PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 373

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
22 October—2 November 2001

£70

Cam Rep R
320
04/02
CAMBRIDGE

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(Formed by the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP, June 2001)

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
Lord Chancellor—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
Secretary of State for International Development—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP
Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and The Regions—The Rt. Hon. Stephen Byers, MP
Secretary of State for Health—The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Reid, MP
Secretary of State for Wales—The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, MP
Secretary of State for Defence—The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Hoon, MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, MP
Secretary of State for Scotland—The Rt. Hon. Helen Liddell, MP
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Williams of Mostyn, QC
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—The Rt. Hon. Patricia Hewitt, MP
Secretary of State for Education and Skills—The Rt. Hon. Estelle Morris, MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong, MP
Minister without Portfolio—The Rt. Hon. Charles Clarke, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Cabinet Office—

Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Macdonald of Tradeston

Ministers of State—

Mrs. Barbara Roche, MP

The Baroness Morgan

Parliamentary Secretary—Christopher Leslie, Esq, MP

Culture, Media and Sport—

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP

Ministers of State—

The Rt. Hon. Richard Caborn, MP (Minister for Sport)

The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Blackstone (Minister for the Arts)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—

Dr. Kim Howells, MP

Defence—

Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Hoon, MP

Minister of State—

The Rt. Hon. Adam Ingram

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—The Lord Bach, Dr. Lewis Moonie, MP

Education and Skills—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Estelle Morris, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for School Standards—Stephen Timms, Esq, MP
Minister for Lifelong Learning—Margaret Hodge, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Baroness Ashton of Upholland
Ivan Lewis, Esq, MP
John Healey, Esq, MP

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for the Environment—The Rt. Hon. Michael Meacher, MP
Minister for Rural Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Alun Michael, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Elliot Morley, Esq, MP
The Lord Whitty

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—
SECRETARY OF STATE— The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Trade—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean
Minister for Europe—The Rt. Hon. Peter Hain, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Ben Bradshaw Esq, MP
The Baroness Amos
Denis MacShane Esq, MP

Health—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
John Hutton, Esq, MP
Jacqui Smith, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Hunt of Kings Heath
Ms Hazel Blears, MP
Yvette Cooper, MP

Home Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE— The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs—The Rt. Hon. John Denham, MP
Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform—The Rt. Hon. Keith Bradley, MP
Minister for Asylum and Immigration—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Rooker
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Ms Beverley Hughes, MP
Robert Ainsworth, Esq, MP
Angela Eagle, MP

International Development—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Hilary Benn, Esq, MP

Law Officers' Department—
ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The Lord Goldsmith, QC
SOLICITOR-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, QC, MP
ADVOCATE-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Dr. Lynda Clark, QC, MP

Lord Chancellor's Department—
LORD CHANCELLOR—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg, QC
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES—
The Baroness Scotland of Asthal, QC
Michael Wills, Esq, MP
Ms Rosie Winterton, MP

Northern Ireland Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Reid, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—Jane Kennedy, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—
Desmond Browne, Esq, MP

Paymaster General's Office—
PAYMASTER GENERAL—Dawn Primarolo, MP

Privy Council Office—
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Stephen Twigg, Esq, MP

Scotland Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Helen Liddell, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—George Foulkes, Esq, MP

Trade and Industry—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Patricia Hewitt, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness—Douglas Alexander, Esq, MP
Minister for Trade—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean
Minister for Industry and Energy—Brian Wilson, Esq, MP
Minister for Employment and the Regions —Alan Johnson, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Sainsbury of Turville
Miss Melanie Johnson, MP
Nigel Griffiths, Esq, MP

Transport, Local Government and the Regions—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Stephen Byers, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Transport—The Rt. Hon. John Spellar, MP
Minister for Local Government—The Rt. Hon. Nick Raynsford, MP
Minister for Housing and Planning—The Lord Falconer of Thoroton, QC
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
David Jamieson, Esq, MP
Ms Sally Keeble, MP
Dr. Alan Whitehead, MP

Treasury—
PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, MP
PAYMASTER GENERAL—Dawn Primarolo, MP
FINANCIAL SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Paul Boateng, MP
ECONOMIC SECRETARY—Ms Ruth Kelly, MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong, MP
LORDS COMMISSIONERS—
Mrs. Anne McGuire, MP
John Heppell, Esq, MP
Tony McNulty, Esq, MP
Nick Ainger, Esq, MP
Graham Stringer, Esq, MP
ASSISTANT WHIPS—
Ian Pearson, Esq, MP
Fraser Kemp, Esq, MP
Angela Smith, MP
Ivor Caplin, Esq, MP
Jim Fitzpatrick, Esq, MP
Phil Woolas, Esq, MP
Dan Norris, MP

Wales Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Don Touhig, Esq, MP

Work and Pensions—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Work—The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP
Minister for Pensions—The Rt. Hon. Ian McCartney, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Hollis of Heigham
Malcolm Wicks, Esq, MP
Maria Eagle, MP

Her Majesty's Household—
LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Luce, GCVO
LORD STEWARD—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD
MASTER OF THE HORSE—The Lord Vestey
TREASURER—Keith Hill, Esq, MP
COMPTROLLER—Thomas McAvoy, Esq, MP
VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Gerry Sutcliffe, Esq, MP
CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Carter
CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD—The Lord McIntosh of Haringey
LORDS IN WAITING— The Lord Davies of Oldham, The Lord Grocott, The Lord Filkin, The Lord Bassam of Brighton
BARONESS IN WAITING—The Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESE[redacted] CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—Stuart Bell, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICERS AND STAFF

THE SPEAKER—The Rt. Hon. Michael J. Martin, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Mrs. Sylvia Heal, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Sir Michael Lord MP

CHAIRMEN'S PANEL—
Mrs. Irene Adams, MP, David Amess, Esq, MP, Nigel Beard, Esq, MP, Joe Benton, Esq, MP, John Butterfill, Esq, MP, David Chidgey, Esq, MP, Frank Cook, Esq, MP, Derek Conway, Esq, MP, John Cummings, Esq, MP, Roger Gale, Esq, MP, Win Griffiths, Esq, MP, Mike Hancock, Esq, MP, Jimmy Hood, Esq, MP, Alan Hurst, Esq, MP, Eric Illsley, Esq, MP, John McWilliam, Esq, MP, Humfrey Malins, Esq, MP, Bill O'Brien, Esq, MP, Edward O'Hara, Esq, MP, Bill Olner, Esq, MP, Peter L. Pike, Esq, MP, Mrs. Marion Roe, MP, Jonathan Sayeed, Esq, MP, George Stevenson, Esq, MP, Nicholas Winterton, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—
The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP, The Rt. Hon. Eric Forth, MP, Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, Stuart Bell, Esq, MP.

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION —M. R. Jack, PhD

AUDIT COMMITTEE
Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, Sir William McKay, KCB (Chief Executive), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), Sir Thomas S. Legg, KCB, QC

SECRETARY OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE Mrs. S. A. R. Davies

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—
Sir William McKay, KCB, (Chief Executive), G. Cubie (Clerk of Committees, Department of the Clerk of the House), M. J. A. Cummins (Serjeant at Arms), Miss P. J. Baines (Librarian), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), I. D. Church (Editor of the Official Report), Mrs. S. J. Harrison (Director of Catering Services)

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT— R. J. Ware, DPhil

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—Sir Nicolas Bevan, CB

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—J. E. G. Vaux

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Canon A. R. Wright

MEDICAL ADVISER TO THE SPEAKER—Dr. R. Zeegen, OBE, FRCP, MRCS, DObst, RCOG

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Elizabeth Filkin

22 October 2001

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 373**

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 22 October 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Asylum Seekers

1. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): When he will publish his review of the voucher system for the support of asylum seekers. [5136]

10. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): If he will make a statement on his policy for dealing with asylum seekers. [5147]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I shall make a full statement to the House on nationality and asylum in the next fortnight. As part of that, I shall spell out the Government's approach to asylum in the years ahead, and shall publish the review of both vouchers and dispersal.

Mrs. Campbell: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on conducting that review. However, does he understand that asylum seekers find the process of making purchases with vouchers humiliating? In addition, they are unable to get full value for money because of shops' inability to give change on the vouchers. Will my right hon. Friend therefore make sure that any future system addresses both those problems and will he try to ensure a speedy conclusion to the review?

Mr. Blunkett: I am aware of the strong feelings—how could I not be?—about the operation of the system generally and the perception of vouchers in particular. That is precisely why my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary initiated the voucher review, why we have taken our time to take the suggested changes on board and why I want to make any change part of a much broader package of measures.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Home Secretary aware that many of us were impressed by his integrity when, shortly after taking office, he volunteered the information that the number of asylum seeker cases in the pipeline was not about 20,000, as had been stated before, but more than 40,000? However, it would help the House a great deal more if he gave us some explanation of how that massive statistical error occurred and who was responsible.

Mr. Blunkett: I am happy to do so. In 1996, the then Government put in place a computer system that soon collapsed; with it went the statistical base on which sensible calculation was made. It was not until we initiated a manual count that we discovered the complete mess-up following the collapse of the Siemens contract, entered into by Conservative Members. In those circumstances, of course we believed that transparency was the best way of proceeding, and that is how the Home Office team will proceed from now.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): In reviewing the voucher scheme, my right hon. Friend will, I am sure, take on board the humiliation and stigma which have been mentioned already. However, will he also look at the critical question of the value of vouchers or whatever system replaces them? Many people will not accept the

replacement of the voucher system with another system that still leaves people living on significantly less than income support.

Mr. Blunkett: The full range of issues raised, not just in the review itself but in representations by Members of Parliament, voluntary organisations and those working with refugees, will be taken on board, including the importance of providing necessary support. That will all be done in the context of getting a system that has the trust of the British people and the confidence of those who have to operate it, and sends a clear signal to the rest of the world.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Does the Home Secretary agree that the asylum voucher system question involves the question of value for money for the taxpayer? To illustrate those administrative costs, can the Home Secretary give the administrative cost of each £1 of vouchers provided to asylum seekers?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I cannot, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman with those details. I am aware of the calculations done about three years ago when the voucher system was first mooted. The calculation by the Department of Social Security and those administering the vouchers—the £700:£425 ratio per 1,000 claimants—did not take into account the full cost of administering the social security system. It would therefore be better if I gave the hon. Gentleman an up-to-date reply.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of my constituents sincerely hope that the conclusions of the second review will result in the abolition of the voucher system? If it does not, and an alternative system is introduced, will he ensure that it is acceptable not only in high street shops but in high street markets?

Mr. Blunkett: I am aware of the problems that people have had in accessing retail outlets that accept vouchers. On my hon. Friend's first point, the key issue is to see the survival or abolition of the voucher system not in isolation but as part of a review of the working of the structure and system. We need a system which allows those operating it to do the job efficiently and effectively, and which is sensible, rational and humane for those who experience it day in, day out.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): In his review of policy, does the Secretary of State intend to review planning policy? I refer to the proposal for an asylum seeker stop-off site in Great Gransden, which I believe is being planned with no local consultation in a rural village and which is causing considerable upset to local people. In this and future cases, will proper local consultation be undertaken?

Mr. Blunkett: As we saw at Ashford, everyone wants something done, but somewhere else, away from their own patch. If there is to be a transition arrangement in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, I am keen that we should ensure that local people know what is taking place, why and how it is to be operated. That will have to be part of the review of the dispersal system, which is designed to protect the people of Kent and London, who were overwhelmed by the way in which the previous system operated. My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the present Foreign Secretary, implemented the dispersal system precisely because people wanted to ensure a more rational system of dispersing and placing people around the country.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us who supported the voucher system in the belief that it would not attract people without well-founded claims have lost their taste for the system, having experienced it almost first-hand? When he examines more closely dispersal and the wider issues, will he bear it in mind that, without dispersal, the situation in places such as Dover and the south Kent ports would be unsustainable? Whatever happens at the other end, will he ensure that for the ports of east Kent, there will be some protection and that dispersal will continue?

Mr. Blunkett: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the rational and mature way in which he has dealt with a difficult issue in and around his constituency. Thanks to the way in which he has handled himself and the issues, a great deal of difficulty has been avoided. I can give him an absolute assurance that any future dispersal system and review outcome will ensure that the people of those areas, which I recently visited, will be protected, and that a sensible way will be found, whether in the case of minors or older asylum seekers, to ensure that they are quickly, effectively and humanely found a suitable place to live which does not involve their staying around the Kent ports.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Does the Home Secretary accept that requests for asylum can be misused by men of violence? What is his response to the statement made by the Saudi ambassador and reported in the Sunday papers that

"many Arab governments have told the British Government repeatedly that a lot of people in Britain masquerading as political refugees are terrorists"?

Mr. Blunkett: I welcomed the hon. Gentleman to his position last week, and I do so again. I look forward to welcoming him for a long time to come. I read the ambassador's statements a week last Sunday. I suggest that all hon. Members read the full interview in order to get the measure of what was being said and how it was being said. If any ambassador from whatever quarter suggests ways in which we might follow up those who are alleged to be terrorists, we will do so. As was made clear in the statement last Monday, we will ensure that those who come into our country and attempt to claim asylum and who are suspected of terrorism will be held and dealt with quickly and effectively.

Mr. Letwin: But is not the real problem that the Home Secretary is unable to deport people whom he regards as a threat to our national security? Given the widespread scepticism expressed in recent days, does he continue to believe that indefinite detention, otherwise known as internment, is really an adequate and sustainable solution to that problem?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentleman is an expert on escaping.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend's not so sotto voce sedentary remark caps it all. The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that there are difficulties in removing people from the country where they would face torture, death or degrading treatment. That is true. That applies and has applied since the inception of the European convention on human rights. The question that we must address is whether we would knowingly send those people to such situations, or would we prefer to hold them pending their transfer to a third safe country. As we spelled out in a statement and in answers to questions last Monday, that depends entirely on whether there is an extradition treaty. Where there is not, it is preferable to hold people than to send them back in circumstances where there is no guarantee of a fair trial.

Closed Circuit Television

2. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): What plans he has to extend CCTV in those areas that already have a CCTV presence in their town centres. [5137]

The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley): Under the crime reduction programme closed circuit television initiative, 149 town-centre schemes have been allocated funding to date, with a further eight still under consideration. Of these, 80 are extensions to existing CCTV schemes.

To date 636 schemes have been approved under the CCTV initiative, and 47 are still under consideration.

Mr. Burns: Is the Minister aware that the CCTV system in the centre of Chelmsford, which was funded by the previous Conservative Government and funded by the present Government, has had a dramatic impact in reducing crime levels in the area and increasing the number of people who have been apprehended while attempting to commit crime?

Does the Minister accept that there was grave disappointment earlier this year when the bid to extend the scheme to other problem areas in Chelmsford was refused funding by the Home Office? Will he explain why there was a refusal?

Mr. Bradley: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman recognises the dramatic impact that CCTV has had on crime in Chelmsford, and that he welcomes the placing of schemes in various positions in his constituency. He should welcome the fact that these areas receive funding from the initiative. As he knows, the initiative is now closed, but there are other opportunities for funding under the communities against drugs and the small retailers in deprived areas initiatives. I am sure that Chelmsford will be considering these opportunities to ascertain whether it qualifies for the programmes.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): Will my right hon. Friend seek to provide more resources so that CCTV can be extended to smaller shopping areas, including estate shops within our constituencies? The system is based predominantly on large town centres, and has been a force for good for both the prevention and detection of crime. Surely we should extend the advantage that the system brings to smaller shopkeepers and not confine it to multinational companies.

Mr. Bradley: As I have mentioned, there is the new small retailers in deprived areas initiative, which I am sure my hon. Friend's constituency may want to consider. We are evaluating the lessons from the CCTV scheme, and I hope that we will be able to bring forward new initiatives that will go round it in future.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware that since CCTV was installed in King's Lynn it has had a very beneficial effect in reducing levels of crime? Is he also aware that the police are concerned that there has been a displacement of crime into surrounding rural areas and into some surrounding towns as well? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a strong case for the installation of CCTV in the neighbouring town of Hunstanton? What is the position of that bid for CCTV?

Mr. Bradley: I am not aware whether the bid to which the hon. Gentleman is referring is one of the schemes that is still under consideration. I shall look into that and write to him with the answer.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): My right hon. Friend knows about the success of the town centre CCTV scheme in Chorley, but dispersal of crime is a problem that we all fear, and is in danger of catching up with us. Will my right hon. Friend make extra resources available for areas such as Pall Mall in Chorley?

Mr. Bradley: I am sure that my hon. Friend would not expect me to commit resources to his constituency from the Dispatch Box. Again, I welcome the fact that he appreciates the benefit of CCTV, which is part of the overall programme of crime reduction in the country. It must be viewed as part of a package of arrangements that we are introducing. I know that my hon. Friend will continue to press strongly for extra resources for his constituency.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Does the Minister agree that although any initiative on CCTV may be welcome, it has to be set against the evidence that the detection rate for crime is at an all-time low of 24 per cent.—and 12 per cent. for burglary? There appears to be no overall strategy. Does he accept that, as matters stand, the criticism by Nick Ross that the Government's claim to be tough on crime is no more than meaningless garbage is valid?

Mr. Bradley: I do not remember that expression. The hon. Gentleman should welcome the overall reduction in crime in specific areas and the extra investment in police. The crime fighting fund has provided for 9,000 extra police officers on top of the planned development of police recruitment. The whole package will mean tackling crime more effectively in future.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The CCTV scheme in Barnsley town centre has been successful in reducing crime and making people feel safer on the streets. There is no doubt that that has allowed the

crime prevention partnership to target burglary and set the goal of a 6 per cent. reduction each year, and a 10 per cent. reduction in areas where the highest incidence occurs. However, my right hon. Friend knows that CCTV involves a displacement factor. Will he consider financing research which could be used to give guidance to local authorities when they extend CCTV projects?

Mr. Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome of CCTV in Barnsley. I assure him that the initiative is being evaluated, and that there is research on the effects of CCTV and its consequences in specific areas. We will present the findings as soon as possible to guide us with new initiatives that we may introduce in future.

Asylum Seekers

4. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What steps he is taking to enable asylum seekers to work legally. [5140]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): Under the terms of the employment concession, adult asylum seekers can apply for permission to work if their application has been outstanding for longer than six months without a decision being made on it. There are no plans to alter the way in which the concession operates.

Dr. Cable: A study by the Mayor estimates that more than half of London's refugee population is economically inactive although most refugees want to work. Does the Minister accept that, economically, that is highly irrational at a time of chronic labour shortage in many service industries? Is it not even more absurd that the Government are scouring the world for qualified doctors and nurses when hundreds are sitting in this country, dependent on vouchers or in detention? Will she have a fresh look at the six-month rule and the single-applicant rule, which perpetuate an irrational and unreasonable policy?

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman seems to be confusing asylum seekers with refugees. As he knows, refugees are entitled to work and we have many schemes for enabling, for example, those who have medical and nursing qualifications to work in the health service, where they are much needed.

However, the hon. Gentleman should agree that we must not allow our asylum and immigration rules to be breached so that people traffickers decide who comes into the country. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has talked about an economic migration policy, about which he will make a statement to the House soon.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Will my hon. Friend reconsider the policy? There are many thousands of asylum seekers in my constituency. I do not sneer at economic migrants, who have come to this country to try to make a contribution. Thousands of them have nothing to do. If that position is allowed to persist, they will enter the unofficial economy, as they undoubtedly already do. It is demeaning to individuals who want to work not to be able to do so. I therefore ask my hon. Friend to think about the policy again.

Angela Eagle: If those people have applied for asylum, they have come to this country because they are fleeing torture. For those who are economic migrants, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will have something to say about organising the way in which we will deal with them in a more coherent way in the future. My hon. Friend should not mix up the two.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Can the Minister confirm that the Home Office has now abandoned proposals to introduce identity cards in this country, whether to deal with this or any other issue?

Angela Eagle: No, I cannot.

Crime Reduction (Young People)

5. **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What assessment he has made of the connection between crime reduction and the provision of leisure, recreation and sporting facilities for young people. [5141]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): We believe that the provision of facilities and activities for young people can help to reduce crime. That is why the Government have supported a number of programmes, such as the Youth Justice Board-managed youth inclusion and summer splash schemes. These provide structured activity programmes not only to occupy young people but to provide a vehicle for working with them to prevent them from drifting into crime or other antisocial activity.

Vernon Coaker: Notwithstanding the need to continue to crack down on those young people who cause problems in our communities, is it not the case that our young people far too often say that they simply have nothing to do, that they cannot find a place just to go and have a cup of coffee and that there is a lack of recreational facilities? Notwithstanding the answer that my hon. Friend the Minister has just given, will she have another look at the facilities available to our young people so that they can get more of those facilities to help them as they grow up?

Beverley Hughes: The evidence from the youth inclusion programme—particularly the summer splash schemes, which have been independently evaluated—shows that these kinds of activities are not only useful but cost-effective. The splash schemes show a 36 per cent. reduction in domestic burglary, and an 18 per cent. reduction in youth crime, on the estates where they took place. They are also important because they enable the police and other workers in the youth justice system to work directly, in a non-confrontational way, with young people, to develop relationships that are important in deterring young people from committing crime. These schemes have been successful and we are going to continue them.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): Given that a young man with plenty of purposeful activity and plenty of useful things to do—be they sporting, recreational or educational—is less likely to turn or return to crime, how does the Minister expect young men aged 18 to 21, released from the B wing of Feltham young offenders institution, to lead a good life when, for the past four years under the Labour Government they have been denied all

those facilities, having been locked up in their cells for most of the day under a regime described by Her Majesty's inspector of prisons as "utterly disgraceful"?

Beverley Hughes: I do not know how recently or how frequently the hon. Gentleman has visited Feltham. If he has visited it, he will know that the problems there started long before this Government came to office. The problems that we inherited at Feltham were the product of long-term neglect by the Tory Government. If the hon. Gentleman has been there recently, he will have seen that the regime is being transformed, initially for the under-18s, and now for the 18 to 21s—not before time, I grant him, but it is this Government who have done it, not the Tory Government.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Will the Minister join me and the representatives of professional sports clubs whom I met on Friday in recognising that, while there is a need and a great desire to increase the level of participation in sport in this country, one of the problems the clubs have is the number of initiatives placed in front of them? Is it possible for the Home Office to work with others across government to ensure that, rather than professional and amateur sports clubs having to fill in a plethora of application forms to chase pockets of money, a more co-ordinated approach could be taken? Many professional sports clubs offer tens of thousands of opportunities across the east midlands already. They would like to offer more, but need assistance to deliver them.

Beverley Hughes: I take my hon. Friend's point. It is sometimes difficult for sporting and other voluntary organisations to navigate the procedures that we rightly require them to go through when they try to access public money. Through Sport England, we are working directly with an initiative called "positive futures", as well as other bodies, and I hope that that enables the sporting bodies in particular to access the information that they need to make successful bids more easily. That is certainly our intention.

Police Numbers (Essex)

6. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): What recent discussions he has had with Essex police about police numbers in Essex. [5142]

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): I am told by the chief constable that, in September, Essex police had 2,953 officers, which is 66 more than in March, and 1,582 civilian staff, which is 135 more than in March. The crime fighting fund is delivering more police officers to Essex police and information supplied by the force shows that Essex expects to take on 247 new recruits in 2001-02.

Bob Spink: Does the Minister accept that Essex police numbers are far lower than when I was previously an Essex MP and does he consider that to be deplorable? Does he accept that that figure is one factor that is driving down police morale in Essex, as elsewhere in the country where morale is at an all-time low? Does he agree that it is an unprecedented insult for the Government to refuse to grant the police the golden jubilee medal? I call on him to review his policy and grant that medal.

Mr. Denham: We are on course for a record, highest-ever number of police officers in England and Wales, and Essex, like other forces, is benefiting—[HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] In the lifetime of this Parliament. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members laugh, but it is good news that there will be more police officers than ever before in England and Wales. That is being achieved by this Government, and the figure will exceed any previous level. I do not accept that morale is low. Wastage from the police service is low.

On the question of the jubilee medal, a decision was announced earlier this year that members of the armed forces only would receive it, but representations have been made from various parts of the police service and we are reviewing the position.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will my right hon. Friend take it from me that the problem is not the welcome resources that he has described, but the chief constable's priorities and the way in which he distributes those resources? I represent some of the poorest areas in Essex and we are simply not getting our share of the cake. Bearing in mind that those are operational decisions of the chief constable, can my right hon. Friend have a word with him about setting the right priorities? We are talking about redistributing resources in favour of the most disadvantaged people who suffer the most crime and are least protected and supported by other mechanisms such as insurance. There is a real problem in Essex. It is not of my right hon. Friend's making, but those scarce resources must be redistributed.

Mr. Denham: As my hon. Friend rightly says, the deployment of officers is a matter for chief constables, but we intend to ensure that we drive up standards in the police service across England and Wales by identifying best practice and the ways in which forces are achieving it. The new standards unit that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has announced and the inspections of basic command units that are now taking place will enable us to identify any areas in which the service is not up to the standard that my hon. Friend would expect and will allow measures to be taken to tackle that.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Police in Essex will be interested to know that, by the end of this Parliament, there will be more officers than ever before, but they are fully aware that there are 1,600 fewer nationally than when the Government took office. They would be delighted to know when we shall get back to where we were when the Government started, let alone when that can be built on.

Does the Minister agree that Essex police will not accept that it is satisfactory still to be reviewing the issue of the Queen's jubilee medal? There has been a widespread outcry from the police force in Essex and elsewhere and his Government are breaking the tradition of 120 years, because jubilee medals have always been granted not just to the armed forces but to the police. Will the right hon. Gentleman state categorically that the Government will reintroduce that linkage, recognise

police officers as equivalent to members of the armed services and give them the jubilee medal next year, which they deserve?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman should have the wit to adjust his question if it has already been answered earlier—but he ploughed on regardless and had nothing of any value to say to the House. I am proud of the fact that the Government have reversed the long-term trend of reducing police numbers that was established under the Conservative Government. Last year, police numbers increased by 1,349, the largest annual increase for well over a decade.

Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

7. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What proposals he has to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. [5144]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): The Government keep the misuse of drugs legislation under continual review.

Paul Flynn: After 30 years of the harshest prohibition of drugs in Europe, this country has the worst drugs problem in the continent and the position continues to deteriorate. Other countries have reduced harm by policies of regulated, licensed decriminalisation.

Will my hon. Friend kill the myth that the present conflict will reduce the flow of heroin into this country? Does he agree with the United Nations that the Taliban have replaced almost all of their drugs crops with wheat, and that 80 per cent. of the heroin produced in Afghanistan is now made by our partners in the Northern Alliance? When one source dries up another fills its place.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend will know that the overwhelming majority of heroin coming into this country comes from Afghanistan. It does not come from the area controlled by the Northern Alliance: it comes from the entire area of Afghanistan. The cultivation of those crops increased considerably when the Taliban Government came to power. Despite the fact that they took the decision not to produce heroin, there are massive stockpiles in Afghanistan, and there is no discernible impact on the supply to this country of any temporary disruption of cultivation. Therefore one wonders what their motivation was for that policy.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Bearing in mind that more than half of our young people have experimented with drugs at some point, and that the police have responded by not enforcing the law in all its severity, is there not scope for a wide-ranging inquiry, perhaps on the lines of a royal commission?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has called for an adult debate, and has rightly emphasised the need to consider carefully all the implications of any change in our drugs law. The potential for increasing usage is one of the issues that would have to be picked up in that debate. It is a challenge for those who advocate legalisation—one to which they rarely rise.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of the comments made at the conference of probation officers last week. In the light of those remarks, of what is happening in other countries throughout Europe and of the recommendations in Lady Runciman's report, and bearing in mind what the Metropolitan police are doing in Brixton, why are the Government so resistant to reconsidering the law regarding cannabis?

Mr. Ainsworth: If my hon. Friend had listened to my previous answer, he would have heard me say that my right hon. Friend wants an adult debate. If he properly examines the policies in many other countries, he will discover that the apparent discrepancies are often not as wide as they are believed to be. In many countries there is a convergence that involves the disruption of the supply of drugs and measures—such as harm reduction and education—to try to tackle these issues.

Special Constables

9. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the number of special constables available for duty in England and Wales. [5146]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): The number of serving specials was 12,738 at 31 March 2001. The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary, and we are currently carefully considering improvements in support services and the recruitment and retention of specials.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for his answer. As he will know from the response to Question 6, there are more than 1,600 fewer police officers than there were in 1997—but is it not also the case that there are 7,136 fewer special constables now than there were then? Does he recall the Prime Minister's pledge to put

"thousands more police officers on the beat"?

That clearly has not happened. Is not the pledge—like all pledges given by the Prime Minister on matters domestic—just a load of hot air?

Mr. Blunkett: There is no hot air in the commitment that we have given to raise 130,000 full-time equivalent officers over the next two years. By next summer, we will have a record number of officers, and we will complement that with a recruitment and retention drive for specials. That will form part of our development of the role of the community and of active citizenship in tackling crime and disorder and, in particular, antisocial behaviour.

Yes, I am aware of the figures relating to specials. They were given to me, specially and privately, by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), then the main Conservative party spokesman, at the last Home Office Question Time just before the summer recess.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said about the increase in the number

of special constables. Does he agree that it would be a great advantage if specially trained special constables worked with community groups on such issues as antisocial behaviour orders and matters dealt with by Crimewatch groups? Might that not help to reduce crime and bring some satisfaction to our communities?

Mr. Blunkett: I entirely agree. That would be an excellent way not just to mobilise the community to tackle crime and disorder, but to ensure that members of the community constitute an in-depth part of the solution and can reach out, having been trained, authorised and regulated by the police service. It would also be an excellent way of using the time and talent of people who may have retired early, and of making the community feel that it is indeed part of the solution. We are currently having constructive dialogue about resources, and I hope that we shall be able to recruit a large number of specials who will fulfil exactly the role that my hon. Friend has outlined.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I know how much specials are appreciated throughout the country, just as full-time officers are. At times of increased tension such as this, the more visible policing that can be provided through the use of both specials and regular officers is hugely appreciated, not least in areas where there could be a threat to minority communities, or where there are very mixed communities.

How does the Home Secretary plan to respond to the suggestion by police authorities and chief constables that extra policing requires additional resources from the Government? Given that the extra cost of policing in the Metropolitan police area is estimated to be £1 million a week, what will the Government do for this year's budget? How will they ensure that we continue to recruit both full-time and special constables in greater numbers, and are able to pay for them?

Mr. Blunkett: I, too, have read the figures that keep emerging from either the Metropolitan police or the Metropolitan Police Authority showing how much costs are escalating. I would never wish to intervene in the operational freedom of a chief constable or commissioner, but we must retain some sort of balance in what is spent by the Metropolitan police and the 43 authorities across England and Wales.

I am discussing with colleagues the amount that can be allocated not just to police forces but to security generally, including provision for civil contingencies. We will ensure that resources are made available both to do that job and to ensure that alternatives, such as specials or their equivalent, are available. That will enable us better to provide facilities as well as guaranteeing the safety and security of people in their own homes and streets, which remain an absolute priority.

Double Jeopardy

11. **Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (South Thanet): What plans he has to change the law in respect of double jeopardy. [5150]

The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley): The Government's manifesto includes a commitment to reform the double jeopardy rule in cases involving murder, and the Government will do so when parliamentary time allows.

In the meantime, we will be giving careful consideration to Sir Robin Auld's recent recommendation that the reform should apply to a wider range of offences.

Dr. Ladyman: I know that my right hon. Friend is very anxious to take the House with him in this matter. Does he agree that the provision of information is vital if he is to do so? Yet when I asked how many cases the change in the law is likely to lead to, I was told that the number is not known because the police do not investigate after an acquittal. When I asked how many cases per year fall within the sentencing category, how many lead to convictions and how many of those convictions are overturned on appeal, I was told that the answer was available only at disproportionate cost. Before we overturn a rule that has served us well for 900 years, will my right hon. Friend make sure that that information is made available to the House?

Mr. Bradley: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's careful consideration of this matter. He has partly answered his own question about the likely number of cases. The information is not available because the police do not generally seek fresh evidence against someone who has been acquitted of an offence. However, in evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, the Director of Public Prosecutions suggested that there might be a handful of cases involving murder each year.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Does the Minister realise that the proposed change in the law is very controversial? Will he give an undertaking that if the Government are determined to make the change, it will be limited to murder cases? In the event of a second trial, what criteria will be applied to ensure that individuals do not have the threat of an infinite number of trials hanging over them?

Mr. Bradley: As I said, we are carefully considering the views of Sir Robin Auld, and those of the Law Commission, on whether double jeopardy reform should be extended. We are consulting on those proposals at the moment and we will make our views known in due course.

The Law Commission has said that if a second trial is to proceed, there must be compelling new evidence of guilt and the court must be satisfied that it is in the interests of justice to quash the acquittal. We will be considering the Law Commission's views as part of our consultation before final proposals are introduced in legislation.

Metropolitan Police (Recruitment)

12. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What further action he is taking to increase recruitment into the Metropolitan police. [5151]

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): Recruitment to the Metropolitan police has been aided by the crime fighting fund, by the

national recruitment campaign, by the provision of free rail travel within a 70-mile radius of London and by the increase last year in London allowance for post-Sheehy officers.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that the particular challenge in recruitment to the Met in attractive, highly desirable, outer-London suburbs such as Harrow is the high cost of property, especially for first-time buyers? Is he aware also that that issue is beginning to affect the retention of officers after two or three years service, when they may be attracted by cheaper property prices in other police force areas? Will he keep under close review the question of whether further investment in key worker housing is necessary both to retain police officers and to help with recruitment in suburbs such as my own?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend makes very good points. We are certainly keen to understand and respond to all the reasons for police officers leaving the force early. Wastage of officers remains very low, but we do not want to lose a single officer unnecessarily. On housing, I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome the Government's initiative to enable 550 London police officers to buy first homes with financial assistance over the next three years.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): Will the review of the resource allocation formula used by the Metropolitan police lead to an increase in police numbers in outer-London boroughs such as Harrow and Bromley?

Mr. Denham: Consultation is taking place on a new formula for the allocation of police officers in London boroughs, which was suggested by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. As that consultation is still under way, it is too early to be certain about what the final allocation will be.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): While I welcome the initiatives that have been taken to increase Metropolitan police recruitment, police have been moved from the boroughs to central London because of the higher security levels, leaving those boroughs under-resourced. Are there any specific initiatives to address that issue?

Mr. Denham: Everyone welcomes and acknowledges the reassurance role that the Metropolitan police service has been playing since 11 September, and I think that that reassurance has had a significant impact on the sense of public security. However, I assure my hon. Friend that the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis is very clearly aware of the need to ensure that effective normal policing arrangements are in place during this time.

Metropolitan Police Training School

13. **Angela Watkinson** (Upminster): What the maximum capacity of the Metropolitan police training school was in each of the last three years; and what percentage of trainees completed the course successfully in each of those years. [5153]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I understand from the commissioner that the capacity of the Metropolitan police service training school for 2001–02 is 2,600. No maximum capacity was set in previous years. The percentage of recruits successfully completing training for each of the past three years is 92 per cent. in 1999; 93 per cent. in 2000; and 94 per cent. in 2001.

Angela Watkinson: I thank the hon. Lady for that reply. Will she please comment on the likely impact of the drop-out rate on the ability to reach the targets for increased police numbers, particularly in that other attractive outer-London constituency of Upminster, which suffers very badly from the leeching of resources into inner London?

Beverley Hughes: The commissioner fully expects to recruit up to 2,500 police officers this year. That number will both cover wastage and enable, by March 2002, an increase in strength of more than 1,000 officers, helping to reach the total target of 26,650 officers. The commissioner therefore expects that that number will more than meet demand.

Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme

15. **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): If he will make a statement on the intensive supervision and surveillance programme. [5156]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): The intensive supervision and surveillance programme is a Youth Justice Board initiative funded by the Home Office. It is targeted at the 3 per cent. of young people who are responsible for about 25 per cent. of juvenile offences, providing the courts with a robust community-based alternative to custodial sentences and remands.

Mr. Challen: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is she aware that my colleagues and I in Leeds are holding an inquiry into drug abuse in Leeds, and that one of the issues that has already been raised is the fact that the families, and especially the parents, of drug users experience great stress, particularly when their offspring go to prison? We therefore truly welcome the type of initiative that she has outlined.

Beverley Hughes: I thank my hon. Friend for his support. The initiative is very important for the reasons that he has identified. The programme has two elements—intensive monitoring by electronic tagging or voice verification and very highly structured individual programmes with intense supervision and surveillance. It is a very robust alternative to custody. I hope that the initiative will prove as successful nationally as the Rotherham pilot showed it to be locally, not only in keeping young serious offenders out of custody but in substantially reducing their offending.

Prison Reform

17. **Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): If he will make a statement on his priorities for tackling prison reform. [5158]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for this question. We do not often get a question on prison reform at Home Office questions, yet it is an issue that hon. Members need to take more seriously.

Our priorities are maintaining the impressive improvement in the record on escapes and doing much more to reduce the rates of reoffending of prisoners and so protect the public. That means continuing to improve the quality and quantity of literacy and numeracy education, tackling levels of drug abuse and delivering more intensive programmes on reducing offending, while treating prisoners with decency.

Mr. Wyatt: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. Perhaps it is because I have three prisons in my constituency that I have more than the average interest. We have had three bad cases involving paedophiles. One was exceptionally awful, in which a paedophile sentenced to a four-year term in prison was given 18 months off for remission, having received no education or psychiatric care. He returned to the community almost the same as he was when he left. Will my hon. Friend give such cases renewed thought? I look forward to changes in the way in which paedophiles are treated in prison.

Beverley Hughes: Alongside the provision of more offending behaviour programmes in prison, the Prison Service has a target to deliver a substantial number of sex offender treatment programmes. That is linked to a more co-ordinated strategy in terms of multi-agency protection panels and continuing work with sex offenders in the community when they are released from prison. This is an important priority. We must ensure that when offenders leave prison, they are as well equipped as possible to ensure that they do not reoffend. For sex offenders, that is a particularly important part of our public protection strategy.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): How can the Minister and the Prison Service be taken seriously on prison reform when Downview prison was re-roled from a category C/category D prison—it had a splendid scheme, RAPT, for dealing with drug offenders—to a women's prison, with just five weeks notice? The offenders being treated on all the programmes to which the Minister has referred were scattered to the four winds throughout the Prison Service, thereby losing the benefits of all those programmes.

Beverley Hughes: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the need to re-role Downview, and he has spoken to me about this. One of the fundamental responsibilities of the Prison Service is to respond to the summation of decisions of the courts. The number of women being sent to prison on sentence and on remand is increasing rapidly—much more rapidly than the general rise in the prison population. The Prison Service must respond to that. Were the numbers of women sent to prison to stabilise or reduce, I, for one, would be glad. We must respond to the decisions of the courts, and we had to re-role a prison to take the 4,000 women who are now sent to prison by the courts.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Should not the priorities be the safety of prison staff and, among prisoners, the eradication of drug dependency, as well as improved education? On the last point, is my hon. Friend shocked by the high levels of illiteracy in our prisons? Should not those levels be eradicated first?

Beverley Hughes: Yes, I am shocked. It is important for hon. Members and the general public to appreciate that those whom the Prison Service receives are, on a range of indicators, some of the most socially excluded and disadvantaged people. That is not to excuse their offending, but to try to show that the problems with which the Prison Service has to deal are multiple and serious. Levels of drug-related offending are high, but the Prison Service is making massive strides in trying to help prisoners to make up some of their deficits. The number of literacy and numeracy qualifications now awarded at basic level 2—the lowest level for employability—is considerable. The focus on rehabilitation and resettlement is something that we want to continue.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): What steps will the Minister take to ensure that the increasing number of women prisoners can keep in touch with their children during their sentence?

Beverley Hughes: There has been a worrying reduction in the number of visits received by prisoners over the past couple of years, and I am watching that closely. In particular, I am considering a pilot scheme in one region, in conjunction with a major voluntary organisation, to see whether we can provide better facilities in prison and, more importantly, make the links with agencies in the community, so that prisoners' family contact, especially with children, can be maintained. The hon. Lady is right to say that that is an important factor in the effective resettlement of prisoners, and maintaining links with family is an important priority for us.

BSE in Sheep (Research)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I begin by apologising most sincerely to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) and his team. I know that he can barely have had the statement for more than a few moments, and I can tell him now that he will find it shorter than the text that he has in his hand, but he has been given some acquaintance with what I propose to say, through a letter that I sent to him at the end of last week. None the less, I sincerely apologise and assure him that on future occasions I would hope to give him much more notice of any statement that I need to make.

I am grateful for the opportunity to put hon. Members in the picture about research into scrapie and the theoretical possibility that it might mask BSE in sheep. The work is being undertaken through a variety of different research projects at different institutes of excellence. I want also to address the significance of the experiment undertaken at the Institute for Animal Health on the so-called 1990 scrapie brain pool, which was due to be reported to the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee last Friday.

The United Kingdom and, indeed, my Department are at the forefront of European research into understanding the incidence of scrapie in the national sheep flock and whether the theoretical risk of BSE in sheep is a real one. The IAH research is merely one of a number of projects. There are many who consider that those on more recent brains are more important, and so far BSE has not been found, but more work needs to be done, and that is why, a couple of weeks ago, we took steps to ensure that more brains are offered for testing. It is important, however, to keep the issue in its proper perspective.

We have known since the experiments began that there were some doubts about whether the brains, which were collected a long time ago for a completely different experiment, were cross-contaminated with bovine BSE material. As results began to emerge from the experiments, it became critical that we resolve the issue of cross-contamination with as much clarity as possible.

That is why my Department, in consultation with SEAC and others, commissioned the DNA testing work at the laboratory of the Government chemist. The results were presented to DEFRA by the LGC last Wednesday afternoon, 17 October. The finding that there was no sheep material in the sample sent to the DNA lab was a totally unforeseen development.

The Government's responsibility in these circumstances is twofold: first, we must establish the facts as quickly as possible; and secondly, we must share those emerging findings with the public. The most obvious question that sprang to mind was whether the material analysed by the LGC was actually the same as that used in the experiments: to put it rather brutally, would the sample that should have been sent to the LGC be discovered at the back of the fridge in some dark corner of the Institute for Animal Health? We needed to establish the facts.

I immediately asked for an independent risk assessment company to perform a detailed audit of the IAH experiment, including an examination of how the homogenised samples were stored and handled. As the company is already familiar with the IAH project, it aims to report its findings within a week or so, and I hope that it will be able to do so.

We have also asked the UK Accreditation Service—UKAS—to undertake to a longer time scale a vigorous assessment of the chain of custody arrangements for the IAH experiment. Only at around 6 pm on Wednesday did we receive information suggesting that the sample sent to the DNA lab was indeed thought to be representative of the brain pool—but we still do not know this for certain. We will not know the full facts until the audit team has reported.

Let me emphasise that at that stage the only question was not whether we should make this public, but how and when. It was already clear that the SEAC meeting—*[Laughter.]* This is a serious issue, of grave concern for public health—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about the underlying disease; how the issue has been used is another matter.

It was already clear that the SEAC meeting planned for Friday could not now take place, as this was the only item on the agenda, and the chairman took the decision to cancel it.

I took the decision, against the advice of my press office, that rather than wait to have a properly staged press briefing the following morning, we should make a statement as soon as possible about what we knew for certain. I will tell the House bluntly that I was convinced the information would leak, and I did not want the slightest hint of any cover-up. In fact, I looked unsuccessfully for the Chair of the Select Committee that evening, in order to update him and correct information I had given him, in good faith, earlier that day.

A press notice was duly sent to the Press Association after we had observed the ordinary courtesies of consulting those involved and those who might be asked to comment on it, including SEAC and the Food Standards Agency. In other words, a statement was made the same day and within a few hours of Ministers being told what was thought to have occurred.

Let me say one other thing about the suggestion that we were seeking to suppress the information. We are all mature politicians, and I invite the House to consider what I was supposed to need to suppress. The research was commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; it was not carried out by that Department. The cross-check that revealed the problems was also commissioned by my Department, as a "belt and braces" measure. Of course there was embarrassment and dismay among those involved with this work, but there was no embarrassment or dismay for the Government, only a very real concern as to where we would go from here, and a real anxiety to treat carefully and seriously an issue of enormous sensitivity.

I understand that the phraseology of one part of the press release—which, by the way, I wrote—is thought to have been obscure. At the time it was drafted, we knew the results of the cross-contamination check, and had been told it was thought that it came from the same material as that used in the experiment, but I could not feel confident about what weight I should give to this piece of advice, given the very short time for checks to be made.

This entire issue rests on the handling of samples and the keeping of records. In consequence it seemed to me right to say, as we did, simply that the validity of the

sample had been called into question. There was, and is, absolutely no intention to conceal or mislead. A press pack, which gave all the information to any of the media that were interested, was issued at a separate press conference held the following day.

What is more important is what this experiment could mean or could have meant. It will not give us a definitive answer as to whether BSE is in sheep today. Indeed, there are scientists who are not yet convinced that it would even have told us whether BSE was present in sheep in the early 1990s. All that the work could have done was reduce some of the uncertainties and add to the little that we currently know.

On scrapie generally, my Department is working closely with the FSA to introduce, early next year, an abattoir survey to test for scrapie approximately 20,000 sheep aged over 18 months annually. This will cost the UK about £5 million and be part of an EU-wide programme designed to give information on the incidence of scrapie in the European Union. This week the Agriculture Council in Brussels will review that programme, which, for both cattle and sheep testing, will cost the UK more than £50 million next year.

Although we hope that the sheep abattoir survey will be useful, I must warn the House that its results may not prove conclusive. A similar survey commissioned by the Government two to three years ago on nearly 3,000 abattoir sheep brains identified no scrapie cases at all. I would certainly be prepared to examine carefully the case for doing an even larger survey.

Around 500 to 600 scrapie cases are reported annually in Great Britain each year. My Department is funding a great deal of work to look for BSE in those cases, but it is difficult work at the forefront of science, and scientists do not always agree on particular aspects or methods. In about 180 cases, using the same techniques used at the Institute for Animal Health but on brains from the current flock, the experiments have reached the first point at which, if any of those scrapie cases were BSE, that might have become evident. It has not done so. However, it is too soon to draw firm conclusions from those on-going experiments that can last several years.

I must emphasise again that all that work is at the very forefront of science, conducted at the leading edge of scientific experimentation. We are not talking about research that can give us simple yes and no answers. I have asked for the most thorough review of the range of scientific studies presently being undertaken into that complex and difficult area, and once it is available I will make it available to the House.

The national scrapie plan is a long-term, voluntary programme to breed genetic resistance to scrapie and to BSE into the national sheep flock. Over the summer, my Department has prepared a Bill which, among other things, would allow the Government to take powers to ensure that we can remove from the flock the genotypes of sheep susceptible to scrapie. Of course the House will wish to give the Bill, including that section, proper scrutiny and I hope that it will have an opportunity to do so in the near future.

Throughout—I speak of the period before I had responsibility for the Department as well as now—we have been open and transparent on all our research into BSE, which is overseen by the independent Food Standards Agency and our advisory committee, SEAC. I stress that the FSA's advice remains unchanged. That advice, from the independent body responsible for food safety, is that there is no reason why consumers should not eat sheepmeat. We will continue actively to promote research to reduce risk, theoretical or not, and to put all our research in the public domain.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): The Secretary of State will know that I wrote to her yesterday requesting an urgent statement on the failure of the tests. I am grateful to her for coming to the House this afternoon, even though it is clear that she should have made a statement last week and that all we have been treated to is a staggering display of complacency. There was not a word of regret, never a "sorry" from the Secretary of State, whose handling of the issue has been appalling. The day that this Government express embarrassment or dismay for any of their incompetencies or their ruthless approach to news management will be a red letter day indeed.

No responsible person will believe that the decision to announce the failure of the test by means of a press release at 10.30 at night on a website, the failure to inform specialist journalists and the failure to hold to a press conference were anything other than a concerted attempt to—in Jo Moore's shameful phrase—"bury" another embarrassing story from a Department that is becoming famous for its gaffes and incompetence. Last week I called for the individual responsible for the decision about the press release to be sacked. It now transpires that that person was none other than the Secretary of State herself. I doubt that she will sack herself—unfortunately—but perhaps she will answer a few questions.

At the weekend, the Secretary of State appeared to admit that her decision to slip out the press release at the dead of night was wrong. Why then did she not take the opportunity to put things right on Thursday when she had the chance? Why, instead and at very short notice, did she make a statement on Lord Haskins's disappointing report on foot and mouth? What does that tell us about the Government's priorities?

On Thursday, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said, in the now time-honoured mantra:

"In all matters relating to BSE and animal health, the Government have been open and transparent."—[*Official Report*, 8 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 1293.]

The Secretary of State repeated the same nonsense just now—for open read "opaque" and for transparent read "evasive".

The Phillips report on BSE maintains that the possibility that it might have been transmitted to sheep is

"perhaps the most important unanswered question about the BSE epidemic."

Does the Secretary of State agree with that, and if so why has she given this issue so little priority? How is it possible that for four years Government scientists have been trying to establish whether BSE was present in sheep in the 1990s by investigating cows' brains? It beggars belief. Why did the late-night press release not come clean about what had happened? It simply said that cross-checking had

"raised doubts about the validity of the original sample."

Why did it not state the case—that the whole experiment had been a fiasco? How much money has been wasted on this experiment over the years?

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that Professor Bostock contacted the Veterinary Laboratories Agency nearly a year ago to express his concerns about the samples? Were Ministers advised about those concerns at the time? If so, when were they advised? If they did not know, why not? Will the right hon. Lady confirm that scientists told her Department early last summer that the material they were testing for BSE appeared to contain traces of bovine remains? If that is so, why did it take her two further months before she ordered DNA checks to be made? If Ministers were unsure of the validity of the experiments—*[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is wittering on, but I am coming on to his role in this affair. If Ministers were unsure of the validity of the experience, why did the Under-Secretary announce on 28 September that all Britain's 40 million sheep might have to be culled? Was that a responsible thing to say at a time when Britain's farmers were already facing a meltdown over foot and mouth?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that Professor Collinge, a member of SEAC, has been calling since 1997 for the use of a new testing system which, instead of taking years to identify BSE, takes just two days? Will she now insist on the use of this technology?

I note what the Secretary of State said about the safety of lamb products. However, is she aware that when the chairman of the FSA was recently asked about the safety of lamb in baby food, he replied that he was assured by manufacturers that they only used lamb from New Zealand? Will she confirm that British babies will be perfectly safe eating British lamb?

This whole episode is a humiliating embarrassment for the right hon. Lady's Department. We are quite used to those—they hardly matter any more. More important, however, it raises major questions about the Government's handling of bad news and, more important still, represents a massive setback to the credibility of Government scientific agencies and to the vital job of restoring confidence in our food. Who does the Minister hold responsible for this fiasco? What action will she take to ensure that those who are found to be responsible are never allowed near food safety and public health again?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman has made it quite clear by that rant that whoever is a responsible person in this matter, he is not one. I have seldom heard anything so dangerously irresponsible as his remarks.

First, the hon. Gentleman referred to the notice appearing at 10.30 pm on the website. He knows perfectly well that the notice was issued through the PA a great deal earlier in the evening because I wrote to him and gave him the details days ago. Secondly, he asked about the failure to inform the press and to hold a press conference. I have already made it plain that we issued a press notice that evening and that we held a separate press conference on the Haskins report on which, as he rightly said, I reported to the House. At that press conference, information packs were made available and I understand that this issue and the contents of the packs were drawn to the attention of the specialist journalists who might have had a particular interest in this case, so information was made available to the press.

The hon. Gentleman talked about my appearing to say that we had handled this wrongly. I actually said that with the benefit of hindsight, if there was an error it might perhaps have been in deciding to issue the press release straight away. I will be quite honest and say that I do not believe that that was an error. I also believe that if we had not put out a press release that evening, as soon as we had cleared what we could then find out of the facts and put them into the public domain, the hon. Gentleman would be screaming even more loudly that we had never intended to make a press statement at all.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the Collinge testing system. Yes, there has been considerable discussion about that. He will be aware that it is not a test that other people have found easy to replicate, but a great deal of other work is going on. Indeed, at present the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, which comprises Government scientists, has been conducting some tests using a similar technique. That work has not yet been formally reported, however; nor—this is more important—has it been peer reviewed. Work is going on to try to identify better and faster methods of getting some of these results—there we are on common ground—and it will of course be reported fully to the House in the proper way.

I do not have up-to-date figures, but from memory, a sum in the order of £200,000 was spent on the research in question. What comes through most clearly in the hon. Gentleman's approach to this matter today, and indeed in some of the press publicity over the weekend, is that although the hon. Gentleman asks me what the matter tells us of the Government's priorities, what it tells us of the Opposition's priorities is clear. The hon. Gentleman was at pains to try to make the case that the Government themselves are in some way at fault, even to the extent of talking about Government scientists. The Institute for Animal Health is not a body of Government scientists; it is an independent body, from which my Department commissioned the research.

What happened during the course of the past few days is clear to me. On Wednesday afternoon, we were told very disturbing news which cast grave doubts on the validity of that research. We put that into the public domain as early as we could—within hours that same evening—and followed it up by issuing a press pack to those whom we thought might be particularly interested. We were perfectly happy to answer questions from anyone who asked them. We were not altogether surprised that there was not much follow-up because inconclusive experiments are not usually very interesting to the press.

What then happened—about two days later—was that the Opposition decided to pretend that this was in some way an attempt to conceal the facts. It was the Opposition who blew this up out of all proportion, as a supposed Government cover-up—*[Interruption.]* It is the Opposition who have since sought to exploit the matter to make it as big a story as possible and to cast doubt in the public's mind about the safety of eating sheepmeat, the safety of experiments and the confidence the public can place in any of the scientific work on BSE. That is why I call what the hon. Gentleman said dangerously irresponsible.

None of these experiments will give us clear and conclusive answers: all we are ever going to have are experimental results that narrow down the range of uncertainty bit by bit. The hon. Gentleman has done

neither sheep farmers nor the British public any service whatever by his disgraceful attempt to pretend that this is anything other than—yes—a series of grave errors that cause grave concern, but I see nothing—*[Interruption.]* To speak to the hon. Gentleman directly, as he is heckling me: what is it for which I am supposed to apologise?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask a very obvious question? Although hindsight is a marvellous thing to have, why on earth was not normal laboratory practice followed and identification of the material confirmed when it came to the laboratory, especially as it had been taken out of some fridge of doubtful provenance? Why was not normal laboratory practice followed?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is a very pertinent question. Further tests have been conducted. Tests were conducted when this experiment began, and from time to time down the years further tests have been conducted. It is far from clear why the results of the tests that were conducted then and the results of the tests conducted at the laboratory of the Government chemist the other day are so disparate. That is precisely the issue that the independent scientific audit will have to address. I know that my hon. Friend will understand precisely why I said that there is a great deal of confusion in the information presently available to the Government.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is the Secretary of State aware that when I was in Brussels last Wednesday, officials from both the Commission and the European Parliament told me that they expected research to be published in the next 24 hours which would confirm that BSE was present in the British sheep flock? Surely, the issue that she needs to address is how we got so close to an announcement that would have had disastrous consequences for our industry, why the error was not discovered earlier and why, indeed, it was possible, over a period of months, for doubts to have been expressed but not, apparently, addressed?

The Secretary of State said, correctly, that the IAH is not the Department but a client of the Department. However, can she say whether the Department was in any way involved in supplying the relevant material or what it did to supervise that? How can she ensure that when the Department commissions research in future, it can satisfy itself that the people carrying it out can be trusted to do so properly, professionally and competently? Does she not acknowledge that there is a great deal of concern that, as MAFF's successor, her Department still suffers from low morale and motivation as well as, in many cases, a poor calibre of decision making and management? If that is the case, does she not recognise that she has a responsibility to put things right so that we can have confidence that the Department is capable of commissioning research that will deliver results? We must recognise and welcome the fact that there is no such evidence in the British sheep flock, but what will she do to ensure that any research now conducted does not raise any further doubts?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is right in that we have been in touch with the European Commission which, like us, was expecting the results of the work on Friday. However, he is wrong about what those results might have shown: even if they had been clearer and more conclusive, they would have told us, at maximum, what scientists believe is the risk of there having been BSE in the sheep flock in the 1990s. Brains from the current flock were not being tested.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the supervision of the collection of the sample and so on. At the moment, I do not know who supervised the collection of material but, as I said in my statement, it was collected for a completely different purpose. Cow brain was collected in the 1990s under the supervision of the Conservative Government to test the effect of rendering on BSE prions; sheep brain was collected to test the effect of rendering on the clinical signs of scrapie. All the material was kept at the IAH and, as far as I am aware, was not in the custody of my Department; I am not aware of any role that we had in supervising its custody. It was thought that there would be merit in conducting experiments on brain material collected in the 1990s, but clearly a limited amount of such material was still available, which is why it was decided to take the risk of using material collected under different circumstances and for a different purpose.

The hon. Gentleman asked about doubts that had been expressed. There were questions and doubts down the years because there must always be some scientific dubiety when material is collected under different circumstances and for a different reason. Moreover, I understand that when people became concerned about cross-contamination, it was felt that the material might have been worked on on benches on which cow brain had also been worked on. We were therefore talking about the possibility of contamination occurring during experimental work and research rather than a mixing of the material itself. I must tell the hon. Gentleman and the House in all seriousness that there are important issues to be addressed, so it is essential that we have the independent scientific audit and do not speculate about what happened.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): Is my right hon. Friend aware that she is right not to be deflected by the incoherent ramblings of the party that caused all those problems in the first place and left the nation with that appalling legacy? Will she confirm that the independent and, I hope, rigorous audit of the work will go wide enough to include an audit of all similar or related work in that area being carried out for the Department and the Government? If it is the case that there was a failure to provide the proper tissues for research, we need to know that similar failures have not occurred in other research carried out in the IAH or other institutions. So will my right hon. Friend ensure that all the work that is going on in this important, sensitive and difficult area is properly and independently—*[Interruption.]*—rigorously assessed before any further decisions are taken?

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend is entirely right, and I share his views. He will know that I have already demanded an independent audit. I have also demanded a thorough review of all the work that is being undertaken, and I am asking for people to consider whether there is yet further research that we ought to undertake. It is important that all that is done. I noticed that Opposition Members were emphasising the need for independent scrutiny. That is a view which I share. I again remind them that the reason that we know about the

[Margaret Beckett]

problems with the experiment is that my Department commissioned an independent check to find out whether there was, in fact, a problem.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): But we have had an extremely close call. It is just possible that we could have been here today listening to a statement about measures taken to protect the public from eating lamb. As the Secretary of State knows, the farming community has an apocalyptic view that that could extend to the slaughter of the entire flock. It would be helpful if we had the parameters of a response if that were discovered. If the work is being done at more than one institute—the experiment was only part of the work—is it possible that we still may be able to find out whether BSE was present, masked by scrapie, in the sheep flock in the 1990s? Is there other work, as the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said, which may have led to policy announcements, although we now doubt the veracity of the research on which it was based? As public money is involved, can the Government have recourse to the institutes to recover it, given that it was spent in a futile cause in the exercise in question?

Margaret Beckett: No doubt that issue will have to be considered in the fulness of time. Of course I am aware of the grave anxieties in the farming community. That is why I regret that the episode has been hijacked for an entirely different political purpose. It is a matter of great concern. As far as I am aware—I will write to the right hon. Gentleman if I am wrong—there may not be much other work going on that will tell us about what happened in sheep brain in the 1990s because, by definition, only a limited amount of material is available. I am not aware that there is other work of that period. Most of the other work that is being undertaken is in many ways more pertinent to the anxieties of the public and of the farming community, as it is being undertaken on sheep that are in the food chain now.

I know that the right hon. Gentleman is well aware that up to the present time, which is all that we can say as we are dealing with uncertainties, none of that work has yet detected the presence of BSE in the national flock. We must hope that that continues to be the case, but that does not absolve any of us from our responsibility to do everything we can to make sure that we get further information and have it properly and rigorously assessed, and to do everything possible to try to eradicate scrapie and, with it, the risk of BSE.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): When exactly in 1997 was the flawed research commissioned? Would my right hon. Friend welcome a full investigation of the matter by the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend asks a very pertinent question. The research was commissioned in January 1997 under the Conservative Government.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Did the Secretary of State at any point discuss the handling of the release of the information with her special adviser?

Margaret Beckett: No, I did not. Both my special advisers happened to be away ill.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the EU Veterinary Standing Committee will soon be considering lifting the export ban on lamb and sheepmeat. What impact, if any, does she think that today's statement will have on its decision?

Margaret Beckett: All these issues must be taken carefully into account. I hope that there will be greater understanding by those who are considering these matters in the relative calm in which they make their decisions on the experiments and on what the questioning of them means.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Farmers in my constituency now have no faith in the Department. If specialists have been examining cows' brains for the past four years, farmers would like to know why they did not find BSE.

Margaret Beckett: I do not want to prejudge what is said to be the outcome of the experiment that has been called into question. I believe that those who conducted it felt that there was some evidence that BSE might have been in the material that they were testing in the 1990s. I do not want to go further than that. The issue of the validity of the experiment, what it means and what it might mean is under question. In addition, these are matters that will have to be considered by SEAC. I am not sure whether farmers in the hon. Gentleman's constituency will be grateful to him for raising even more doubts.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): This is obviously a grave announcement. To what extent does my right hon. Friend think that the Phillips report, rather than helping us understand the cause and transmission of BSE, has made the case for understanding these matters that much more difficult? Will she take due account of that in future and ensure that investigations are reported more quickly, and perhaps pull together some of the scientific evidence in a more opportune manner?

Margaret Beckett: I take my hon. Friend's point. One of the concerns about the work of the Phillips committee, without any discredit to the distinguished individuals who carried it out, was that it took so long. It was not easy for the members of it to draw together the scientific evidence in a way that made it clear. That is one of the reasons why the Government have chosen a different route for the inquiries that we have announced into foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): In March, the right hon. Lady's Department received memorandums from the Select Committee on work on transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. Dr. Dickson, formerly of the neuropathological unit in Edinburgh, contributed to it. He said:

> "It was a cause for amazement . . . when I heard that MAFF was funding attempts to search for particular strains in the UK sheep population by pooling the brains of sheep in batches."

He added:

> "They will need considerable good luck with any such approach."

With that critical comment, I ask the right hon. Lady when her Department first became aware of doubts about the scientific validity of this work. Who provided the source

of the doubts? Is it true that the Department knew about them in September? If so, why is it that we have heard about it only now?

Margaret Beckett: With great respect to the right hon. Gentleman—I regard him as usually a serious contributor to these issues—I do not think that he has listened to what has been said. The material was already pooled. Nobody drew together a brain pool to conduct the experiments. The material was in that form. As it was one of the small amounts of material available from the 1990s, it was decided to take the risk of using it for the experiment. It seems from what I know that from the beginning there has been something of a question mark over whether the research would show us much of great value. That is something that has always been in dispute. I do not have any names. My impression is that there are a number of scientist who have some reservations about the issue and the experiment. The right hon. Gentleman will know that it is ever thus: scientists do differ about the work of different experiments.

Mr. Jack: When did the right hon. Lady know?

Margaret Beckett: The experiment was commissioned by the Conservative Government in January 1997. From the beginning there have been those who have had doubts about its validity.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): My right hon. Friend was quite right to make the information public as soon as it became available. It is no sin not to spin; that differs from the Conservative party's attitude to BSE.

Is my right hon. Friend aware of the genuine public anxiety about the safety of feeding lamb to young children? Without resorting to feeding her grandchildren a lamb burger, unlike a former Conservative Minister, what can she say to parents about the safety of feeding British lamb to their children?

Margaret Beckett: Quite rightly and properly, food safety is in the hands of the independent Food Standards Agency, not least because of our experiences under the Conservative Government. No FSA advice states that baby food manufacturers should not use United Kingdom lamb or that lamb should not be consumed.

I thank my hon. Friend for his earlier remarks and simply observe what should be evident to anybody: although it may be inconvenient, life does not always correspond to media deadlines.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): We are considering a grave matter. In what form was the tissue in the 1990 scrapie brain pool kept: complete organs or histological specimens? Given the high economic and scientific stakes that were being played for in the experiment, as the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) pointed out, would not any contamination of samples with bovine tissue render the entire experiment pointless? What checks were built into the experimental protocols when the experiment was designed to ensure that the tissues were not contaminated and that the results were consequently valid?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman asks, first, about the form of the material. I understand that it was pooled brains in the form of a paste. He also asked about checks and said that any trace of bovine material would invalidate the experiment. Several checks were made—I am not sure of the number, but I believe that it was three or four—over the lifetime of the four-year experiment.

Although some people will undoubtedly share the hon. Gentleman's view that any trace of bovine material would call the results into question, those who conducted the experiment would not accept that. They believe that any minor contamination—one would have to consider their definition of minor—would not necessarily invalidate the results. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee was set up to discuss and evaluate exactly such an issue. It would undoubtedly have held such a discussion on Friday if my Department had not commissioned the cross-check.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Why cannot the right hon. Lady be clear about the issue and simply apologise? Is it not clear that scientists working for her Department have been experimenting on the brains of cows, not those of sheep, for the past four years? She says that she was trying to be transparent. If so, why does not the word "cow" appear in the press release? She could hardly bear to use it today; instead, she talked about "non-sheep material". Was not the press release opaque, unclear and thoroughly discreditable, and put out by an increasingly discredited Government?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman asks why we cannot be clearer and simply apologise. I repeat that the Government are not conducting the research; the previous Conservative Government, whom the hon. Gentleman supported, commissioned it, and it continues under the present Government. He says that it is clear that the scientists have been working all the time on bovine material.

Mr. Cameron: Say "cows".

Margaret Beckett: Cows, sheep—it is not clear that they have been working on material from cattle all the time. What has happened is not clear; the purpose of the independent scientific audit is to find out.

The hon. Gentleman claims that "cow" does not appear in the press release, but "cattle" does. The press release states that the "cross-checking research" was

"to guard against the possibility of material being contaminated by cattle brains"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must give the Secretary of State a chance to reply.

Margaret Beckett: The press release continues:

"This cross-checking has raised doubts about the validity of the original sample."

As I pointed out in my statement, that is because I am not confident that we can be sure that the material that was checked at the laboratory of the Government chemist was the same as that used in the experiments. Although the institute initially suggested on Wednesday afternoon that the material was the same, it has subsequently said that perhaps it was not.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Having, in recent months, seen a young woman gradually die from

[Mr. Malcolm Savidge]

CJD, may I say that I found the knockabout, pantomime performance of the Opposition spokesman deeply distasteful? We should not allow this sad fiasco to distract us from our primary responsibility, which is to try to minimise CJD infection. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that we shall try to ensure that rapid and reliable research will be carried out into the risk of BSE in our sheep flocks?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right about the gravity of this matter, which is why I very much regret the way in which it has been used. I have said that I will place in the Vote Office or the Library a list of what research is being undertaken, but obviously we shall need to reassess that. I entirely share my hon. Friend's view that this is what really matters.

One of the things that I found most distressing about the events of the past few days was a report from the mother of a young vCJD victim, who talked about her daughter having still been alive in 1997, and who appeared to have been given the impression that the work that has been called into question would in some way have prevented her daughter's death, or in some way answered questions or solved these problems. That is why I went to such lengths to explain that, even if the experiment had been successful, it would tell us only a limited amount, and that there is a great deal that we still do not know. These are very grave issues indeed, and it is incumbent on us all to treat them with the seriousness that they deserve.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The real issue is whether the results of other experiments have been compromised in the same way. It seems to me, a lay person, absolutely inexplicable that professional people should have mistaken cows' brains for sheep's brains. Will the Minister tell the House visually what the difference is between a cow's brain and a sheep's brain?

Margaret Beckett: I would certainly be cautious about doing so. I stress to my hon. Friend that the material on which this research was conducted was a paste. So far as I am aware—I hope that this will emerge in the information that I shall place before the House—all the experiments that are being conducted on sheep from the current flock, so to speak, are using individual brains. Therefore, the same kind of issues do not arise, although it is obviously still right for us to look at these questions and to try to answer them if we can.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Does not the Secretary of State understand the immense damage that this has done to the scientific reputation of her Department and the advice that may emanate from it?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): It was not her Department.

Mr. Paice: The Minister says that it was not their Department. He and the Secretary of State are responsible for the advice that comes from that Department, so any accusation that those who wish to criticise the Secretary of State or her Department are in some way exploiting the tragedy of CJD is, frankly, contemptible. The reality is that the Department's scientific advice is listened to out in the country, and it is very worrying for millions of people, consumers and farmers, when they hear that an experiment has gone on for four years and that it was only at the last minute—beyond the eleventh hour—that the challenges that the Secretary of State rightly says have existed for four years were held perhaps to be right, suggesting that the trials might not be valid. Will the Secretary of State not even now say that she is sorry that this has happened and, rather than criticise the Opposition, accept that her Department's status and prestige in scientific matters now stand on a knife edge?

Margaret Beckett: No, I do not accept that, although the Opposition are doing their best to make that the case. I am not sure what makes them think that that will serve the public interest.

The hon. Gentleman wondered why this conclusion had emerged only at the end of the experiment. Perhaps he has not taken on board the fact that it is the nature of this kind of experiment that the results to be assessed come only towards the end. Secondly, he spoke of the immense damage done to the reputation of my Department. May I repeat that this research was not conducted by my Department? It was commissioned by the previous Department under his Government, not under ours. I do not hold the Conservative party to blame—it was perfectly legitimate and correct to commission the research from an independent institute—but I am blowed if I see why we should take the blame for yet another of its errors.

The hon. Gentleman says that the reputation of my Department has been damaged because the experiment went wrong, but I remind him that my Department also commissioned the experiment—the cross-checking—that showed the error. He says that this is a contemptible episode. I am sorry that he chooses to use that language, but, in that case, I tell him bluntly that what is utterly contemptible is the Opposition's attempt to hijack a serious issue to try to fabricate evidence of some supposed cover-up and spinning when information was put in the public domain hours after Ministers knew it. Call that spinning? It is ridiculous.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): My concern is also for the reputation of the scientists and laboratories involved in the incident. All those in the House with a detailed knowledge of science, including my right hon. Friend, know that the storage labelling and the integrity of scientific samples, especially during transport from one laboratory to another, are of prima facie importance in science. In the light of that, does she agree that, in order to reverse the damage that may have been done, getting a full technical explanation in the public domain as soon as possible is of the utmost urgency?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I say to him quite honestly that I feel extremely sorry for the scientists involved, although I am probably the only person who does. They must be questioning all their work, and they must be deeply concerned about what has happened. I can assure him that the independent audit that we have commissioned will indeed be made public and that we shall do everything we can to provide as much information as we can as accurately as possible.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): It is a disgrace that we have had not a single sign of contrition from the

Government. Does not the Secretary of State realise that we were within 36 hours of wiping out the sheep farming industry in Wales? The headlines on Saturday following SEAC's meeting on Friday would have been "BSE found in sheep", which would have finished off sheepmeat sales in England and Wales.

Will the right hon. Lady confirm one thing—that an official of the National Assembly for Wales who was on the working party overseeing the tests and who assisted on the DNA tests, not her Department or an official in it, insisted on the DNA testing? That is why the testing was done at the very last minute. Is it not clear that her Department cannot be responsible for animal health in Wales? It is time that she devolved animal health and other agriculture responsibilities to the National Assembly.

Margaret Beckett: I did not think that anyone could vie with the Conservatives in a ridiculous rant, but clearly the hon. Gentleman is trying hard. I am not aware of the point that he makes about who gave particular advice, but I simply say to him that it remains the case that my Department commissioned the further information.

As a Secretary of State I am normally reluctant to decline to apologise, but I say honestly and genuinely to the House that I do not see for what the Department that previously supervised the research, or indeed my Department, is supposed to feel guilty and apologise. The research was not carried out by Government scientists. It was commissioned by a Government—but not by our Government. The cross-check was commissioned by the Government. As soon as we knew that there were problems, we immediately put the information in the public domain. That is the proper way to behave, and that is what I stand for.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): My right hon. Friend emerges from this latest incident with great credit and she should take no criticisms from the Conservative party. When it was in government, I remember Minister after Minister coming to the Dispatch Box to say that, on expert opinion, there was no chance of BSE getting in the food chain, and the appalling scene of Ministers force feeding their children hamburgers. The object lesson of all this is to be wary of experts in her Department and, indeed, from MAFF. Their philosophy seems to be, "If it moves, slaughter it", which probably extends to Ministers. The final lesson surely must be that the sooner people follow my example and become vegetarians, the happier and healthier they will be.

Margaret Beckett: I understand my hon. Friend's point of view. I was not aware that he had become a vegetarian. Although I have deep sympathy with his views, I would merely utter to him the word "pesticides."

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): On food safety, will the Minister confirm—this should reassure the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks)—that the removal of specified material in all sheep more than one year old will continue? Sheep farmers will be dismayed by this hugely embarrassing delay, because they have been implementing this procedure at great expense. Cull ewes are worthless. Given the Government's refusal to help the sheep industry with that problem, and given that there will be more years of research, will the right hon. Lady consider much more sympathetically the financial support that the Government give to sheep producers in Wales, on the North Yorkshire moors and in the uplands? They are making very little money, and most of them are on the verge of bankruptcy and ruin. They are dismayed by what has happened, because the uncertainty means more delay in getting back to the day when they know that all their sheep are BSE free.

Margaret Beckett: I have great sympathy with the concerns of the farming community. I believe that it is necessary for the removal of specified material to continue. No one regrets more than I do the fact that we have not been able to reduce some of the present uncertainty. The hon. Gentleman may have noticed that I referred to the separate work on contemporary sheep brains being carried out at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. We hope that that research will make a contribution. If the tests that the VLA is developing can be validated, peer reviewed and properly accepted as being of use, it will immensely speed up the completion of this work, and we very much want to see that.

Clive Efford (Eltham): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on her prompt action in publishing this information. Such information should not enter the public domain by being leaked.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees with me that, as a result of these issues, there is widespread public concern about animal produce from this country. Does she also agree that one of the best ways of restoring confidence is the routine testing of all livestock that enter the human food chain, including cattle of under 36 months?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is right that all these issues should be examined carefully and thoroughly and kept under review. The general discussion about where the future of the farming community and the wider rural community lies includes consideration of how we can produce consistent and high-quality food. I have little doubt—this is certainly a matter of discussion—that it requires more individual identification and, ultimately, more individual testing. My hon. Friend will be aware that that will involve substantial costs.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Regrettably, before the Secretary of State made this announcement last week the agriculture industry had little confidence in her Department, and her announcement will have further dented its reputation. She could go some way towards restoring that reputation by agreeing to a full public inquiry into the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Will she now consider that at least?

Margaret Beckett: I have already said many times from the Dispatch Box that we have commissioned inquiries of this nature because they can take place more speedily and can disaggregate the science and the long-term implications of a range of animal disease outbreaks. The hon. Gentleman will recall that we have had a range of outbreaks in recent years. The inquiry into precisely what happened during the foot and mouth outbreak and the separate inquiries to consider where the future of the farming community and the rural economy should take us will investigate how we handle those

[Margaret Beckett]

diseases, how we use epidemiology and what lessons we can learn for good or ill. We believe that that will be more effective and speedier than a lengthy public inquiry that tries to undertake all those tasks.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Secretary of State return to the critical question of why DNA testing was not included in the original design for the research programme when it was commissioned in 1997 by the Conservative Government? Could it be that there was an attempt to do the job on the cheap? It is an extraordinary fact that the fate of 40 million sheep was to hang on a research programme costing less than £1,000 a week. Does the right hon. Lady believe that, when originally set up, the programme was properly funded?

Why, in particular, did the professor at the IAH ask, as I understand he did some months ago, about the integrity of the sample that his team was investigating? What motivated him to ask that question?

Margaret Beckett: I cannot say that I have the full details of exactly what happened at every stage of the four-year experiment. I know the institute claims that it undertook some investigation of the sample originally. Information comes in and changes from time to time, but I understand that what has led those at the institute to say that they are not convinced that what was tested at the laboratory of the Government chemist is the material on which they carried out the experiment is the fact that right at the beginning—I think before the experiment commenced—they conducted some tests that they believed identified the material as sheep material.

I am not sure of the precise nature of the tests; I am not sure whether they were DNA tests or not. I understand, however, that those who carried them out were said to have identified a protein found only in sheep, and therefore felt confident that it was sheep material. I also understand—I am not sure from what interview, but it is my impression that it has happened three or four times over the years—that further checks were sought. Somewhere along the route, flaws emerged. I do not know whether the checks were not carried out in the right way or whether the difficulties arose towards the end of the experiment, and I know the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I say that I do not intend to speculate. That is what the independent scientific audit will try to establish, and whatever it finds—clear or otherwise—will be put in the public domain.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The right hon. Lady did not answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), who wanted to know why the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), had appeared to experience a kneejerk reaction in saying that all the national stock would be slaughtered. Can she restore the confidence of our sheep producers by saying that that was a regrettable remark, and that such action will now not be necessary?

The right hon. Lady will be aware that important new evidence has come to light suggesting that variant CJD may not be caused by BSE. Will she commission her Department to try to find conclusive evidence that that is so?

Margaret Beckett: This is the philosopher's stone. No one would like to know anything more than this: what causes BSE, and what we can do about it.

The hon. Lady mentioned remarks made by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. That is, of course, one of the options identified in the national contingency plan; it is the extreme option. I will write to the hon. Lady if I am mistaken, but I believe that the Phillips report recommended that it should be considered if BSE was found in sheep. It has therefore always been one of the options in the contingency plan to deal with the day when BSE in sheep might be identified, but I repeat that up to now the experiments conducted on the current flock have not identified it in them.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Can the Secretary of State tell us whether the Institute for Animal Health is accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service? Does she agree that this whole sorry saga is an indictment of the Government's action in submerging agriculture in a much bigger Department? Does she also agree that it is a disgrace that the Minister with dedicated responsibility for agriculture is in the House of Lords rather than here? What signal does that send to the farming community?

Margaret Beckett: That is a very silly remark. The Minister responsible for agriculture is standing at this Dispatch Box, and, indeed, I am the Minister who attends the Agriculture Council. I am not at all sure what makes that an indictment.

I do not know whether the IAH is accredited by the body cited by the hon. Gentleman, but it has certainly always been widely regarded as a much-respected organisation. No doubt that is why the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported commissioned research from it.

Speaker's Statement

4.35 pm

Mr. Speaker: I am now able to respond to the points raised by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) last Thursday at column 1324 of *Hansard*. First, he pointed out that answering a written question orally at the end of questions could mean that Opposition Front Benchers did not get the normal notice of the Minister's statement. I make it clear that this is an exceptional procedure, which requires my permission. When deciding whether to exercise my discretion in that way in future, I will certainly bear in mind the need to give adequate notice.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman said that the mechanism could be triggered only by a Government Back Bencher and a planted question. That is not the case. When the procedure was used on 8 March, for example, the written question was in the name of the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson). It is always open to any Member to seek to bring a Minister to the Dispatch Box by way of a private notice question. I hope that helps the hon. Member for North Cornwall.

Points of Order

4.36 pm

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Mr. Speaker, I know that you are, like your predecessors, concerned with the reputation of the House. There has, understandably, been criticism about the fact that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has not been reappointed as a matter of course. Indeed, a written question on the subject appears in Friday's *Hansard*.

What steps can be taken to debate the issue? When I raised the matter with the Leader of the House on 28 June, he said that

"the present Commissioner has been extremely zealous in performing her duties."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 782.]

The suspicion is that in carrying out her duties she has been too zealous in interpreting the rules to which the House has agreed. We know that the office was created because of allegations of sleaze, which did the House so much harm. It is unfortunate that it has been decided that the present Commissioner will not be reappointed as a matter of course. Is there any way in which we can debate the matter on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to advise the hon. Gentleman on procedural matters from the Chair via a point of order. He is as aware of procedure as I am, and it is up to him to find a way of bringing a motion before the House and debating the matter.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that the House passes its Sessional Orders, dealing with facilities for entry and access to the House, at the beginning of each Session. You may be aware that on Sunday and this morning the traffic light system in Parliament square broke down, causing a considerable build-up of traffic around the House. In light of the difficult circumstances in which we currently operate, when access for emergency vehicles might be needed, I wonder whether you would be so kind as to make inquiries about what can be done to ensure the robustness of the systems that operate the traffic lights, so that at least the terms of our Sessional Orders can be adhered to.

Mr. Speaker: I find that the traffic lights always break down at the most inconvenient time. All I can say to the right hon. Gentleman is that at the moment we have a great many worries, particularly about security, but that matter is now on the record.

Orders of the Day

Homelessness Bill

Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

ROUGH SLEEPERS

'The Rough Sleepers Unit shall cease to operate with effect from April 2002, and its powers and responsibilities shall be devolved to local housing authorities.'.—*[Mr. Clifton-Brown.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.39 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 2—*Limitation of main homelessness duty for prisoners—*

'In subsection (1) of section 193 of the 1996 Act (duty to persons with priority need who are not homeless intentionally), after the word "assistance", there is inserted—

", has not been sentenced to imprisonment in respect of a conviction and been released from imprisonment within a period of six months prior to his application not having been resident in the authority's area at the time of sentence,".'.

New clause 3—*Limitation of main homelessness duty to residents—*

'In subsection (1) of section 193 of the 1996 Act (duty to persons with priority need who are not homeless intentionally), after the word "assistance", there is inserted—

", was continually resident in the authority's area for a period of twelve months prior to his application,".'.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: This is my maiden performance from the Front Bench, and I am honoured to be here.

The Homelessness Bill has a rather long-drawn-out history. Hon. Members will recall that the Bill's contents were essentially part II of the Homes Bill, which fell in the previous Session because of the general election. Had the Government accepted the Opposition's recommendation that Ministers drop the controversial aspect of the Homes Bill—on the seller's pack—the provisions of the Homelessness Bill would already be enacted and we would not have to spend time today debating the Bill and the proposed amendments to it.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I share many of the hon. Gentleman's feelings on that issue. Nevertheless, does he not accept that the Government's opportunity for reflection during the Dissolution occasioned by the general election has enabled Ministers to table amendments that are welcomed not only by Liberal Democrat Members but by Conservative Members?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman is right, and Conservative Members welcome greater reflection on any legislation. Indeed, the Opposition have been so critical of the Government's timetabling of various legislation because that timetabling does not allow sufficient reflection on legislation. Moreover, as we shall see today, although Ministers had time to reflect further on this legislation, they have not reflected long enough on some matters. We shall see what Ministers propose now after reflecting on the Opposition's amendments.

As I said, the House has long awaited the genesis and gestation of the Homelessness Bill. The provisions of new clause 1 itself, on ending the rough sleepers unit, were debated in Committee during passage of both the Homes Bill and the Homelessness Bill. On 25 January 2001, in debate in Committee on the Homes Bill and the provision on rough sleepers, the then Minister, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), said:

"it is not intended that the unit should become a permanent fixture. Work is already under way to develop an exit strategy . . . It is envisaged that eventually the unit will be wound up and responsibility will be passed back to local authorities."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 25 January 2001; c. 310.]

The Opposition have tabled new clause 1 to probe the Government's intention on this matter. The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble)—whom I welcome to the debate—said:

"The rough sleepers unit has begun consulting on a future strategy."

I believe that that consultation will conclude on 1 April 2002. The Minister continued:

"The rough sleepers unit consultation process will take into account what role local authorities should play after 2002."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 10 July 2001; c. 44.]

Therefore, the first question for the Minister is what role she envisages for the rough sleepers unit. The purpose of new clause 1 is not to criticise the RSU's performance, as that has been rather good. From June 1998 to June 2000, the number of rough sleepers has decreased by 62 per cent., from 1,850 to 700, which is a commendable improvement. The reason why Opposition Members object to the RSU is that it is too bureaucratic and too expensive. Moreover, local authorities have the major role in dealing with rough sleepers. We believe that, as local authorities know most about what is happening in relation to rough sleeping in their area, they should be the leading partner in dealing with the problem.

What is the current nature of the problem of rough sleeping? As we know, 700 people are still sleeping rough on the streets. No hon. Member on either side of the House wants to see anyone sleeping rough at any stage, and we all accept that most of those who are sleeping rough are transient and can be helped in one way or another. We know also, however, that hard-drug use is a major factor in the reasons why people sleep rough. Some 75 per cent. of the rough sleepers in Soho are involved with hard or soft drugs. Perhaps we need to tackle the underlying problems in this area.

4.45 pm

Another reason that the Government may cite for keeping the rough sleepers unit is that a large number of rough sleepers come from our armed forces. That is an utter disgrace. If we cannot provide proper counselling for members of our armed forces to ensure that when they leave they have a proper place to sleep and bring up their families, something is very wrong with the organisation.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): If the new clause were successful, is the hon. Gentleman confident that local authorities will have the ability to perform

similar roles to the rough sleepers unit? Will they be objective in carrying out that responsibility? Will they be able to cope with the pressure that will be put on them by charities and organisations that will constantly press them to look closely at the problem of rough sleepers? I do not believe that local authorities will be able to deal with that responsibility objectively. I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman could tell me whether he thinks they could.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We are not saying that local authorities should have the sole role in this matter; indeed, they will be one of the partners, along with the voluntary sector and charities. Local authorities know best what is going on in their area and they are the correct people to play the leading role. The hon. Gentleman asked whether local authorities would be objective. The vast bulk of local authorities—which do a tremendously good job—will take a responsible role and will be effective.

It must be said that the authorities that are most likely to be effective in this area are Conservative-controlled. In terms of turning around empty houses, Conservative authorities are successful, while Labour authorities take many months, or more, to turn them round. The local authority in Westminster has come up with innovative schemes to house rough sleepers, and such schemes should be replicated across the country. Best practice should be disseminated by the internet and other forms of information technology. By doing that, local authorities, with other partners, will be able to tackle the problem of the remaining rough sleepers.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I have news for the hon. Gentleman. Many Labour-controlled local authorities have the same initiatives as the council he has just mentioned. My authority, Bolton, has a very good rough sleepers initiative. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the proposals implied by his new clause could be built into the requirements of the homelessness strategy that the Government will ask local authorities to produce?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I entirely agree. The two aspirations—the new clause and the hon. Gentleman's comments—are not mutually exclusive. One would expect the Government to build into the Bill some form of duty for local authorities. This problem is too important to be left hanging in the air and that is not the intention of my new clause. The intention is to probe the Government in view of previous statements by Ministers on the realistic role of the rough sleepers unit.

The unit is somewhat bureaucratic and expensive. We know, for example, that it has a budget of £198 million over three years, which could go directly to local authorities. That is a huge sum that, to use a rather crude phrase, could be recycled into the problem. I do not mean that uncaringly, but it is a simple fact of life that the money could go towards solving the problem, especially as local authorities already have housing staff in place, so there is some duplication between local authorities and the unit. We want to eliminate that duplication, not in any way to reduce the effectiveness of the effort being made to deal with the problem, which we regard, as the hon. Gentleman does, as very important.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): There is indeed a great deal of duplication. Will my hon. Friend speculate on how many homeless people that size of budget could help if it were channelled directly into the problem?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend reinforces my comments about duplication. Anyone can do the maths: 700 people divided into £198 million produces a very large sum for each rough sleeper. I am not saying that I would expect all the money to go towards the rough sleeping problem. It could be well directed towards some of the other problems that I have outlined, and others that we will refer to in our subsequent discussions.

The unit's administration budget is £3.6 million, and the chief executive is paid between £70,000 and £75,000. I do not begrudge her that in the slightest—she has done an amazingly good job—but she could be using her skills elsewhere, and the money that she and her staff are paid could be going towards dealing with this and other problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) tabled new clause 2 to try to ensure that those who are released from prison do not get undue priority in a local authority's provision for the unintentionally homeless. This is a sensitive area. The problem with one group being given priority is that other groups are de facto disadvantaged. We have all heard from perfectly ordinary, decent constituents who, for one reason or another, despite being highly deserving, have not accumulated quite enough points—if the local authority is using a points system—to be housed. If we are to give criminals—that is what they are, or they would not have been in prison in the first place—priority over some of those people, it will make it even harder for them to get off the bottom of the pile.

I do not want to be too harsh. Of course, the rehabilitation of offenders must be an important part of our work. Again, we should give local authorities more discretion. Every case is different, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you will know from your surgeries. You will have had heart-rending cases of people who have not been able to get priority for housing. In some circumstances, people coming out of prison might deserve priority, but it should not be written into the Bill that all such people should get it automatically. The more inclusive lists become in legislation, the more exclusive they are of those people who are not on the list. I wholly support new clause 2, and I hope that the Government will take it into account.

The third of our new clauses deals with priority for local people. This, too, is a difficult area; I have had several recent constituency cases involving the same kind of people—those who have not notched up enough points to be given priority housing, who find that people come in from outside the area and take priority over them.

If we want to maintain communities we should give local people some sort of priority. People moving back to live near their families are a classic case; communities would be strengthened by giving them priority over somebody coming in from outside—for example, a criminal. A criminal coming in from outside could be made a priority over people who were originally local and wanted to move back and live near their family. The problem when such people lose a house is more acute in rural areas, because in some places, a village house owned by a registered social landlord comes up only once every few years, and if a local person loses that one opportunity it may not come again for a long time.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

My hon. Friend is right to want to put on the statute book the idea that those who have a local connection should be one of the groups considered to have a priority need for housing.

Dr. Iddon: The hon. Gentleman seems to be concentrating on areas of high demand, but he knows that houses are available in areas of low demand. If the Government accepted new clause 3, would it not rule out a person moving from an area of high demand to an area of low demand?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman is right. The Opposition believe that, by and large, people should be housed in the area from which they come. If people come—from London, for example—to seek priority housing in an area of low demand such as his, if there is no priority housing available, it would be better for them to be sent back to their own local authority, if that is convenient and possible for them, and that authority should then consider the problem.

I accept that the problems for an authority such as the hon. Gentleman's are totally different from those in my area. Legislation, however, always deals with the most difficult cases, and in an authority such as mine, where there are probably five potential applicants for every house that becomes available, it is disheartening for local people with a reasonably high priority need for housing to find that people coming in from the outside make sure that they never reach the point of being offered a house. I accept part of what the hon. Gentleman says, but I believe that he would also recognise the severe difficulties that face an authority such as mine.

Priorities are difficult, but the Opposition think that local authorities should be given discretion. Hon. Members will see that later amendments attempt to give local authorities more duties and obligations—yet the more duties and obligations we give local authorities, the less easy it is for them to make their own decisions and the less effective they will become.

For example, a huge number of directives and regulations have been issued concerning housing benefit, and in some authorities the administration of that benefit has descended into chaos. The Opposition do not want to see that. We want an effective homelessness policy; we want local authorities' housing policies to become ever more effective, with rapid turnround of empty houses in both the private and the public sector, so that we can deal with some of the problems.

New clause 1 deals with rough sleepers—a problem that we acknowledge, and want to reduce further. We also want to ensure that correct discretion is given to local authorities over which groups should have priority on the housing list, and new clauses 2 and 3 were tabled with that objective in mind. I ask the Government to answer the questions that I have posed.

5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I welcome the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) to his new position and to the deliberations on the Bill. The new clauses and the other amendments tabled all seek to alter the homelessness responsibilities of local housing authorities.

New clause 1 would cease the operation of the rough sleepers unit and give housing authorities the primary responsibility for addressing problems of rough sleeping. I hope that all hon. Members share the Government's concern for the plight of people sleeping rough. The RSU was established in 1999. It has been set the specific objective of reducing the number of people sleeping rough in England to as near zero as possible, and by at least two-thirds, by April 2002.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the unit has already made excellent progress towards that demanding target. It has taken a partnership approach, delivered through a national strategy. Housing authorities and voluntary sector agencies play a key role in delivering the strategy at local level. One of the successes of the unit has been its ability to draw together different programmes from across government, including programmes to help people suffering mental ill health or problems of drug and alcohol addiction. It takes a joined-up approach in looking at why people sleep rough in the first place, and offering them an alternative to a life on the streets.

By working across government, the unit makes sure that all organisations with a stake in the problem—like local authorities, the Prison Service, the Benefits Agency and the armed forces—are doing their bit to tackle it. The hon. Gentleman acknowledged that the results had been good, but that is not only because the unit has been able to reduce the numbers—the head count—sleeping rough. It has also been successful in changing thinking in the approach to dealing with rough sleepers and introducing more permanent solutions.

The unit has been consulting authorities, voluntary sector homelessness agencies and others, including people sleeping rough, former rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping, on a future strategy. The unit is currently examining responses to the consultation and is evaluating the impact of its strategy to identify how work to tackle rough sleeping, and prevent people from hitting the streets in the first place, should continue beyond April 2002. The hon. Gentleman recognised the impact of that date. An announcement on the future arrangements will be made in the coming months.

The role of housing authorities will, of course, be a factor in the analysis. They will need to build on their present successes in working in partnership with voluntary sector agencies and other statutory organisations to reduce the number of people sleeping rough, to ensure that numbers are sustained at a low level. That will be a substantial challenge. The hon. Member for Cotswold identified the role of the Ministry of Defence and, in doing so, he recognised the complexity of the issue and the importance of ensuring a smooth transition from the present arrangements to whatever comes after April 2002. The new ways of working that have been introduced must be continued, so that we do not see a rise in the head count of people sleeping rough after that date.

Mr. Hancock: Is the Minister satisfied that the RSU and her Department have accurate figures for the number of rough sleepers? A survey was done in my constituency—the city of Portsmouth has around 140,000 adults—and only one rough sleeper was found. When that

result was questioned, it was suggested that the count was inaccurate because the likely places to find rough sleepers were too dangerous for the people carrying out the surveys to enter to ascertain the true figure. I know that on one evening at least a dozen people were sleeping in a derelict building but who had not formed part of the count.

Ms Keeble: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. The head counts are snapshots taken at a particular point in time. The work of the rough sleepers unit has shown that there is often a perceptible difference between the number of people who sleep rough and the number out on the streets during the day. If the hon. Gentleman has clear evidence of a substantial mistake, I would be happy to take it up.

The numbers reflect the circumstances of the nights on which head counts are taken. They are taken repeatedly and all the evidence points to a substantial and sustained decrease in the number of people sleeping rough which, I am sure, is down to the innovative and sometimes challenging way in which the rough sleepers unit has gone about its task. In the context of that work, I ask the hon. Member for Cotswold to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does the Minister accept that the success of the rough sleepers unit has been largely superseded and that the purpose of this consultation is to see what should follow it? We should use the resources that it consumes in a better way and, in particular, ensure that the best practice for which it is responsible is disseminated and used by local authorities.

Ms Keeble: I take issue with what the hon. Gentleman says. First, I would not underestimate the real value of the rough sleepers unit in challenging some of the conventions, including some voluntary sector assumptions, about rough sleepers. That has been extremely important and could have been done only by a very strong, centrally based unit.

It is also extremely important to recognise that the rough sleepers unit has not succeeded simply because it has got numbers down in one or two head counts. It has identified some of the structural causes of people sleeping rough and has considered structural solutions to the problem. Whatever the transition that takes place, those arrangements must be maintained so that there is no damage to some of the working practices which I suspect are still in their infancy, comparatively speaking. We do not want a return to the kind of problems which were well known in London when the hon. Gentleman's party was in government. That is why it is particularly important that we conduct the consultation carefully and do not precipitate a decision, one way or another, simply for the convenience of this legislation.

Dr. Iddon: Does my hon. Friend accept the point that I made to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) about local authorities building in to their strategy reports how they will deal with rough sleepers in the future?

Ms Keeble: That matter will covered in guidance; I am sure that people will find it of interest.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): Does the hon. Lady agree in principle with the comments of her predecessor, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), as quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), that the rough sleepers unit has a finite lifetime? If so, when we will have an exit strategy? When does the hon. Lady envisage that the current programme is due to reach its target, if not next year?

Ms Keeble: I have already given the time scales for the consultation, for when we expect to have a strategy and when, therefore, we expect to move on. It is more important to have the right solution than one that is time limited. I would prefer to have in place arrangements that not only deal with people currently sleeping rough but ensure that those who are at risk of being on the streets—people who have been in care, in the army or have come out of prison—do not end up sleeping rough. I would prefer a good solution to one that suits a particular bureaucratic time scale.

To turn to new clauses 2 and 3, the essence of the Homelessness Bill, and our proposed draft order extending the priority need categories, is to offer greater protection to those who are genuinely homeless through no fault of their own. It is about achieving more equitable systems for the allocation of social housing, and ensuring that authorities think strategically about the needs of all groups in their area and plan appropriate provision of accommodation and support accordingly. In short, the Bill mixes pragmatism with compassion, both of which the Opposition are clearly short on when it comes to the issue of ex-offenders.

There is a broad consensus of support for the thrust of the Bill, which is to strengthen the safety net available for people who are homeless and have a priority need. That consensus of support has included Opposition Members, yet new clauses 2 and 3 would weaken the safety net.

The effect of new clause 2 would be that ex-prisoners who wanted to make a homelessness application within six months of their release from prison would have to apply to the local housing authority in whose district they were residing when they were sentenced. If they were to apply to any other local housing authority within that period, no duty whatever would be owed—regardless of whether they were unintentionally homeless and had a priority need for accommodation. Only after six months would they be able to make an application to other local housing authorities and have it properly considered in the normal way.

To an extent, I understand the intention behind the new clause, and sympathise with the constituency interests that it seeks to protect. I think that they apply to one constituency in particular. I sense that, behind the new clause, there is concern that the draft order that the Government propose to make under section 189 of the Housing Act 1996, to extend the categories of applicant who have a priority need for accommodation, may lead to a significant increase in the number of ex-prisoners who will be entitled to temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation.

Let me make clear that there is no reason to expect that the order would have the result predicted. First, the order would provide that there was priority need only where the housing authority was satisfied that the individual was vulnerable. Secondly, authorities should already accept that applicants who are vulnerable for that reason—or any other—have a priority need by virtue of the current provisions in section 189 of the 1996 Act. These provide

[Ms Keeble]

that a person has a priority need if he is vulnerable not only as a result of factors such as old age and mental illness, but as a result of another special reason.

There has been a lot of nonsense—some of it shameful—talked about the provisions in the draft order which bear on those who are vulnerable as a result of having served a custodial sentence. It has been suggested that the order would allow ex-prisoners to jump the housing queue ahead of families. This is nonsense, and it confuses priority need for short-term assistance under the homelessness legislation with priority for an allocation of long-term housing through the housing register. The order bears on applications for assistance under the homelessness legislation. It puts ex-prisoners who are homeless and genuinely vulnerable on the same footing as other vulnerable homeless people who need short-term assistance with accommodation until a settled housing solution can be found.

I understand the thinking behind the new clause, but the 1996 Act already contains adequate provisions to address the situation where a person applies for homelessness assistance to an authority in one area but has a local connection elsewhere. Under current provisions, where an authority has decided that an applicant is unintentionally homeless, in priority need and owed a main homelessness duty, and if the applicant does not have a local connection with that authority's district but has one somewhere else, the authority has a discretionary power to refer the applicant to the authority in the area where there is a connection. For that purpose, a local connection can be established because of residence—by the person's choice—employment or family associations in the area or because of special circumstances.

Under guidelines issued by the Local Government Association, to which all housing authorities operate, there must be normal residence in an area of at least six months before a local connection is established by way of residence for the purpose of meeting the statutory conditions for referral. However, there is specific provision in the 1996 Act which prevents a local connection being established as a result of the applicant becoming resident in an area because he is detained in prison. Thus, under current provisions and arrangements, it would be open to an authority dealing with an applicant who was unintentionally homeless and in priority need, and who met the additional criteria that new clause 2 would impose, to refer him or her to another authority.

5.15 pm

New clause 3 seeks to tinker with existing provisions on local connection; I have already explained how those provisions work. Broadly speaking, under current arrangements, a person will not establish a local connection with an area by way of residence until he or she is normally resident there of their own choice—so not in prison—for at least six months. A local connection can also be established as a result of employment, family associations or special circumstances. The current arrangements therefore provide a pragmatic and flexible framework which, on the one hand, helps to provide a safety net for homeless people, allowing them to seek help wherever they are, regardless of whether they have a local connection. On the other hand, it allows local authorities to refer applicants to the appropriate authority in cases in which the local connection rests elsewhere.

New clause 3 would demolish that pragmatic framework. One effect would be that, regardless of whether homeless applicants had a local connection with an area because of employment, family associations or other reasons, they would be unable to obtain any homelessness assistance from the local authority in that area if they had not been resident there for at least 12 months. Such a proposition is unacceptable.

However, the effects of new clause 3 would go much wider. Many applicants will have lived somewhere in Great Britain for at least 12 months and would therefore be able to make an application to an authority somewhere, even if that involved making an application from a location at one end of the country to an authority at the other end. But what about the position of those applicants who had not lived anywhere in Great Britain for 12 months, which could include people from overseas who had been granted refugee status or given indefinite or exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom? It could also include European nationals with a right of residence in the UK. Those groups are eligible for assistance under the homelessness legislation, but could be denied access to such help under new clause 3. Quite apart from the practical implications, that could result in a breach of the UK's EU treaty obligations and other international obligations. The way in which those rules operate is obviously fairly complex, but they are designed to give the correct balance of rights for the homeless and flexibility for local authorities to make the best possible arrangements for people who present themselves as homelessness, so I strongly urge hon. Members not to press new clauses 2 and 3.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Liberal Democrat Members welcomed the Bill first time round and we welcome even more its re-emergence in amended form. Clearly, some thought and reflection have taken place in the intervening period and it has been much improved; Liberal Democrat Members hope to improve it still further.

We do not support the three new clauses, and would probably not do so in any circumstances. I have been a critic of the rough sleepers unit, partly because rough sleepers come in all shapes and sizes, but the initial recommendations for removing the bulk of them from the streets basically increased the provision available for those who would otherwise have gone into hostels. My criticism of the policy is that many rough sleepers have particular needs, but they do not all have those needs met. For example, those who require drug rehabilitation cannot all find places on rehabilitation programmes. Indeed, it is often the case not that there are no resources for such programmes, but that there are not enough people to carry them out. The Government ought to look at that separately; I am sure that the rough sleepers unit will be aware of it.

There are other issues which some people might consider minor. For example, a rough sleeper who has a pet cannot take it into a hostel. More thought needs to be given to the first stage of helping people to rehabilitate themselves after rough sleeping, if the problem is simply that they cannot take a place in a hostel because they have a pet animal with them.

The bulk of the work of the rough sleepers unit has rightly been praised from all parts of the House. The unit has issued best practice guidelines which have been of great benefit to local authorities. The fact that the unit examines what is happening in various parts of the country, assesses the numbers, and issues guidelines has improved the services available throughout the country to local authorities trying to tackle the problem of rough sleepers. Given that the Government have promised a review of the rough sleepers unit, the new clause should be withdrawn and forgotten for the moment.

New clause 2 would reduce the duty to assist people released from prison. First, it would set a six-month period from release until authorities had a duty to assist with housing. Secondly, if the applicant was not resident in the area at the time of sentencing, the authority would have no duty.

The Liberal Democrat view is that housing is fundamental to the rehabilitation of ex-offenders. Evidence suggests that people with fixed accommodation are less likely to reoffend and are more committed to any assistance programme in which they may be involved. The clause would make it much harder for ex-offenders to find accommodation and to move away from areas where they have criminal connections.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) seemed to suggest that once the sentence is served, the offender remains a criminal. That is not the view of our criminal justice system, and it is certainly not the view of those on the Liberal Democrat Benches.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to clarify what I said. Once a criminal has served his sentence, he can in no way still be considered a criminal. We are discussing the housing priority of various groups. It is our view that that matter is best left to the discretion of the local authority, especially in areas such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). His authority has a particular problem, as it has three prisons.

Mr. Sanders: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that clarification. He said in his opening remarks that ex-offenders were criminals, and that criminals would jump the queue. However, they are no longer criminals once they have served their sentence, and I am glad for that clarification. The hon. Gentleman mentioned that former criminals were one of the largest groups of rough sleepers. The clause would remove their right to receive assistance as a priority group and their right to be looked on kindly by local authorities.

New clause 3 would limit the main homelessness duty to residents. It seems to confuse the aims of the Bill. There is a distinction between offering support to various groups and the allocation of priorities. The hon. Member for Cotswold mentioned service people. They may not be able to provide a local address within the previous 12 months, which would automatically remove their right to be recognised under the Bill as a priority group. The effects of the clause on such groups have not been properly thought through.

I shall comment later on the general deficiencies in the Government's homelessness policy, if I am lucky enough to catch the Deputy Speaker's eye. Meanwhile, in respect of all three new clauses, I hope that the motion will be withdrawn.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I oppose the new clauses, which seem paradoxical in what they purport to achieve. The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who speaks from the Opposition Front Bench on these issues, was rightly full of praise for the work that has been achieved by the rough sleepers unit, and its particular initiative in reducing the numbers of rough sleepers on our streets. However, new clauses 2 and 3, by what they would require of the Bill, would make the situation perfect for increasing the number of rough sleepers on our streets.

It is surely absurd to dub somebody an ex-offender, but perhaps I am paraphrasing what the hon. Member for Cotswold said. People can be in prison who are ex-members of the armed forces. They can be drug and alcohol-dependent and can be vulnerable. If they have nowhere to go after having served their prison sentence and no one is responsible for attempting to house them, their most natural recourse will be to rough sleeping back on the streets.

The hon. Gentleman is somewhat confused about the realities of the housing that is provided by local authorities for people for whom they must already accept a responsibility. He kept talking about houses. It would be rare in the borough in my constituency and in some of the most hard-pressed boroughs, if not all the boroughs in the Greater London area, if they were able to afford to offer a house to anyone for whom they had a specific housing responsibility. There are vast numbers of people in temporary housing. Families are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

The hon. Gentleman talked about locality and individuals' links with particular areas. In Greater London, local authorities accept housing responsibilities, but they may house a group, an individual or a family in a borough many miles from their own. It is especially a problem for the GLA because it is probably the most hard-pressed area for housing, and certainly for affordable housing, in the United Kingdom.

I say to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that I do not support the call for the rough sleepers unit to be wound up and for responsibility to be farmed out to local authorities. The idea of the hon. Member for Cotswold—that the problems of rough sleepers would be solved by divvying up £198 million between 700 people—leads me to believe that he is not as aware as he should be of the realities of rough sleepers.

Often, a rough sleeper's problems are not solved by bricks and mortar alone. Such people have many complex needs that cannot be met by an individual or one organisation. They require properly integrated support packages, which in my experience include a local authority and a voluntary or charitable organisation. The national health service will most certainly be included, not least in the area of improving mental health. There may be a requirement for advice from the Benefits Agency. Certainly there will be a need for retraining and reskilling. The needs of rough sleepers run through our national life, which is why I do not support the new clauses.

I return to the point that I was attempting to make to my hon. Friend the Minister. Once the proper exit strategy for the rough sleepers initiative has been achieved,

[Glenda Jackson]

there will still be a need for services to be provided for them. People will continue to come on to the streets, especially those of central London. Four London boroughs are carrying the heaviest burden, and perhaps she and other right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department could examine the possibility of transferring the responsibilities of the rough sleepers initiative to the Mayor and the GLA. Perhaps this is not a true belief, but there is anecdotal evidence of some of the more distant or outer boroughs of the GLA saying, "We have no rough sleeping problem." No, they do not, because their rough sleepers come to central London. The increase in young people sleeping rough on the streets of central London is almost invariably due to their coming from the outer London boroughs. They are there because of family breakdown and, in some instances, severe abuse in the family. The instability of an environment where severe overcrowding has an impact on the whole family is also a factor.

5.30 pm

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider my suggestion because, despite the RSU's excellent work, I believe that such an approach to preventing rough sleeping and keeping people off the streets will not remain a central and integral part of the work of the London boroughs and local authorities throughout the country.

New clauses 2 and 3 would increase the possibility of ever more rough sleepers on the streets.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I agree with the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) that the delay in introducing the Bill has been fortunate, especially for the two issues to do with prisoners and others. My constituency background led to my tabling new clauses 2 and 3, but I am sure that the experience is not limited to my constituency.

The Minister acknowledged the specific circumstances of the Isle of Wight in respect of prisoners, but the relevance of the point about other people moving into a constituency and seeking housing is not confined to the Isle of Wight. The island word "overner" is usually used jocularly to refer to someone who comes from the mainland. No one counts as an islander without being there longer than 30 years.

Prisoners do not choose to come to the island, but they may choose to remain. Many new Members must deal with the problem of who is responsible for prisoners. When prisoners write to me from Parkhurst, do they belong to me or the Member of Parliament for their home constituency? When prisoners' relatives who live on the island complain to me about conditions in a prison in another part of the country, is it my responsibility or that of another hon. Member?

Residents of the island believe that those leaving prison are the responsibility of where they came from. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) was wrong to suggest that new clause 2 would remove any duty to provide assistance for prisoners. It merely makes it clear that the duty should be exercised by the authority in which a prisoner lived at the time of sentencing. Provision for prisoners should be made, but not in the constituency where they happen to be imprisoned and released.

As the Minister acknowledged, there are three prisons on the island. That must be more per head than in most constituencies. One in particular has a good record of dealing with drug addiction and paedophiles. It is not surprising that paedophiles find it more difficult to move back to their home constituencies when they are released and are therefore more likely to seek housing on the island. That, however, is not the right solution because they need to be reintegrated.

There are examples of paedophiles who, on their release, have returned to Newport, in my constituency, to the house they lived in when they were convicted. They are known by the local community, which takes a tolerant, understanding and sensible attitude towards them and does not drum them out. Surely we would recommend that approach, not their transfer to a place with which they have no connection and where they are likely to be regarded with grave suspicion.

I do not demur from the assertion of the need to offer support to released prisoners, but that requirement should not be imposed on my constituents—or on the constituents of other hon. Members with prison establishments in their constituencies—disproportionately. There are also prisoners whose wives or girl friends come to live on the island during their sentence, because that makes it easier to visit. It is difficult for local people to see that those wives or girl friends deserve to be housed on the island at the time of release.

The Minister suggested that there was a lack of compassion in the amendments. There is no lack of compassion, but there is an understanding that if we give priority to one group, we reduce the priority of another. I would like to emphasise, particularly to the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), that there is no suggestion that prisoners should not be dealt with, merely a suggestion that they should be dealt with where they live, rather than where they are released.

Mr. Don Foster: Can the hon. Gentleman imagine a situation in which a prisoner might, as a result of the offence for which he or she was convicted, subsequently have a major family breakdown? That prisoner's main relatives might happen to live in the same constituency as the one the prison is in; it would therefore be more appropriate for that person to be housed in that area. I accept that that is fairly unlikely, but it is possible. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the amendment would prevent that from happening?

Mr. Turner: I would not agree with that for a moment.

Mr. Foster: Why not?

Mr. Turner: Because the amendment makes certain provisions. It contains an awful lot of double negatives. Perhaps I should read it and put the pauses in. It provides for the insertion of the words

", has not been sentenced . . . in respect of a conviction"—

pause—

"and been released from imprisonment within a period of six months prior to his application"—

pause—

"not having been resident in the authority's area at the time of sentence,".

In other words, if he was resident there at the time of sentence, he would be a priority for that local authority.

Mr. Foster: We are dealing with a hypothetical example, but I was using it to illustrate the complexity of the situation and the problem that would be created by the hon. Gentleman's amendment. It would be perfectly possible for someone to have been sentenced in another local authority area and to have had a breakdown of family relationships as a result of the activity that led him to be sentenced. The remainder of his family might happen to live in the local authority area in which the prison was located. By the hon. Gentleman's own admission, that local authority would be unable to assist that person in those circumstances, even if it wished to do so.

Mr. Turner: I understand that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the remainder of the prisoner's family with whom he maintains good relations. I misunderstood; I thought that he meant those with whom he no longer had good relations. In those circumstances, I hope that the family would be able to support the person, and that he would not expect that support to be provided by the rest of the community.

I want to add a further point on the housing of former offenders. It is a matter of great concern to my constituents, and perhaps to many others, that housing associations do not have information on the records of ex-offenders when they come to allocate housing to them. They might, therefore, allocate housing to known paedophiles, who have finished their sentences, in the middle of housing estates or blocks of flats where young children live. That matter—although not the subject of the amendment—needs to be taken on board by the Government.

New clause 3 relates to the problem of the definition of "local connection" for the purposes of statutory homelessness. I thank the Minister, in passing, for confirming that local authorities will be allowed to take account of local connection in their allocation procedures. However, the new clause is about statutory homelessness. Many people on the south coast of England, and perhaps in many other parts of the country, come to coastal constituencies to work in the holiday trade or in fruit picking, and to live in holiday accommodation that is available for short lets during the winter months. At the end of, say, six or seven months, they present themselves as homeless to the local authority. If they are taken as homeless, they go up in priority and the normal, regular, long-standing residents of the constituency go down. We must understand that giving additional priority to one person means a lower priority for someone else. That is the point that has not been accepted by Liberal Democrat Members. Priority for one means less priority for another; frankly, islanders are fed up with being pushed to the end of the queue by people who come to work as fruit or tomato pickers.

David Wright (Telford): Would not the hon. Gentleman have been better served by tabling a new clause that specifically mentioned those groups, if he is particularly concerned about them? This is a blunderbuss new clause that covers a range of people.

Mr. Turner: I did not table a new clause dealing with specific groups because I do not want to remove any powers from the local authority. I merely want to remove the compulsion on it. It is better to leave local authorities with a range of powers, which they exercise at their discretion, rather than undertake detailed intervention by the Government or the House.

Mr. Hancock: Can the hon. Gentleman explain what would happen to a service man whose family or marriage broke up while he was at sea? On his return from the sea, he might leave the Navy. The family might have been based in my constituency in Portsmouth and his natural home would be Portsmouth, but perhaps for more than a year he would have had no recognition of that fact and no address in Portsmouth or anywhere else that was his.

Mr. Turner: Nothing in the new clause would remove local authority discretion to give priority to specific groups. All I am saying is that many constituencies, which are perhaps not like Portsmouth, South, experience a regular, seasonal influx of workers who, at the end of their term, during which they might have been provided with accommodation while they picked tomatoes or garlic, present themselves as homeless. They jump the queue in which others have waited patiently.

Glenda Jackson: I am most interested in the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I do not understand why his local authority accepts people as homeless without considering other contingencies that would make them vulnerable. Surely we are discussing not the exercise of local authority discretion, but how most local authorities, which are seriously overstretched in respect of affordable social housing, attempt to deal with such problems. I have yet to encounter a local authority that does not have a strict listing of what constitutes vulnerability.

Mr. Turner: I am sure that that is true, but the point is that those who live in an area temporarily, having come for a specific short-term job, should not get priority above normal residents. That is the substance of my new clause.

Glenda Jackson: I am still not clear why the hon. Gentleman's local authority would for 30 seconds think itself responsible for those particular itinerant workers.

Mr. Turner: Perhaps the hon. Lady should correspond with my local authority.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): The hon. Gentleman should do that.

Mr. Turner: The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) has the problem, not me. That is the position as it is perceived by so many of my constituents.

Mr. Hendry: I rise to support new clause 1 and to make a few points about new clause 2.

I agree entirely with those who have spoken about the success of the rough sleepers unit over the past few years, but I was intrigued as I listened to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) as she suggested that all the changes and the joined-up thinking across government began when the unit was created.

[Mr. Hendry]

The hon. Lady overlooked a lot of the good work done in preceding years by the rough sleepers initiative, which sought precisely to bring Departments together in such a way that they would realise that many of the homeless and people on the streets had significant problems not just with drugs or alcohol, but with welfare, education and a range of different issues. The great strength of the rough sleepers initiative was that it tried to tackle those problems. The RSU moved on from that by providing an actual presence. It is wrong to say that that approach was taken only when the unit was suggested.

5.45 pm

At the outset, I should have declared an interest as vice-president of The Big Issue Foundation. I should be grateful if that could be put on the record.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) suggested that the £198 million that is spent each year by the RSU could be better spent by local authorities, and I agree with his assessment. What worried me about the Minister's response to my intervention was that ministerial minds seem to be moving from a unit set up specifically to tackle the current crisis to something that is part of the permanent structure of government. I sense that the proposals will contain not an exit strategy, but an explanation of why Ministers believe that the unit should continue for some years more and then be reviewed again.

Unless the Bill contains a requirement that the unit should be wound up by a specific time, the issue will gradually slip off the agenda. The Minister's predecessor, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), was right to recognise that the unit should not have an enduring, permanent quality. When it has achieved its intentions, we should find other ways to carry out that work.

We should also recognise that the issues that affect different parts of the country reflect different needs. If money, instead of being handled entirely through the unit, were given to the local authorities affected, they would address their homelessness problems in different ways. It is possible that they would take a different approach in Hampstead and Highgate from that taken by Westminster, or Westminster would want to do it differently from Brighton or Manchester. Only by being given the funds, the ability and the discretion to deal with homelessness can local authorities make decisions in the interests of people living and sleeping rough in their areas.

Where appropriate, local authorities should be able to move towards prevention rather than cure. The numbers of rough sleepers are coming down—we all welcome that—so local authorities will want to become more proactive in addressing this problem. If they have the numbers firmly under control, they will want to prevent people from sleeping rough rather than take responsive action. That should not be done centrally: individual local authorities should be given the chance to do that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold spoke about people who leave the armed forces. Another dimension to the problem is the frightening proportion of rough sleepers who have come out of local authority care. Many of those people are still of an age at which the local authority has a legal duty of care towards them. One of the most scandalous failures of the public sector has been that it has let down young people in care. The public sector says that it will look after vulnerable people, but in no other example has it failed them so dismally with such disastrous consequences. That is not a criticism of the Government; it is a continuing criticism of the care system over many years. It would make sense for the money that is spent by the RSU to be passed back to local authorities so that they can put in place the strategies and structures that would enable them to fulfil their duty of care most effectively.

I listened with great care to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on new clause 2. Clearly, he has a particular problem, but it is not unique to the Isle of Wight. Many of us have constituencies with prisons in them or adjacent to them. It is a matter of great concern to all those communities that people coming out of prison look to set up their new homes in those areas. There may be good reasons why they do not want to go back to the areas they came from—either because of marital breakdown or because the nature of the crimes that they committed was such that they do not feel they can fit back into that community. The communities in which prisons are, however, should not then bear the burden of finding housing for those people as well.

I was not sure what the Minister meant when she used the phrase "resident by a person's choice". I am not sure what that means. Many people leaving prison or any other form of institutional life would love to live in East Sussex, a beautiful area with wonderful scenery and great facilities. One can see why they would make that choice; one can also see why many people would want to live in an inner-city area with a vibrant community. I feel, however, that there should be a more tangible reason for wanting to live somewhere than the fact that it is an attractive location.

The Minister mentioned family connections. How tenuous could such a connection be? Are we talking about parents, or about brothers and sisters? Might a great-aunt happen to live in a place in which such people think it would be pleasant to live? That phrase, too, must be clarified.

Above all, when dealing with the resettlement of offenders, we must focus on what is best for them. Resettling them in the area in which they have just left prison may not be the best way of doing that. There will be places where they know more people, where they have a circle of friends, and which could have a positive influence on their rehabilitation.

What causes a number of people to return to the spiral of decline into criminality after their release is the nature of the circumstances and the community in which they happen to be living. Unless there is a support structure consisting of people who know and care about them, and who will tell them that there is a better way of leading their lives than a return to crime, it will be much more difficult to ensure that they do not slip back into criminality. If they come out of Parkhurst and live somewhere else on the Isle of Wight, or come out of Lewes and live in Lewes, they will not have access to the support system that would enable them to break away from a life of crime. That must be our first objective, and that is why I support new clause 2.

I have little to say about new clause 3, but I think it has a particular dimension relating to the Isle of Wight. In areas with peculiar local authority boundaries—such as that between Wealden and Mid-Sussex—a number of anomalies would arise. People living in a small village next to a large town where their children go to school might wish to move to the town but might find it more difficult than they would otherwise. I see that the new clause has significant advantages for the Isle of Wight, however.

I hope that the House will accept the new clause.

Mr. Hancock: Like many who have already spoken, I think that the extra time available to both Ministers and the House has enabled the Bill to appear in much better shape than it did originally. This must be one of the few occasions when time has been used to good purpose and has fundamentally improved a Bill—so much so that there is now little for most Members to be able to criticise.

These three interesting new clauses have raised a number of basic points about the way we treat people in this country. The rough sleepers unit may have done a good job, but I am not altogether convinced that it has done the whole job, and I am far from sure that the job is complete to the extent that we can now say the unit should be wound up.

In an intervention, I mentioned a head count in my constituency. That has left a very bad taste in the mouths of many who have advocated the provision of proper facilities for homeless people. The suggestion that a head count of only one person sleeping rough was an accurate reflection of the situation in a city like Portsmouth was ludicrous and a manifest misrepresentation of the true position. As I said, those conducting the survey were unwilling to enter at least two buildings, simply because of their unsafe nature. The same must apply in many inner-city areas.

Cities like Portsmouth will soon have no facilities for night shelters for genuine rough sleepers. That is being heavily criticised by Churches and by many of the charitable organisations that have worked for years to observe the rights of, and provide facilities for, young people who—as other Members have said—have been let down by local authorities, and not only those in which they now find themselves. I shall say something about members of the armed forces later, but there are a number of vulnerable people who will never be picked up in surveys and will continue to be a cause of concern to those who genuinely care about the issue.

I am not entirely sure that local authorities will rush to accept the responsibility proposed in new clause 1. I think there should be at least an arm's-length arrangement directing resources and priorities both to and from Government, and I think it would be lost if the RSU were wound up.

As for new clause 2, I congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on his robust defence of his position. There are three prisons in his constituency, and no one should minimise the problems that that involves. Families do move near to prisons like those and like the one in my constituency, which cater predominantly for long-stay prisoners—very long-stay prisoners, in some instances—to make visiting easier. The Isle of Wight is notoriously unpopular with families because of the logistics of travelling to and from the island at all times of the year. I feel that the hon. Gentleman was right to flag up the issue, but I think he has failed to address a fundamental flaw in his proposal.

The hon. Gentleman said that we should not allow prisoners the flexibility to identify the Isle of Wight as a good place in which to live. He suggested, however, that the housing needs of a fruit picker who went to the Isle of Wight on a seasonal basis and then decided one year to stay would be readily recognised. He failed to deal with the many other criteria that would have to be met. The prisoner would probably have fallen into the category of those in the place in question and needing support.

As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) suggested in a forceful and well-thought-out contribution, this is not just about homelessness and providing a safe shelter. It is about the raft of resource support that, in some instances, will be needed over a protracted period to give people a real opportunity to return to the community and be useful citizens.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me at least some support on the question of prisoners. As has been pointed out, a female could well come to the constituency, work as a fruit picker for six months, become pregnant during that time and later present herself as vulnerable because she was pregnant—and later still, perhaps, because she had a young child. I do not deny her vulnerability, but I deny the responsibility.

Mr. Hancock: We could nitpick, but I think the hon. Gentleman failed to observe the fundamental flaw in the new clause allowing the Isle of Wight ultimately to decide to whom to give housing priority. It is no different for my local authority, but I believe that prisons present a particular issue.

There is a prison in my constituency. I do not believe that, in the 30-odd years for which I have represented Portsmouth in one way or another, too many prisoners have decided to come out of Kingston and settle in Portsmouth. It is not that type of prison; it is a lifers' prison. Many prisoners have decided to go back to wherever they lived before their conviction. Indeed, I cannot think of a single instance in which a prisoner has left Kingston and then sought housing from the local authority.

6 pm

I have a problem with new clause 2. A constituent of mine was living in a Portsmouth city council property on an estate in another local authority area. He fire-bombed the property and was arrested and put into prison in Winchester. He was convicted after six months on remand and sent to prison from Winchester, yet his family links are in Portsmouth. One wonders where, under new clause 2, he would seek to be rehoused. My constituent has returned to Portsmouth to live with his mother, with whom he has the only stable relationship that he has had in his life. His return poses problems because of the crime for which he was sent to prison, and his neighbours are naturally concerned. However, the situation will hopefully be resolved soon. New clause 2 would cause problems in such cases.

[Mr. Hancock]

New clause 3 entirely misses the point of what we are trying to achieve, and it would hinder the working of the Bill, which hon. Members feel goes some way towards addressing homelessness issues. It would cause more problems than Conservative Members hope it would resolve. It would create so many difficulties for those who will make judgments in these cases that in the end very little would happen.

All three new clauses would cause homelessness, or rough sleeping, to increase. They would put too many obstacles in the way of resolving cases, and I hope that Conservative Members realise that the part of the Bill that they are trying to amend has substantially changed for the better. People who are sleeping rough need three things: they need support, they need somewhere to live and they need to be got off the street. All three can, or at least should, be achieved pretty quickly if the Bill is passed. The new clauses would hinder that process.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: Before I entered the House, I worked with the homeless for three years, doing my utmost to run an appeal to finance the creation of a hostel for homeless women in London. Although I do not think that I need to declare that as an interest, it has certainly given me some experience of the subject and a general interest in it. I was very grateful then for the help of my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry), who at that time represented High Peak. In his speech, he displayed a great deal of knowledge about homelessness and showed how complicated the subject is.

My hon. Friend spoke about the rough sleepers initiative, as it was in those days, which I believe was set up in 1993 or 1994. The RSI was useful and provided a great deal of money for the project on which I was working. However, I agree with my Front-Bench colleagues that the time has come to consider whether the money spent on the rough sleepers unit could be better used. I want to touch on issues that have been mentioned already, without detaining the House too long.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) talked about two issues that particularly interest me. The first is the need to understand why people become homeless or, more particularly, why they might sleep on the streets, and the second is duplication. We have considered those matters in some detail, but they deserve further scrutiny.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) spoke about the reasons for homelessness and correctly pointed out that the solution is not simply a matter of finding someone a house; in fact, that can add to the problem. We are familiar with the reasons for homelessness. Two of the most significant are family breakdown and violence in the home. My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden pointed out that young people may become homeless because they are not treated properly at home or in a local authority home. That is a tremendous problem, and homeless young people often lie about their age to get into hostels because some hostels will not take people below a certain age.

As well as everybody in the House understanding why people become homeless, it is essential that homeless people understand the reasons for their situation and what they have to do to change it. However, people have to work with them to get them to that point. When I was working with the homeless years ago, I heard some very stupid politicians on the television saying that people on the streets, if asked, would say that they did not want to go into a hostel or a home, and preferred to be on the streets. That is wrong, and it misses the point.

Of course, people who have escaped from a terrible family background, from violence or sexual abuse will find it a relief no longer to be in that situation. It frightens them to think about getting another home, where they will be faced with bills and huge responsibilities, and where they might end up in a situation as bad as the one from which they escaped. However, that does not mean that they prefer to sleep on the streets; it means that the challenges that they face are too much for them, and that can be misinterpreted as a desire to remain on the streets. Those people need help.

To provide that help, fully to resettle people and to continue to work with them once they have been resettled, takes a great deal of money and expertise. When I was working with the homeless, both those things were missing. We needed more resources to try to get people into hostels and then to get them into their own home. Above all, we needed more understanding of the problem and the expertise to deal with it. I want more resources to be devoted to finding people with that expertise who can help people move from the streets into temporary accommodation and then into their own place. Even then, they will still need help if the resettlement is to be a success and they are not to become homeless again.

I endorse the point about duplication made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold. When I was working with the homeless, there was duplication, but there were also gaps in provision. There was duplication in that there were many agencies involved in homelessness, including the Housing Corporation, local authorities, housing associations, the RSI and charities. Although they overlapped, however, huge gaps were evident in an understanding of the issue and in the will to help the homeless. If the Bill can fill in those gaps and avoid duplication, we will have achieved a great deal.

I worked in London for three years before I was elected in 1997, and when I went to Tewkesbury people gently reminded me that there was homelessness in Gloucestershire. It then struck me that the RSU, and the earlier initiative, had created a two-tier system. I readily acknowledge that the initiative was quite successful in London, but in other areas of the country it was not in place, or it was not successful, and it fell to the local authorities to do something about homelessness.

That brings me back to the central point made by my hon. Friend, which is that there must be a better way of making progress than by continuing with the present situation.

I shall not speak to new clauses 2 and 3 as they have already been dealt with competently and eloquently by my hon. Friends. They are not saying that people with the problems that have been described should not be helped or housed, but that there are many people who have not been caught up in problems with alcohol, crime and drugs,

and whose families are intact, and that those people also have rights. I think that my hon. Friends were making those points when speaking to new clauses 2 and 3.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I should like to do the exact opposite of my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) by speaking only to new clauses 2 and 3.

The Bill's provisions are positive and generally acceptable, and I believe that the Government have introduced the Bill with the best of intentions. When meeting housing needs, it is definitely a step forward to increase the number of categories of those who have priority. It would be difficult for anyone to try to defend excluding from those categories someone who is suffering from domestic violence, and I very much support the inclusion of such people in the priority categories.

I have some concerns about the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). I feel strongly that it is very difficult to defend allocating a house to a prisoner when, as in the previous examples, that house might be appropriate for a young family, perhaps living with parents, who have been waiting on the housing register. Although the Minister seemed to say that such concerns are, in a word, nonsense, many housing officers across the country are extremely nervous about how they can defend such a situation if the Bill is enacted.

The concern is particularly pertinent in London, where more than 75 per cent. of current vacancies are being allocated to those who are in one of the housing needs categories. Some people believe that, with the extension of the categories that the Bill is proposing, that figure could well increase to 100 per cent. and even beyond. How will local authorities deal with a situation in which they have more homeless people to house than they have houses to allocate?

New clause 3 is particularly pertinent to me as I represent Skegness, which as many hon. Members know is a holiday resort where many people—particularly those from the east midlands who have spent holidays there—wish to live eventually. Coming from the east midlands myself, I can understand that desire. However, as there is a definitive perception that the people of Skegness are being overridden by outsiders coming into the area, I fully support new clause 3, which establishes a 12-month residency as a very important element in dealing with housing needs. Those who live in Skegness or in other parts of the United Kingdom are not getting the housing that they need without such a qualification, and that situation is a terrible indictment of the current arrangements. I therefore support new clause 3, to change one small part of the Bill that I do not agree with.

What are the Minister's views on transferring responsibility for 16 and 17-year-olds who become homeless? As my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden said, one of the major deficiencies of our care system is that our public services do not pick up those who leave the system at 16. However, the Bill seems merely to propose transferring the problem, as a matter of compulsion, from local authority social services departments to local authority housing departments. I should think, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said, that we have to allow each local authority to exercise discretion in this very sensitive area. There is absolutely no doubt that many of those 16 and 17-year-olds would be dealt with better by social services than they would by the perhaps less sensitive and less understanding housing departments.

6.15 pm

I am concerned also that the Bill does not seem to distinguish between the able-bodied, the disabled and those who have mental health problems when people are thrown out of their home by their parents or by others with whom they are living. There seems to be a clear distinction between those two or three groups of people. Will housing authorities deal with all those groups in the same manner, or will they make special allocations to the disabled and those with mental health problems?

The Bill does not deal with the fundamental problems of homelessness. We have to strengthen housing advice centres and provide alternatives to social landlords.

Mr. Hancock: I question the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for new clause 3. Perhaps he will consider the case of a young person who leaves Skegness to join the Royal Navy but leaves it after five years because it is not suitable for him. Although his last known address was one of Her Majesty's ships or a shore base in the Greater Portsmouth area, his home had been in Skegness. To whom should he look for housing, rather than sleeping rough somewhere?

Mr. Simmonds: I do not think that new clause 3 would preclude a solution to that problem.

Mr. Hancock: What is the solution?

Mr. Simmonds: As my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold said, the local authority should have discretion to address specific issues as they arise, such as the issue that the hon. Gentleman has just raised.

Mr. Hancock: Which local authority?

Mr. Simmonds: It should be the local authority that is responsible for housing in that particular geographical area; in Skegness, it would be East Lindsey district council.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. Gentleman says that the local authority is responsible, but who determines the responsible local authority? Does the young person in my example have the right to choose between the Portsmouth, Plymouth or Skegness local authority? Who decides?

Mr. Simmonds: I am not quite sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making. The responsible local authority would be the one in which the social housing is located.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Does my hon. Friend accept that the local authority that must make the decision is the one to which the applicant applies? The notional applicant about whom the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) has spoken is only 23. Unless he is most unfortunate, it is not likely that his family has disappeared entirely from the scene in Skegness.

Mr. Simmonds: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention, and agree with him that responsibility to

[Mr. Simmonds]

decide must rest with the local authority to which the individual applies. The point made by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) certainly does not undermine my support of new clause 3.

Mr. Hancock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Simmonds: No; I have given way many times already to the hon. Gentleman. I should like to speak to later groups of amendments.

Ms Keeble: Our consideration of the Bill is similar to "Groundhog Day", as many of the issues have been debated already, both in earlier debates on this Bill and in our debates on the Bill's earlier incarnation. I therefore do not plan to revisit all the detailed regulations and issues about which I spoke earlier.

I think that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) will find that many of the issues that he raised, such as the right of temporary workers to accommodation, were addressed in my earlier speech and in current regulations; he will find the answers to his questions if he reads the regulations carefully. I also think that he will have realised from the comments that have been directed to him by various hon. Members that most of the issues that he raised about those groups were spurious.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) said that rough sleepers come in all shapes and sizes. One of the unit's skills has been to gain a better understanding of who is likely to be at risk of ending up on the streets, which previously was not considered consistently.

The hon. Members for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) and for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) said that we have had similar schemes before, but we have not. We have not had such rigorous studies of those who sleep on our streets or live in a street culture. That will go a long way towards dealing with the problems of rough sleeping and homelessness.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) was right to say that new clauses 2 and 3 would aggravate the situation for some of those affected. We are consulting on the future role of the rough sleepers unit and its work. I do not wish to preclude anything in that consultation by commenting on her points about London.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We have had a long debate on the future of the rough sleepers unit, but the Minister has been unable to say anything about the Government's thinking on what might happen at the end of the consultation period. Will the unit linger on? Will the Mayor take responsibility, or will local authorities do so? The Minister has failed to give us any idea.

Ms Keeble: The hon. Gentleman keeps asking the same question. We are consulting and looking at the options. It is more sensible to find a solution that works rather than one that is time limited. We need an understanding of the valuable work of the unit in getting people off the streets and into accommodation. We must also continue to make sure that the problem does not arise in the first place. We expect to make a statement later this autumn. That provides the hon. Gentleman with as much information as there is about how we will move forward.

It has been recognised that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight has three prisons in his constituency and that he is concerned with particular issues. It would be quite wrong, however, to have a strategy for homelessness based on the experience of one constituency. He also referred to sex offenders. He will find that the arrangements for housing them, and the work with ex-sex offenders, are well catered for in regulations.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I am not asking for the whole homelessness policy to be based on the experiences of the Isle of Wight. I am merely asking that the Government take account of those experiences to the same extent as they have taken account of the experiences of the constituency of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), for example. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) has pointed out, the policy appears to be based on metropolitan areas rather than rural and coastal areas.

Ms Keeble: I do not agree. The hon. Gentleman has extracted one category of people and talked about them, whereas the Bill and the regulations that will accompany it, which will be brought back to the House for further discussion, deal with a much wider range of people. I want to go through the priority list to show that the group about whom he has talked is one of a number.

Under the Bill, housing authorities have a duty to house unintentionally homeless people in priority need. Only certain specified groups have a priority need, so it is not a question of someone wanting to live in a particular area who does not have a place to live. Families that include dependent children or a pregnant woman, and people who are vulnerable because of old age, illness, disability or other special reason are included. If a main duty is owed, the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant for at least two years.

The order, which has been discussed, extends protection to several new groups: 16 and 17-year-olds; 18 to 21-year-olds who were formerly in care; other vulnerable care leavers; those who are vulnerable as a result of institutionalisation, serving in the armed forces or being in custody; and those who are vulnerable as a result of fleeing harassment or domestic violence. That is a long list; it is not simply a question of ex-offenders.

The common strand of vulnerability—not whether someone has been in prison—is what local housing authorities need to consider when assessing whether someone is a priority need for accommodation. Not all ex-offenders will be vulnerable. The order will emphasise the importance of authorities assessing whether ex-offenders are vulnerable as a result of a period in prison.

Mr. Turner: Is it not evident that I have not tried to amend the whole of the list, but have concentrated on one or two specific groups on it, who—in one case at least—do not have long-standing connections with the constituency? Prisoners can be dealt with under the new clause by their place of origin, not their place of release.

Ms Keeble: I have dealt with the issues of the period of residence and of qualification. However, the hon.

Gentleman needs to consider the fact that housing is a key factor in the successful reintegration of ex-offenders and reducing the rates of reoffending. Work is continuing across Departments to make sure that we get better resettlement outcomes for all ex-offenders. They are just one group. In addition, the priority is short-term accommodation and not the allocation of a permanent home. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that a single ex-offender who is vulnerable will not be looking for the same type of accommodation as a family. The hon. Gentleman's attempt to play off one category of homeless person against another is not only divisive, but completely unfounded.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister has been very generous in this long debate. She has given the House the interesting information that the various groups covered by the Bill will be determined according to their vulnerability. Ex-offenders could be particularly vulnerable. Will she say more about how that vulnerability will be determined, and by whom? Will it be determined by the prison authorities or the probation authorities? Will the local authority have a role? It seems critical that the local authority has a role—after all, it must provide the temporary accommodation.

Ms Keeble *rose—*

Mr. Hancock: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Keeble: I will take the hon. Gentleman's intervention first, and then deal with both together.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The Minister must deal with one intervention at a time. The next one may not be on the same subject.

Ms Keeble: I apologise.

Decisions on allocation are made by local authorities. Guidance will be issued, in the light of which they will have to take their decisions.

Mr. Hancock: There are a number of issues concerning the long list that the Minister read out. Is there a time limit for local authorities to accept some of the groups? Will some of those she mentioned—ex-service men or persons coming out of care—be deemed to fall within such a time limit? Will guidance be issued to local authorities on the way in which they must choose, or not choose, to interpret the order?

Ms Keeble: The order will come back to the House and there will be guidance on how it is to be implemented. A number of those groups would not be looking for the same type of accommodation as others.

We have dealt with many of the detailed issues concerning who would qualify for housing under the new arrangements and how they would be dealt with. I regret some of the language that has been used in this debate. I recognise that the hon. Members for Wealden and for Tewkesbury have practical experience in the matter, and I pay tribute to them for that, but let me emphasise to the hon. Members for Isle of Wight and for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) that women do not get pregnant just to get council properties. We need to move away from such language about women and about outsiders coming into a place looking for accommodation.

6.30 pm

Mr. Simmonds: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Keeble: No, I want to carry on.

The legislation provides a good balance of compassion for people who need housing, and pragmatic rules that a council can apply. The regulations take into account the need to provide housing for vulnerable people, as well as issues of sustainable housing and communities. Many of the proposals in the Bill will be supplemented by other Government programmes. I am thinking in particular of the supporting people programme, which will further strengthen the provision for some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

I welcome the support given by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock). I urge the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton–Brown) to withdraw the motion. The new clauses are not helpful. They are divisive and could damage some of the very good work done in introducing the Bill.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: This has been a very useful debate. It has brought out the fact that the fall in the number of rough sleepers is one of the very few bright lights in the current homelessness scene. It has also become apparent that there is a willingness among both Government and Opposition Members to see the rough sleepers unit move on.

I was especially interested in what the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said. She initially argued that the unit had done a good job—indeed, it has—and should be allowed to continue in its present role. She then suddenly realised that what she was saying was at odds with her party's policy and decided that perhaps it should go to the Mayor instead. In saying that, she implicitly acknowledged that the present policy is not perfect. She said that the main burden in London is shouldered by four boroughs. Surely, then, those four boroughs are the ones that really know what the problems are, and that exemplifies the fact that the ideal solution would be for local authorities to be given the responsibility.

Glenda Jackson: The hon. Gentleman has a very selective power of hearing and of retaining what he has heard. The point that I was trying to make was that at present in London—this could continue in the future—the main burden is being borne by four boroughs at the centre. I argue that the excellent work done by the rough sleepers unit should perhaps be handed on to the Mayor and the GLA because they are best placed to create a strategy that incorporates all the effective work that is being done in London. Outer-London boroughs, which are very happy to shunt their rough sleepers into the centre of the city, could no longer pretend that they do not have a rough sleeping problem.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: With respect, the hon. Lady is trying to dance on the head of a pin. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) said, it was our party's initiative that spawned the rough sleepers unit and

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

began to reduce the problem, but it has become apparent to Members that it needs to be tackled further. There is a serious problem of drugs that needs to be tackled by all the partners involved, among which the local authority is one of the most proactive, especially with local drug action teams.

We need to deal with problems associated with mental health, again involving all the relevant agencies. There is a particular need for short-stay acute beds, for example—day hospital beds are in short supply—and we all agree that it is unacceptable for people with mental health problems simply to be swept out on to the streets to become rough sleepers.

Mr. Hendry: Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment at our not having the result of the ministerial review of the RSU before we conclude our discussions on the Bill? Is it not likely that the report is already sitting on Ministers' desks, given that the Minister has said that it will be published in the autumn, which does not leave all that many days or weeks? Would not it have been rather more helpful for our deliberations on the Bill if we had been able to read and take account of it in advance?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Yes. I am going to be quite critical here. It is somewhat typical of this Government to ignore the democratic voice of Parliament and announce a policy some little while after we have had a debate here. It would have been helpful, even if she had not finally made up her mind, if the Minister had at least given us some parameters of her thinking. If she had said, "I'm fairly certain that the rough sleepers unit is going to continue", we would all have understood where the Government were coming from, and if she had said, "We're looking closely at whether it should be devolved to local authorities" or regional assemblies, or the Mayor—or whatever—we would have had some sympathy with that, but to respond to a serious proposal from the Opposition without giving us any pointers as to where the consultation is leading is somewhat unhelpful.

If the Minister would like to intervene and give us some pointers, I would be only too delighted to give way. The fact that she does not want to intervene tells me that she does not want to give us any information. That is why we have to be critical.

I took on board very carefully the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury. It is always interesting to find out something new about one's colleagues. I was especially interested to hear that he had run a hostel. This House benefits greatly from such specialist experience and knowledge gained outside. I noted in particular his comments about young people who are homeless as a result of violent or sexual abuse in the home. That is very important. Again, as with so many aspects of the problem of rough sleeping, it is the local authority that has the resources and the contacts to deal with the problems.

I sincerely believe that, in time, as the rough sleepers unit starts to deal with fewer people, we should move on and think of how best to deal with the problems.

Everyone would recognise that, as is often the case with amendments and new clauses tabled by individual hon. Members, the wording of new clauses 2 and 3 may not have been perfect, but the sentiment behind them has found accord throughout the House. No one could deny that the local authority of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight faces a significant problem because of the three prisons that it contains. Rather towards the end of the debate, the Government helpfully informed us that they are introducing secondary legislation to deal with institutionalised offenders requiring advice on homelessness and temporary housing.

I assume that today's announcement is what was trailed in the Green Paper, "The Way Forward for Housing", as long ago as December 2000. I see the Minister nodding. If that is not what was trailed in the document and more such regulations are to be introduced, perhaps she could intervene now and make that clear.

Ms Keeble: I have made it clear.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I assume that there will not be more regulation on that subject, then, apart from the order that has been announced today.

It is helpful that we have been told that people with an institutionalised background will be considered under the order, especially on the grounds of vulnerability, as will other groups named in the order. However, the Minister's inability to answer my question about how vulnerability will be determined is not helpful. That seems a key part of the order, and if the Minister cannot tell us how it will operate, that makes things difficult.

If the Government have not yet decided what will happen, may I suggest that a partnership approach should be taken? As I said in my intervention on the Minister, the prison authorities would have to be involved, because they would know about the detailed behaviour of the prisoner while he was in prison. The probation officer is also likely to be involved, because that person will have supervised the prisoner's early release. The local authority should be involved, too, because it is likely to have to give advice and provide temporary housing if the prisoner asks for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight must speak for himself, but I suspect that if such a partnership approach were adopted, it would allay his fears considerably.

Mr. Andrew Turner *indicated assent.*

Ms Keeble: The hon. Member for Cotswold was a party to the previous discussions. In conjunction with the Bill, an order to extend the categories of homeless households is being introduced and is being consulted on now. That is not a new announcement; the order was discussed repeatedly while we were debating the Bill. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear that in mind.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: That is indeed helpful, but, as I say, we would like to know a little more detail about how the order will operate. I do not wish to be churlish: the Minister has been helpful, my hon. Friend's amendment has been worth while, and I hope that the debate will reassure him and his local authority.

I do not pretend that the wording of new clause 3 is perfect. As I understand it, its import would be to ensure that people with a local connection or background should not always be bypassed in the queue by other groups that

the Government deem to be a housing priority, especially under the order. I hope that the Minister will consider that subject carefully, because I am not sure that it is covered in the Bill. My hon. Friend was therefore right to table his new clause to probe and encourage the debate that we have had this evening.

We have not had any of the answers that we want about the rough sleepers unit, which will be the subject of a debate on another occasion, but we have probed the Government as far and as hard as we can today, and we have had some useful debates and answers on new clauses 2 and 3. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 4

ACCOMMODATION DURING REVIEWS OF HOMELESSNESS DECISIONS

'After section 202 of the 1996 Act (right to request review of decision) there is inserted—

"202A Section 202: reviews

(1) This section applies where an applicant has the right to request a review of a decision by an authority or authorities under section 202.

(2) If the applicant is dissatisfied with a decision by the authority—

(a) not to exercise their power to continue to secure that accommodation is available for the applicant's occupation pending a review under section 188;

(b) in a case where the authority have secured that accommodation is available for the applicant's occupation under section 190(2)(a), to cease to secure that accommodation is so available before the time available to the applicant to bring an appeal under section 204 of the Act has expired (or, if sooner, the day on which an appeal is brought by the applicant);

(c) not to exercise their power to secure that accommodation is available for the applicant's occupation pending a review, under section 200(5) or;

(d) to exercise their power under either section 188 or section 200(5) for a limited time ending before the time available to the applicant to bring an appeal under section 204 of the Act has expired (or, if sooner, the day on which an appeal is brought by the applicant), or, in either case, to cease exercising their power before that time,

he may appeal to the county court against the decision.

(3) An appeal under this section may not be brought after the time available to the applicant to bring an appeal under section 204 of the Act has expired (or, if sooner, after the date on which an appeal is brought).

(4) On an appeal under this section the court—

(a) may order the authority to secure that accommodation is available for the applicant's occupation until the time available to the applicant to bring an appeal under section 204 of the Act has expired (or such earlier time as the court may specify); and

(b) shall confirm or quash the decision appealed against,

and in considering whether to confirm or quash the decision the court shall apply the principles applied by the High Court on an application for judicial review.

(5) If the court quashes the decision it may order the authority to exercise any of the powers mentioned in subsection (2) above in the applicant's case for such period as may be specified in the order.

(6) An order under subsection (5)—

(a) may only be made if the court is satisfied that failure to exercise the power in accordance with the order would substantially prejudice the applicant's ability to pursue the review against the authority's decision in his case;

(b) may not specify any period ending after the time available to the applicant to bring an appeal under section 204 of the Act has expired.".'.—*[Mr. Don Foster.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Don Foster: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 22.

Amendment No. 21, in schedule 1, page 15, line 23, at end insert—

'16A. For section 210(1) of the 1996 Act (suitability of accommodation) there is substituted—

"In determining for the purposes of this Part whether accommodation is suitable for a person, accommodation shall only be regarded as suitable if—

(a) it is not overcrowded (within the meaning of section 324 of the Housing Act 1985);

(b) it is fit for the number of occupants and it has adequate means of escape from fire (within the meaning of sections 352 and 365 of the Housing Act 1985); and

(c) in the view of the authority it is fit for human habitation (within the meaning of section 604 of the Housing Act 1985).".'.

Mr. Foster: We have had some fairly lengthy debates on the first three new clauses, so you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and, no doubt, the rest of the House—will be pleased to know that notwithstanding the significant enthusiasm in the House for the Bill, hon. Members from all parties have been fairly restrained in the number of issues that they have sought to raise by tabling amendments for us to deliberate on this evening.

I reiterate what my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) said earlier—that the Liberal Democrats are delighted that our deliberations on the Bill are coming to an end, and that it will shortly pass to another place. Although we wish to make some minor amendments to it, we wish it good speed there, so that it can be implemented as soon as possible.

6.45 pm

As I said, there are several minor areas in which we seek to make improvements. That is why we tabled new clause 4 and amendment No. 21. I am delighted to see Government amendment No. 22 included in this string of amendments, and were there to be a vote on it—I am sure that there will not be—we would support the Government.

New clause 4 and amendment No. 21 deal with rather different issues, so I shall discuss each in turn. New clause 4 concerns people's right to access to justice at all stages of the operation of the homelessness legislation. Unfortunately, that is a complex body of legislation, which includes many different stages in the consideration of a request for accommodation by a homeless person.

At the later stages of the process, the local authority can determine somebody's eligibility for assistance, and at an even later stage, it can determine what priority

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

[Mr. Foster]

should be given to such a person when his or her eligibility has been acknowledged. The Government have already accepted that at those two later stages it is right and proper that the applicant should be able to appeal against a decision that goes against him or her. They have also decided that during the appeal process an applicant should be able to seek to obtain accommodation. If the local authority fails to provide accommodation, the applicant can appeal against that judgment, too.

During our deliberations on that complex issue, the Government accepted that the right court to determine whether someone should have accommodation during the appeal process was not the High Court, because that involves a remote judicial process, but the county court. When they accepted the content of some of the amendments moved by Liberal Democrats, although they slightly amended it, the Government argued that it was appropriate that a local court with knowledge of the area should make the decision.

My new clause suggests that the same procedure should apply at another stage of the consideration of a homeless person's application. In the very early stages, someone has to go to a local authority and seek to be treated as homeless. That precedes all detailed discussions about eligibility and levels of priority.

In section 202 of the Housing Act 1996, there already exists a provision to enable someone whom the local authority is not prepared to treat as homeless to ask for an internal review of that decision. That is not affected by the Bill. Also within existing legislation, the local authority has the power to offer accommodation to such a person pending the outcome of the internal review. Unfortunately, all the research shows that local authorities rarely make use of that power, and many people need to fight a battle for a review while remaining homeless. Nevertheless, a right to seek assistance remains and to have a judicial review of the decision by the local authority not to provide accommodation.

The Government have accepted that, at later stages in the procedure, judicial review in the High Court is an inappropriate procedure. They have accepted that a county court is better placed to make the decision. Therefore, new clause 4 would substitute the county court procedure for the High Court procedure.

It has been argued that the change would mean a significant increase in the number of internal reviews required. Indeed, the Local Government Association misunderstood the new clause and thought it meant that anybody who requested an internal review would be given an automatic entitlement to accommodation. That is wrong. All that would happen is that the individual would have the right to apply to the county court for consideration of the decision not to provide accommodation. The individual would not be provided with accommodation during that time.

It has also been suggested that the change from High Court to county court—some would argue that the county court might be more sympathetic to homeless people—would make it more likely that the decision would go in favour of the homeless person and require the local authority to provide accommodation. That, too, is incorrect, because the county court would be required to use exactly the same test as the High Court.

The new clause is not a charter to ensure that any homeless person will be able to prolong their case in an attempt to obtain accommodation. It merely seeks to change the location of consideration of the issue from the High Court to the county court. The only change would be that justice would be easier to access by the homeless person, and those who have argued differently—such as the LGA—have misunderstood the purpose of the new clause.

Amendment No. 21 is about the suitability of accommodation, especially temporary. The current requirement is that accommodation provided for homeless households should be suitable. However, local authorities must have regard only for housing standards, overcrowding and physical conditions, which does not mean that accommodation has to meet those standards. Therefore, homeless households are often placed in temporary accommodation that is overcrowded or unfit, a fact that the Government acknowledge in several documents, including the most recent, "Homelessness Strategies: A Good Practice Guide". I am delighted that that document could be rushed out in time for our debate today. In it, the Government state, in reference to the most usual form of temporary accommodation, that bed-and-breakfast hotels

"are almost always the worst option for temporary accommodation, offering the poorest conditions at the highest cost."

Real concern is felt about the quality and suitability of accommodation and the amendment seeks to make it a requirement that such accommodation meets some agreed standards on overcrowding, availability of escape routes and being fit for human habitation within the meaning of existing legislation.

At the end of March 2001, some 75,000 households were in temporary accommodation. In areas with high demand for housing, homeless people can spend many months in so-called temporary accommodation before being offered long-term housing. As a result of the inadequacy of current legislation, including the Bill, many households may continue to be forced to endure poor housing conditions for long periods without a requirement that temporary accommodation meets specific standards.

No doubt the Government will say in response that they have recently established the bed-and-breakfast unit, and that is welcome. The Government may also say that moves to establish standards now are premature, because we will soon have legislation about the licensing of houses in multiple occupation. The Government's response may be to acknowledge the problem and say that the solution may be reached via other mechanisms—the work of the bed-and-breakfast unit and the HMO legislation. I hope that if the Government are not prepared to accept amendment No. 21, they will give the House a clear understanding of how they will, in the near future, end a situation in which so many people live in substandard accommodation. I have raised two separate issues and I look forward with considerable interest to the Government's response.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) will recall that in Committee on 10 July we had a long canter around the course discussing which part of the eligibility and suitability regulations should be capable of being referred to the High Court under judicial review and which part should be capable of being referred to the county court. I have read the reply to that debate

from the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and I am now even more sure that the hon. Gentleman was right to raise the issue. Considerable confusion exists about which judicial route will be available for which part of the priority housing system.

Eligibility for and suitability of housing are both matters that should be determined by the county court. There is an element of overlap and the same court may be asked to adjudicate on both issues, which would streamline the process for the local authority and for the homeless person who is appealing its decision. We all know that the judicial review is a slow, cumbersome and expensive procedure and the homeless person has first to apply to the High Court to be granted leave to seek judicial review. The poor homeless person has to employ a lawyer, possibly without the benefit of legal aid, to prepare a case for his eligibility to apply for judicial review and a High Court judge has to give judgment on that. Some months later, the judicial review itself is carried out. Given the often charged situations in which homeless people live, that is most unsatisfactory.

Mr. Don Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the clear support that he is giving to the new clause. However, so that he does not mislead the House, I remind him that the small issue covered by the new clause is whether a local authority is right to deny accommodation to a homeless person whose local authority has deemed that it is unwilling even to treat that person as homeless. It is a small issue, although vital for the individual, and that is why it is appropriate that the county court should make the decision.

7 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I entirely accept what the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) says. I think that my simpler language was compatible with his more detailed legal language. My point about eligibility being subject to judicial review covers the point that he has just made. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions can give the House a more cogent reason for having two judicial routes than he gave in Committee on 10 July.

We all have a great deal of sympathy for people in housing that is not suitable within the meaning of the legislation because it is overcrowded or does not meet health and safety requirements. However, I think that it will be difficult for authorities to meet the exacting requirements of amendment No. 21 when it comes to those who are temporarily housed. So although I have considerable sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's proposal and believe that he is right to bring the matter to the attention of the House, I suspect that in practical terms it is not realistic. We await the Minister's response with interest.

Dr. Whitehead: We are condemned for ever to repeat the observation that we appear to be taking part in the film "Groundhog Day". If we were, this would be the third or fourth attempt of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) to secure the undying love of Andie MacDowell.

New clause 4 would give the county court powers to intervene in a decision by a housing authority not to continue to accommodate a homeless applicant pending a review by the authority of its decision on the homelessness case. Those powers would be similar to those in clause 11 which give the county court the power to intervene in a decision by a housing authority not to exercise its discretion to continue to accommodate an applicant pending an appeal to the county court about the homelessness decision under section 204 of the Housing Act 1996.

It might be helpful to remind right hon. and hon. Members of the two procedural stages open to an applicant who is dissatisfied with the housing authority's decision on his homelessness case. Indeed, the hon. Member for Bath has mentioned this distinction. First, under section 202 of the 1996 Act, he has the right to request the authority to review its decision. Secondly, if he is dissatisfied with the authority's decision on review, or a decision is not provided within the time allowed, the applicant has the right, under section 204, to appeal to the county court on a point of law.

Under current provisions, applicants who wish to challenge an authority's decision not to continue to accommodate pending either a review by the authority or an appeal to the county court must seek judicial review of that decision in the High Court. This provides an avenue of redress for applicants in the event that an authority does not make a proper and reasonable decision—for example, by failing to give due consideration to all the circumstances or failing to consider them at all. It is appropriate that the discretion whether applicants should continue to be accommodated once the authority has completed its detailed inquiries and satisfied itself of the facts of the case should rest with the authority.

Applying to the courts to overturn an authority's decision should be a matter of last resort and should be considered only when it is clear that the authority has not made a proper decision. The nub of the hon. Gentleman's argument is why we have made provision in clause 11 to give the county court the power to intervene when an authority decides not to continue to accommodate an applicant pending an appeal to the county court about the decision on the homelessness case.

During the Report stage of the Homes Bill, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), who was then Minister for Housing and Planning, gave a commitment to the House to consider whether there was a case for giving the county court power to require an authority to accommodate an applicant pending an appeal to that court. That was in response to a new clause moved by the hon. Member for Bath—one of the first of his postcards—which included such provision.

Following that commitment, my right hon. Friend duly consulted colleagues at the Lord Chancellor's Department and resolved that there would be merit in providing such a power. However, that merit concerned practical considerations. While it remained appropriate in principle for legal challenge of a local authority's decision not to exercise its discretionary power to continue to accommodate to be subject to judicial review in the High Court, there is a persuasive administrative and practical argument for such decisions to be considered in the county court when that court is already considering the substantive decision about the homelessness case on appeal under section 204 of the 1996 Act. In short, it does

[Dr. Whitehead]

not make administrative sense for two different courts to consider different decisions about the same homelessness case at the same time.

The Homes Bill fell when the election was called, but a suitable provision—clause 11—was included in the Homelessness Bill when it was introduced shortly after the election. Meanwhile, the principle of judicial review by the High Court remains valid when applicants wish to challenge an authority's decision not to continue to accommodate pending a review by the authority of the homelessness decision.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister ponder on the illogicality of his remarks? A decision against an authority's decision to continue to house, which is the most important decision faced by a homeless person, has to go through the cumbersome procedure of judicial review. A decision on whether the person is eligible or suitable can go to the county court—a lower court—and can go on a point of law, which will undoubtedly have to go up through the system if it is a complex point of law. What the Minister has said is illogical. Why cannot the decision whether to continue to house be heard by the county court along with the other decisions?

Dr. Whitehead: We are discussing the two stages of the process—review and appeal. The administrative case for conflating the two during the course of an appeal was considered and has indeed been put into the legislation. If the hon. Gentleman can be patient, I will explain why the Government cannot accept the tempting notion of symmetry across the board and do not wish to have a county court course of appeal when a review has taken place.

It is interesting that, during the passage of the Homes Bill, the hon. Member for Bath did not propose a power for the county court to intervene in local authority decisions at the review stage but only at the appeal stage. I put it to him that that might relate more to the collection of postcards than to anything else.

The homelessness legislation makes clear distinctions between those who have a priority need and those who do not, between those who have become homeless through no fault of their own and those who have brought homelessness upon themselves. It is simply not practical or reasonable to expect local housing authorities to arrange accommodation for everyone every time they have to find a new home.

Local authorities have an immediate duty to secure accommodation for new applicants where there is reason to believe that they are homeless and in priority need, until the authorities have had a chance to look into the circumstances and satisfy themselves whether there is homelessness, whether it was caused by the applicant, and whether there is priority need. It is right that authorities should have that immediate duty and that applicants should have the right to ask the authority to review any decision that goes against their interests—that they do not have priority need, for example, or became homeless intentionally. However, it is important that authorities should have the discretion to decide whether there is good reason to continue to accommodate applicants during a review, and that that discretionary power should not be undermined by the possibility of routine intervention by the courts. The question is whether there would be a danger of such intervention by a court on a routine, or fairly routine, basis if the present arrangements for review were changed.

It is important that that discretion should not be undermined by such intervention on a routine basis. I have mentioned that legal challenge to the authority's decision should be made only in exceptional circumstances, for example where the authority has failed to take account of all the circumstances or has acted unlawfully. The Court of Appeal has made it clear that the High Court should give permission for applications for judicial review of such decisions to be heard only where there appear to be exceptional circumstances. In the Government's view, that is the right policy and the right approach.

Mr. Don Foster: I entirely agree with the Minister that there should not be a system that allows people to intervene routinely. We need an appropriate filtering mechanism in whichever court is ultimately decided on. Will the Minister tell the House whether the filtering mechanism used by the High Court through the judicial review process is different from what would have to be used by the county court? If so, why is the legal opinion wrong that the London borough of Camden ex parte Mohammed is the standard procedure in either case?

Dr. Whitehead: I do not have that case to hand. The hon. Gentleman's point about the filtering mechanism is important and I was about to deal with it. If the Government give the county court a power to consider local authority decisions not to continue to accommodate, the county court judges might interpret that policy change as indicating that Parliament has had regard to the Court of Appeal view that applications to the court should be heard only in exceptional circumstances, and has decided that the jurisdiction should be given to a level of court which has no permission stage. In the absence of such a filtering process, there would be no certainty that county court judges would hear only those cases with exceptional circumstances. Although some people in Parliament think that the courts should have the opportunity to intervene in such local authority decisions, almost routinely, the Government are not among them.

The Government do not consider that the filtering process—as it has been referred to—is the same as between applications to the High Court and applications to the county court. There is, for example, no permission stage for the latter. If homeless applicants had a right to appeal to the county court about decisions not to continue to accommodate them pending a review, all such applications made in accordance with the proper procedure would have to be considered by the court. Shelter's experience, according to their briefing on the Bill, is that in most cases local authorities reverse their decision and agree to accommodate at the point the High Court gives permission for a case to proceed and grants an injunction requiring the authority to accommodate. That demonstrates just how effective the possibility of court intervention is. Most authorities will decide that it is not worth the cost of fighting the proceedings—regardless of the merits of the case. I am concerned that the possibility of intervention by the county court in a much larger number of cases would bring similar responses from local

authorities which will decide that the cost of continuing to accommodate is preferable to the legal costs of fighting the case.

For those reasons, the Government do not consider that the tempting case for symmetry is made. There are substantial differences between the High Court and the county court in the filtering mechanisms, so we cannot accept the new clause.

7.15 pm

On amendment No. 21 and the issue of housing standards, I am grateful to hon. Members for raising the matter. Of course it is true that overcrowding and poor standards are unacceptable, but it will take some time to address those deep-seated problems. Pressure on housing, especially in London and the south, is growing. Many households live in unacceptable conditions.

The Government have made a start in addressing the problems of poor quality housing stock and insufficient supply of affordable accommodation in some areas. We have, for example, doubled the Housing Corporation's budget for new affordable housing from 2001–02 to 2003–04—an extra £872 million. We have set a target over three years of 100,000 new or improved homes for low-cost rent or ownership. We have doubled the programme of affordable housing in small rural settlements, from 800 in 2000–01 to 1,600 in 2003–04. We have increased resources for local authority investment from £750 million in 1997–98 to £2.5 billion by 2003–04. Those increased resources include a new major repairs allowance of £1.6 billion from 2001–02, to encourage efficient management and proper investment in council housing.

Hon. Members will agree that, taken together, those measures will bring all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010—at least, that is the target. They will improve the supply of affordable housing in areas where it is most needed, and promote sustainable home ownership and a healthy private rented sector.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): On the point about costs being borne by local authorities, will my hon. Friend assure us that those costs will be closely monitored? The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has estimated that the costs will be £8 million. Many London boroughs have reason to believe that the costs will be far in excess of that. I fully welcome the provisions, but I beg my hon. Friend to realise that they need to be funded.

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend's point is well made. Those costs will be closely monitored. It is not intended that there should be arbitrary cost over-runs for no benefit. Certainly, the operation of the process will be closely considered and monitoring will continue. I take my hon. Friend's point. I am sure that she will agree that none of these things will happen overnight, even with our substantial programme of investment and new provision, but we are making progress and we know that more needs to be done.

The amendment would of course strengthen the duty on authorities, but that would not tackle the real problem. It would not increase the supply of suitable accommodation on the ground, and it would make no real contribution to the efforts being made physically to improve the standards of existing accommodation. Furthermore, there must be some concern that in the immediate term it could add to the difficulties that many local authorities in high demand areas are experiencing in securing sufficient accommodation to discharge their statutory obligations to homeless people. The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) made that point.

The issues of fitness and decent standards are important, and have been neglected by previous Administrations for far too long. They are real issues, but they must be addressed by devoting real resources to finding real solutions. That is what the Government are doing.

There is consensus that the housing fitness standard in section 604 of the Housing Act 1985 no longer reflects a modern understanding of the health and safety risks within dwellings. I trust that the hon. Member for Bath will hear this point with warmth and approbation. We are planning to replace the standard with a housing health and safety rating system, which will apply a modern, risk-based approach to assessing housing conditions. We have consulted widely on that proposal and we are currently carrying out further work to strengthen the system and ensure its robustness.

We intend that the housing health and safety rating system should apply to all dwellings and that it should underpin our proposed scheme for licensing houses in multiple occupation—a point raised by the hon. Gentleman. We have made a commitment to legislate on that proposed scheme.

We also see provisions to enable the selective licensing of private landlords in areas of low housing demand as being part of such legislation. Those measures, on which we are currently holding consultations, would give local authorities the power to tackle the problem of unscrupulous landlords who will not meet minimum standards of management.

All those reforms will secure better standards of accommodation, and we plan to legislate for them as soon as we have a suitable opportunity.

As right hon. and hon. Members will be aware, the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), has already given an undertaking to review the current overcrowding provisions, which are extremely outdated. As she said on another occasion, it is unacceptable that families in overcrowded accommodation should have to resort to such ingenious but desperate measures as converting airing cupboards into make-do bedrooms. At this stage, I cannot say what the outcome of the review will be, but I can give an assurance that the Government are determined to address poverty in all its manifestations and will take the necessary steps to do so.

On that basis, I ask the hon. Member for Bath to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment No. 22 is a technical Government amendment intended to clarify the right of a homeless applicant to request a review of the suitability of accommodation offered by a local authority. Clause 8(2) was drafted on the basis that, under current law as interpreted by the courts, section 202(1)(f) of the 1996 Act provides that homeless applicants can ask for a review of the authority's decision about the suitability of accommodation offered under part VI of the 1996 Act.

[Dr. Whitehead]

However, it has subsequently come to our attention that the Court of Appeal ruled that the right to seek a review of such a decision does not flow from section 202(1)(f), as accommodation offered under part VI is not accommodation offered as a discharge of any duty under part VII. The court ruled that, in effect, applicants can ask for a review of the suitability of a part VI offer by requesting a review of the authority's decision on what duty, if any, is owed them under section 193. That will include any decision that a section 193 duty is no longer owed because the applicant has refused a part VI offer which the local authority considers suitable. Under that ruling, the right to request a review in such a case currently flows from section 202(1)(b).

Government amendment No. 22 will clarify the position by explicitly providing that section 202(1)(f) gives applicants the right to request a review of the suitability of accommodation offered under part 6, as well as accommodation offered as a discharge of the section 193 duty. I commend the amendment to the House and trust that the hon. Member for Bath will withdraw new clause 4.

Mr. Don Foster: When the Minister said that he hoped we would withdraw our amendment, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) whispered in my ear and suggested that I say, "We are prepared to withdraw ours if you will withdraw yours." However, we have no desire whatsoever for the Minister to withdraw his amendment; indeed, we support it wholeheartedly.

I found the Minister's comments on new clause 4 and amendment No. 21 as disappointing as the very similar response that he gave several months ago. However, I am delighted that at last he and I understand the nature of the issue that we are tackling in a complex part of a complex piece of legislation; it is simply somebody's ability to challenge the decision of a local authority not to provide housing during the internal review of an original decision on whether or not somebody should be treated as homeless. The difference between us is whether the opportunity to challenge that decision should be granted in the High Court or the county court. The Minister, justifying the only reason why it should continue to be the county court, claimed that the county court has a better filtering process and will filter out more unjust cases than the High Court.

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman said that the county court has a better filtering mechanism, but the Government are making the opposite case.

Mr. Foster: I apologise. The Minister made the case that the High Court has a better filtering process than the county court. When I challenged him as to whether he had any reason for believing that the county court's filtering mechanism is different from that of the High Court, specifically referring to the Court of Appeal's judgment in the case of the London borough of Camden ex parte Mohammed, he said that he did not even know the case, which sets out the filtering process that would apply equally to the High Court or county court, whichever is used.

The Minister's justification for his decision is entirely wrong. In addition, he will be well aware that the vast majority—99 per cent—of those who make an application will need to do so with the support of legal aid. There is an earlier filtering process which, of course, is the Legal Services Commission and will apply whether the High Court or county court is used.

Dr. Whitehead: In fact, I said that I did not have the Mohammed case to hand—but a piece of paper has miraculously come into my possession. It talks about the effect of the Mohammed case, which sets out the criteria but does not, and cannot, alter the procedures. I was talking about procedures; there is no filtering procedure in the county court, but applications to the High Court require the permission of the court which, ordinarily, is a paper process. There is therefore a difference in procedure, which remains despite the Mohammed judgment.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the Minister; we are gradually getting to the difference between us. It may be sensible for me to take the Minister's advice and offer to withdraw the new clause to allow time for lawyers representing both sides of the argument to look at the issue. However, I shall just leave the Minister with one thought before doing so. If we end up in a situation where there is little difference between the two court procedures, and if the Government have their way and stick with the High Court procedure, we will deny justice to many people, as their only recourse will be a High Court procedure in either London or Cardiff, which is extremely difficult to secure and flies in the face of everything else that the Government are seeking to achieve in making access to justice easier and modernising the court process.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the filtering mechanism that the Minister talked about is coded-speak for denying applicants who are refused continued housing by the local authority access to an appeal? Does he agree that if an applicant were refused leave to go to judicial review by the High Court or, indeed, legal aid, and took his case to the European Court of Human Rights, the Government would almost certainly be forced to alter the procedure?

Mr. Foster: I would not wish to second-guess decisions by the European Court of Human Rights on such complex matters. However, the hon. Gentleman is correct in the thrust of his remark that the clause, if unamended, will deny justice to some people.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again, because these points are important.

The county court can give a decision much quicker than either permission to go for judicial review or, indeed, the review procedure itself. County court judges are used to interpreting the law to decide whether or not somebody has a justified case. I repeat the points made by the Minister: the reasons for going to the county court on the grounds of unsuitable accommodation include points of law which are bound to end up in a higher court in any case.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is taking the issue a step further, to deliberations that may well be made on appeal, rather than in the internal review which we are discussing. We would perhaps be ruled out of order were we to get into those issues.

There is genuine concern about denying some people justice; if jurisdiction stays with the High Court, that makes it much more difficult for people to access. On the more general point made by the hon. Gentleman, it is worth reflecting on the period that local authorities have for internal review. Leaving aside the 21 days that applicants have before they put in their request, there is a subsequent 56 days before local authorities have to make their decision, which is a long time for people—who may have a good case and who are denied access to accommodation to help them during the period of request—to remain homeless.

7.30 pm

On amendment No. 21, I am delighted with part of the Minister's response. He said, as I suggested he might, that these matters may be best left until a later stage, after we have considered the workings of the bed-and-breakfast unit and have had an opportunity to study the proposed legislation in respect of licensing, not least of houses in multiple occupation.

The Minister might do well to choose his words a little more carefully at times. To suggest, as he did, that standards in relation to overcrowding and so on had been neglected by previous Governments for too long is a rather lame excuse for a Government who have been in power for several years and who should have addressed the matter sooner. Nevertheless, they are now doing so. I accept that their way of going about it is slightly different from the way I would have proposed and preferred, but we look forward to further debates on the matter in another place, when the Government will no doubt be able to give us even more information about their plans. In the light of the answers given and of the continuing need for legal advice to both sides, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 5

CO-OPERATION BETWEEN REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS AND LOCAL HOUSING AUTHORITIES

'For section 170 of the 1996 Act (co-operation between registered social landlords and local housing authorities) there is substituted—

"Where a local housing authority so request, a registered social landlord shall co-operate in offering accommodation to people with priority under the authority's allocation scheme, if to do so is compatible with their constitution and does not unduly prejudice the discharge of any of their functions.".'.—*[Mr. Don Foster.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Don Foster: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 11, in clause 13, page 8, line 12, leave out from beginning to "(7)" in line 13.

No. 12, in page 8, line 15, leave out "or (b)".

No. 13, in page 8, line 37, leave out from beginning to end of line 45.

No. 14, in page 9, line 1, leave out from beginning to end of line 10.

No. 15, in page 9, line 14, leave out from "(5)" to end of line 16.

No. 16, in page 9, line 22, leave out from beginning to end of line 25.

No. 19, in clause 15, page 11, line 1, after "any", insert "deliberate, wilful, or negligent.".

No. 7, in page 11, line 4, at end insert—

'(d) any record of behaviour of a person (or a member of his household) which has affected the terms of a previous tenancy he has held.'.

No. 17, in page 11, line 6, after "given", insert—

'or allocation to be made'.

No. 18, in page 11, line 15, leave out from beginning to end of line 17 and insert—

'(2D) The only behaviour which may be regarded by the authority as unacceptable for the purposes of subsection (2C)(a) is—

(a) behaviour of the person concerned which would (if he were a secure tenant of the authority) entitle the authority to a possession order under section 84 of the Housing Act 1985 (c. 68) on any ground mentioned in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to that Act (other than ground 8); or

(b) behaviour of a member of his household which would (if he were a person residing with a secure tenant of the authority) entitle the authority to such a possession order.'.

No. 20, in page 11, line 37, leave out from "has" to "him" and insert "is informed".

Mr. Foster: I begin with an apology to the House. Because of the way in which the Chair has chosen to group amendments for deliberation today, it is inevitable that a number of very different issues have ended up in the same group. This group contains four separate and distinct issues. Instead of my speaking on the entire group, were my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he might give my voice a rest and the House a rest from having to hear it.

When she responds to new clause 5, the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), will no doubt remind the House that this is old ground that we have been over on several occasions. For anyone coming new to this "Groundhog Day" event, the issue is simple. Under the Bill, local authorities are required to develop a homelessness strategy, although in its delivery they will be increasingly reliant on various housing associations and registered social landlords.

As hon. Members who served on the Committee know, it is estimated that by 2004 more than 50 per cent. of all social housing will be in the hands of housing associations or registered social landlords. It is therefore agreed in all parts of the House that close co-operation between a housing authority and a housing association is crucial. The question is how we ensure such co-operation.

New clause 5 is one way of ensuring that by writing into the Bill a specific requirement for registered social landlords to co-operate with the local authority, unless to do so would be incompatible with their constitution or would in some way unduly prejudice the discharge of their other functions. The Government have suggested an alternative way forward, by making sure that the Housing Corporation has strong enough teeth to ensure that the

[Mr. Foster]

housing associations for which it has responsibility comply with requests that they work closely with housing authorities.

In the Standing Committee, the Minister said:

"I share the concern that has been expressed that registered social landlords should play their part, but I believe that that will best be achieved through revised guidance and enhanced regulation by the Housing Corporation".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 10 July 2001; c. 17.]

I have no doubt that in her response she will tell the House that she still believes that that is the appropriate way forward. Perhaps she can tell the House a little about her consultation and discussion with, and perhaps exhortations to, the Housing Corporation, and assure me that we will end up with clear statutory arrangements to ensure close co-operation between registered social landlords and the Housing Corporation.

Before the Minister responds, however, may I raise three points which, I hope, will inform her deliberations with the Housing Corporation? First, in respect of the number of lettings currently taking place, there has been a significant reduction in the share of new lettings to homeless households. That has been in decline for the past decade. In 1992–95, 25 per cent. of new lettings went to homeless households. By 1999–2000, the figure had fallen to just 11 per cent. I am well aware that there are many complex reasons for that figure, but it shows that the RSL sector as a whole is not doing enough to support the Government's policy objectives. I hope that that will form part of the Minister's discussion with the Housing Corporation.

Secondly, on possessions, recent figures from the Lord Chancellor's Department show that social landlords were granted more than 26,000 possession orders in 2000. That figure is up by 12 per cent. from the previous year and has more than doubled in the past six years. Again, there are complex reasons for that, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the underlying reasons for the increase are the demands of meeting performance indicators on managing rent arrears and delays in processing housing benefit.

There is no doubt that the increased use of possession orders is causing unnecessary homelessness. Of course there is a place for possession orders, but far too often they are used as the first, rather than the last, resort. I note with interest that in the latest edition of "Roof", Shelter launches its "Evictions: who's counting?" campaign to get more detailed information about the problem. I hope that the Minister will look into that matter, too.

Thirdly, we will consider later in this group of amendments the question of suitability to be a tenant. That should form part of the discussions with the Housing corporation. It is important that the new regulatory guidance is consistent with the framework in the Bill for allocating accommodation, particularly in circumstances where applicants can be deemed to be unsuitable tenants. Throughout our earlier deliberations, Ministers have been keen to stress that a high legal test should be applied. A registered social landlord cannot be allowed to decide that it does not like the behaviour of a particular tenant. It is important the guidance produced by the Housing Corporation mirrors the high tests that apply to local authorities.

Amendments Nos. 11 to 18 relate to what has often been called the neighbour from hell. I stress that I do not believe we should take away from local authorities the discretion to take account of antisocial behaviour, nor discretion in factors that pose a threat to fellow tenants. I also believe that local authorities should have discretion to frame their allocation schemes to reflect local circumstances. I accept those matters in their entirety. Many local authorities have a real problem to grapple with, and in so doing they face many challenges. However, the Government were right to state in a number of policy documents that housing need must be given a high level of consideration when dealing with the problem of homelessness. The purpose of the amendments is to remove the issue of behaviour from the decision whether a person is deemed to be eligible. There is no intention to remove the issue of behaviour at later stages when the crucial issue of priority will have to be decided.

It is vital that local authorities are able, as is proposed in legislation, to consider the issue of suitability in terms of prior behaviour when determining priority, or whether there should be no priority. However, that should not happen at the first stage of considering eligibility. If at the first decision-making process—that of eligibility—the issue of behaviour can be taken into account, it is possible for a local authority to determine immediately that a person is not eligible without having any regard for the housing need of the applicant. It would be especially worrying if that were to happen in circumstances where the applicant is not an individual but a member of a homeless family. Perhaps one individual in the family has behaved in such a way that at a later stage the authority may use it to deny the family priority. At the earlier stage there would be no opportunity for the local authority even to bother to make an assessment of the housing need of every member of the family.

I hope that the Minister will recognise that we are not seeking to water down the clear arrangements that have been put in place following earlier discussions to enable local authorities to take behaviour into account. The tabling of the amendments is a move to ensure that something that is close to the Government's heart and to the heart of Liberal Democrats is taken into account. Housing need must be addressed.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay succeeds in catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will be keen to speak to amendments Nos. 19 and 20. We are concerned that there is inconsistency in the Bill in respect of behavioural issues. It is bizarre that when we come to consider various decisions on the levels of support that are to be given, we find it has been decided that there should be a set of clearly defined strategies for determining whether certain behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable, and what impact that will have on someone's likelihood of receiving support. In determining the level of priority—one small piece of the procedure—we move from having a set of listed criteria to stating suddenly that the local authority can take any behaviour into account. That is flying in the face of the logic that many of us have discussed many times in earlier stages of the Bill's consideration.

Amendment No. 20 raises an issue that the Minister and I have debated on many occasions. That issue is whether, when a decision is made about the priority to be given to an applicant, the local authority should have a duty to notify the applicant of the decision, as it has in

earlier stages of the process. There has been confusion during many earlier debates about the significance of priority. I say that it is vital. If a local authority decides that someone is eligible but has no priority for housing, he or she will not be helped. If it decides that an individual is eligible but that he or she has low priority, that person will find that there is no opportunity to be helped. That is the situation in many parts of the country. I hope that it will be accepted that priority is an important issue.

As I have said, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay will wish to amplify one or two of the points that I have raised. I hope that we shall have more interesting responses from Ministers to these amendments than to the previous string of amendments.

7.45 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Amendment No. 7 adds the following clause:

"(d) any record of behaviour of a person (or a member of his household) which has affected the terms of a previous tenancy he has held."

The amendment relates to allocation schemes that local authorities have to consider.

I broadly agree with what the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) said about amendment No. 18, which is similar to No. 7. However, I believe that amendment No. 7 is more direct and to the point. He said that there is a real problem with which local authorities must grapple, and I entirely agree. He added that housing need must be given a high priority in dealing with homelessness. A balance must be struck.

In considering the allocation of scarce houses, local authorities should be given a power to consider the previous behaviour of a tenant, and perhaps in the area of another local authority. At present, there is no such power, especially when a tenant has come from a different authority. He may have a long record of antisocial behaviour towards his neighbours; he may have, for example, a long record of bad rental payment. However, a different local authority may not take that record into account as the law stands. Surely it would be reasonable for a system of voluntary recording to be undertaken so that a local authority is able to pass on such information to the next local authority. That would be one of the factors that could be taken into account when considering the allocation of housing. Perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us whether she agrees with that approach and whether she agrees with amendment No. 7.

Mr. Sanders: I support amendments Nos. 19 and 20, both of which are designed to tackle the same problem and the same deficiency. We all want to do something about neighbours who are disruptive, who cause annoyance, disruption, pain and hurt to others, and the need to do so is recognised in many parts of the Bill, but not in the one that we are discussing. For example, an applicant can go through all the eligibility tests, but when it comes to allocation the priority is lost. Amendment No. 20 is designed to correct the procedure where there is a duty to inform the applicant at all stages about the decisions that have been taken, and in those terms it is similar to amendment No. 19. However, there is no such duty at the allocation stage. It is almost as if there has been an omission at the final stage.

Amendment No. 1 would ensure that local authorities exercise their discretion in determining the priority that is given to applications for housing in line with the Government's policy intentions. The amendment is designed to promote consistency and to ensure that the Government's policy intentions are met, as set out in the housing Green Paper.

Much of the debate so far has focused on giving local authorities discretion not to house antisocial tenants. We agree that local authorities should have the discretion to take into account previous violence, antisocial behaviour and other factors that pose a threat to fellow tenants. More broadly, authorities should have discretion to frame their allocation scheme to reflect local circumstances.

However, proposed new subsection (2A)(b) in clause 15 gives local authorities wide-ranging discretion to take "any behaviour" into consideration when assessing an applicant's priority for accommodation; it does not refer only to antisocial behaviour. Unlike at other stages in the allocation process, no test defines the circumstances in which an authority should apply the provision. That is inconsistent and means that authorities could reduce priority for rent arrears or other reasons. That is common under current arrangements.

In many parts of the country, the decision to reduce an applicant's priority will mean that he or she will not be housed. That is especially relevant at the moment because local authorities suspend or exclude people for rent arrears that have nothing to do with them but have occurred through, for example, delays in housing benefit administration.

Amendment No. 20 makes the important point that authorities should provide information when no priority is given to an applicant. A way forward might be to amend the Bill so that it explicitly states that information about the decision and the right of review should be provided. Guidance for local authorities about decisions to reduce priority should also be given.

Glenda Jackson: I should like to speak against the new clause and deal with the remarks of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). I am worried that he advocates giving the Housing Corporation teeth to deal with housing associations that work with local authorities. In the borough of Camden in my constituency, the local authority and the housing associations work closely together. However, I am sure that he knows that some housing associations deal with specific minority groups—for example, single women. They have expressed anxiety, even at this stage, that the teeth that he advocates for the Housing Corporation could threaten their specific services to groups that remain excluded from local authority priority housing.

I share the hon. Gentleman's anxiety about the number of repossessions that have taken place. If they are a direct result of the inequities in housing benefit, I strongly urge my hon. Friend the Minister to speak again to our colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions.

Mr. Don Foster: I understand the hon. Lady's point about housing associations that have been established to serve the needs of specific groups. The new clause takes that into account and states that the housing association does not need to work with the local authority if that would breach the purposes for which it was set up. She is wrong to say that it is easier for local authorities to work with registered social landlords; the figures show that the situation is getting worse after transfers.

Glenda Jackson: I do not believe that I said that. I spoke of the ease with which Camden, my local

[Glenda Jackson]

authority, works with all the housing associations in the borough. I stress that I read the new clause, and I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. However, representations have been made to me that suggest that housing associations that attempt to deal with the difficulties of specific minority groups believe—accurately or inaccurately—that any wish to expand their services or engage in development that would mean financial partnership with the Housing Corporation would result in their being put at the bottom of the list.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to speak to our colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions. Although I appreciate that the Government have stated that they do not expect fundamental changes for at least a decade, we cannot wait that long. Far too many people are being punished through no fault of their own, but because of the incompetence of those who provide housing benefit in the area. My borough of Camden has two charter marks for the excellence of its housing benefit service.

I assume that the amendments that the hon. Member for Bath and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) have tabled deal with bad behaviour. Antisocial behaviour can be enormously destructive, as we all know from experience in our constituencies. However, I was not clear about the point raised by the hon. Member for Bath. Does he believe that the consideration of behaviour should be placed further down a local authority's list of priorities? No one accepts bad behaviour, and I appreciate that local authorities have difficulties in housing families that include one young antisocial member. In such a case, should the whole family be punished?

I am worried about inappropriate lettings, which have happened in the past and will doubtless occur in future. I want to consider the case of someone whose behaviour is not bad but may be perceived by neighbours as antisocial—for example, if an individual with mental health problems allied to alcohol dependency set fire to their flat. Greater consideration of previous behaviour before the inappropriate placing of the individual could have prevented the incident.

I do not support the new clause, and I hope that behaviour will be placed at the bottom of the list of criteria. I accept the point about antisocial behaviour, but the purpose of the Bill is to provide for those who are vulnerable.

Ms Keeble: We have had a good debate about amendments that deal with the difficulties of providing a housing service when we have a range of different providers, including housing associations.

The problems of antisocial behaviour are universally recognised as profound for those who provide or manage housing. Transparency and providing information to people who have applied for housing were also discussed.

New clause 5 would place a statutory duty on registered social landlords to co-operate with local authorities in offering accommodation to people with priority under the authorities' allocation schemes when that does not unduly prejudice the discharge of their functions. I accept the point about the implications for housing associations that provide special services.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) for raising an important issue, which we discussed at length in Committee, where I gave an undertaking to consult with the Housing Corporation about his concerns about the co-operation of registered social landlords and local authorities in tackling housing need. My officials have been working closely with the corporation to ensure that its revised regulatory arrangements can make sure that RSLs co-operate with local authorities.

I have already met the chair of the Housing Corporation, Baroness Dean, informally to discuss the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised. I shall meet her again tomorrow to underline the issue's importance and to satisfy myself about the corporation's proposed arrangements. It must take on board the hon. Gentleman's points, and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson). I undertake to mention the point about the number of lettings and to get information about the percentage that go from the Housing Corporation to homeless families.

On repossessions, I understand that the article that the hon. Member for Bath mentioned referred to possessions by housing associations and by local authorities. The figures are not simply those for housing associations. The Department has asked for a breakdown of figures so that we can try to ascertain the percentage that is due to rent arrears and that due to antisocial behaviour. I hope that we can thus begin to find a way forward on a difficult problem. I therefore urge the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the motion on the assurance that the issues that he has raised will be tackled.

8 pm

Amendments Nos. 11 to 16 would remove the provisions in the Bill which would give local housing authorities the power to decide to treat an applicant as ineligible for an allocation of housing, if satisfied that he was guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him unsuitable to be a tenant, and which would prevent them from allocating housing to such a tenant.

Under the current provisions, section 167(1) of the Housing Act 1996 requires that every housing authority must have an allocation scheme which sets out how the authority determines its priorities for making housing allocations. Clause 15 of the Bill would substitute a new section 167(2), which deals with powers and duties concerning how allocation schemes must or may be framed.

Amendment No. 17 would provide that nothing in new section 167(2) would require an allocation scheme to provide for an allocation to be made to people the authority has decided are guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be tenants, and who, in the circumstances at the time their case is considered, deserve not be given any preference for an allocation.

Amendment No. 18 would reintroduce—in effect, reposition—the provision deleted by amendment No. 14, which specifies the type of behaviour which may be regarded as unacceptable.

The hon. Members who have tabled this group of amendments may consider that they would simplify the current provisions in the Bill which allow an authority to decide not to allocate to those who would be unsuitable

to be a tenant of that authority. However, the provisions as drafted are robust and effective and, crucially, make a clear distinction between the issue of eligibility and the issue of whether any degree of priority for an allocation is deserved under the allocation scheme. This distinction is lost in the amendments. The allocation scheme deals only with the determination of priorities and with procedures to be followed. It does not bear on the question of eligibility for an allocation. If an applicant is ineligible, his allocation will not be considered under the scheme, since the issue of what priority he might deserve will not arise.

Mr. Don Foster: I have listened closely to what the Minister has said. Will she explain how, if a person is denied eligibility based on behaviour criteria, there will be any opportunity for the local authority to consider the issue of housing need?

Ms Keeble: The issue of housing need is, of course, the overriding priority. However, I would underline the fact that those whose unacceptable behaviour is serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a local authority tenant cannot behave in that way with impunity. They forfeit the right to be considered for an allocation or to be given any preference for an allocation. It is right that serious antisocial behaviour cannot be tolerated, and local authorities must have the clear power to decide not to allocate to people who have demonstrated—and who continue to demonstrate—that they are unsuitable as tenants.

Mr. Foster: I fully understand the Minister's argument. I genuinely believe that she is right to say that local authorities must have discretionary powers to exclude people who have serious antisocial behaviour problems. Nevertheless, before we get to the issue of priority, we must address the issue of eligibility. If the Bill is to allow a local authority to deny eligibility to a family on the grounds of behaviour criteria, when is the issue of housing need to be considered in such a case? Surely the answer is that it is not.

Ms Keeble: The problem with the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Bath is that they conflate the two different issues of eligibility and priority order. It is right that a local authority should be able to make the decision in the first instance, judged by the stricter test of whether a person has forfeited the right, through their behaviour, to be considered eligible for a local authority tenancy.

Therefore, I do not consider that these amendments would improve the Bill, as they would place provisions which deal with local authority decisions not to make an allocation in the context of the allocation scheme. That seems to me to be the wrong place for them. I believe that the existing structure provides a better way to achieve the desired result, as it would give authorities an unambiguous power to decide not to make an allocation to applicants who had demonstrated that they were unsuitable to be tenants. I urge hon. Members not to press amendments Nos. 11 to 18.

Amendment No. 19 seeks to ensure that when an applicant's behaviour made that person unsuitable to be a tenant, that would count against him only when his behaviour was deliberate, wilful or negligent. It is certainly important that those who have behaved in an antisocial manner, or in some otherwise unacceptable way, should be given the opportunity to show they have reformed. However, it is also important that local authorities must be able to protect the vast majority of tenants.

Local authorities must be given the discretion to make balanced judgments on the basis of their knowledge of individual circumstances. Every time the Bill lays down further instructions that local authorities must take into account, we limit their ability to make decisions which, on the basis of their local and particular knowledge, they consider to be in the best interests of the majority of tenants and residents.

The existing provision already strikes a fair and proper balance between the interests of applicants and those of authorities and existing tenants, with its references to "serious" behaviour and "unsuitability" to be a tenant, and by linking into the grounds for possession in schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1985. These safeguards—already included in the Bill—ensure that to attract "no priority", a person must have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him unsuitable to be a tenant, and which would entitle the authority to a possession order, so that those whose behaviour in the past has fallen short of the best, but is not intolerable, are protected. We have struck a balance which recognises that people can reform, but which also respects the right of the vast majority of tenants and residents to quiet enjoyment of their lives. I therefore ask hon. Members not to press the amendment.

Amendment No. 7 seeks to ensure that a person's previous behaviour, or that of a member of his household, may be taken into account when determining priority for allocation. However, past behaviour may already be taken into account under the terms of the Bill. Clause 15(3), which inserts new section 167(2A)(b) states that

"any behaviour of a person (or of a member of his household) which affects his suitability to be a tenant"

may be taken into account. New sections 167(2B) to (2D) also make it clear that past behaviour can be taken into account.

However, account must be taken of current circumstances as well as an applicant's past behaviour. If there is clear evidence that the applicant has reformed or that the circumstances that led to his or her unacceptable behaviour have changed, the authority must have regard to that evidence. In effect, the authority should assess whether the applicant is likely to behave in an unacceptable manner if allocated housing now. I therefore ask hon. Members not to press the amendment.

The Bill gives housing applicants the right to request information about any decisions which have been taken, or are likely to be taken, about the facts of their case and about any decision that no preference will be given because of unacceptable behaviour. Amendment No. 20 would remove the onus from the individual to request information, and would place an obligation on authorities to inform applicants of any such decisions.

I am sympathetic to the thinking behind this amendment. I share the concern of the hon. Member for Bath that the application process should be transparent and accessible, and that applicants should be able to obtain the information that they need to get an indication of the degree of priority their application will receive,

[Ms Keeble]

relative to others. I also understand the importance of priority in terms of people's prospects of being able to obtain accommodation.

I believe that local authorities should be encouraged to provide as much feedback on individual applications as is practicable, as early as practicable, so that those applying for housing know where they stand and understand their prospects, be they good or bad, and can make plans accordingly. That is particularly important in respect of those households that are being accommodated temporarily under the homelessness legislation while awaiting the opportunity of an allocation to provide them with a more settled home. I can assure the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), as I have said to the hon. Member for Bath, that that will be reflected in statutory guidance as strongly as possible. It will also be done in consultation with housing authorities.

I recognise also that the Local Government Association and the Association of London Government support the proposal. However, I remain concerned that we do not inadvertently place local authorities in a difficult position by including statutory duties that may not be practical. The provisions have been carefully and thoughtfully drafted. They recognise that, although some authorities may decide to continue to operate what might be characterised as points-based allocation schemes, others are moving to choice-based schemes, which allow applicants more opportunity to exercise their preference for particular properties. The statutory provisions therefore need to be appropriate to both types of scheme as well as any others that local authorities may devise.

The provisions on applicants' right to information about their applications, which amendment No. 20 would modify, are a case in point. Under choice-based schemes, active consideration of the facts of an applicant's case may not occur until he or she makes a specific application for a particular property. Under the provisions as drafted, an applicant has a right to ask about decisions likely to be taken on his application. That right applies at any stage of the process, including from the outset.

If no decisions have been taken by the authority at the point at which an applicant makes a request, the authority must nevertheless consider his application and inform him what the decisions are likely to be. I remain concerned that it would be impractical and onerous for authorities operating a choice-based allocation scheme to have to provide that information as a matter of course for all applicants, whether they require it or not.

I am also concerned about whether, under a choice-based scheme, an application would be considered in such detail. However, I am ready to give the matter further consideration. I shall ask my officials to consult the local government associations so that we can be absolutely sure of the implications involved and sure that we have a sound and practical provision. On that undertaking, I ask hon. Members to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Don Foster: I thank the Minister for her responses to the separate issues that have been raised and I am delighted that she has already had informal meetings with the Housing Corporation. I understand that tomorrow's meeting will be formal and I hope that minutes will be available in due course. She goes with the clear wish of Members on both sides of the House that she fight hard to ensure that the commitments that she has made tonight are honoured by the Housing Corporation. We wish her well in those meetings.

I confess to being disappointed with the Minister's response in respect of whether it is appropriate to omit at the eligibility stage of determining what support to give a homeless applicant the issue of possible rejection on the ground of previous behaviour. She accused me of conflating the stages of eligibility and priority, but if there is confusion about that it is hers, not mine.

The issue is simple. I genuinely believe that the Government intend that a high priority be given to housing need in allocations policy. Indeed, I believe that because it is what they keep telling us in every single one of their housing documents. For example, in paragraphs 9.15 and 9.16 of the housing Green Paper, they state:

> "Any decisions to suspend applications would need to take account of the circumstances of the household in order to safeguard vulnerable groups such as those with mental or behavioural problems, or the children of the families concerned. We would expect suspensions to be exceptional and that other ways of managing problems or risk may be more appropriate in many cases".

They continue:

> "Meeting housing need remains the priority for lettings and transfer policies".

That picks up the point made by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson). Is it the key issue, and does it remain the Government's priority? I suggest that, by allowing local authorities to ignore housing need when eligibility is determined by simply addressing the issue of behaviour, they are going totally against what they suggest throughout their policy document. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that issue.

8.15 pm

On the behavioural hurdles that should be set at the various stages, I genuinely believe that there is confusion in the Government's mind. They have rightly said that we should not allow any old behaviour criteria to be adopted. There are already significant problems with rent arrears and hon. Members are well aware that 89 per cent. of housing authorities use it as a reason for not allowing a transfer to take place. Of those, two thirds have no specific detail about what level that rent arrears should be.

There is genuine concern about the issue, so it seems odd to say the least that the Government propose a series of high hurdles early in the process. For whatever reason, a local authority might not want to house a certain person, but even if he does not cross those high hurdles he is allowed to move on to the next stage, and rightly so. Yet the Government say that, at that next stage, the local authority can take any behaviour into consideration.

That person can get through the first stage against agreed criteria, but at the next stage of priority the local authority can say, "We don't like you. Any behaviour will do, so you are not going to get high priority and you won't get housing." I suggest to the Minister that there is an inconsistency in the procedure. Again, I hope that she will reflect on it.

I am grateful for the Minister's response in respect of giving applicants information on the priority allocated to them, and I accept entirely that a complication is brought

into play by the move to choice-based lettings schemes. I welcome the fact that more local authorities, including mine, are considering how to move to such a scheme. That change will alter the nature of the information and the way in which it should be provided. I am delighted that she has agreed to reflect on that. She has my assurance that I too will reflect on it in consultation with my colleagues in the other place, where the matter may be raised again. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

DUTY OF LOCAL HOUSING AUTHORITY TO FORMULATE A HOUSING STRATEGY

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 3, after "authority")", insert—

'and its strategic partners, to include registered social landlords and housing co-operatives, landlords of houses in multiple occupation registered with the authority under the Housing Act 1996, members of landlords' forums, and voluntary organisations and other relevant bodies ("strategic partners")'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 16, at end insert—

'(4A) The authority shall maintain a list of those organisations which are its strategic partners, which it may modify from time to time.'.

No. 3, in clause 2, page 2, line 11, at end insert—

'; and

(d) the availability of housing advice within the district.'.

No. 4, in page 2, line 19, at end insert—

'(d) providing for the welfare of animals under the control of homeless persons.'.

No. 5, in clause 3, page 2, line 29, after "authority", insert "and its strategic partners".

No. 8, in page 3, line 12, at end insert—

'(5A) In formulating a homelessness strategy the authority shall have regard to—

(a) the total and types of empty housing and vacant property within their district which should be based on regular audits of such property;

(b) targets for the re-use of such properties for residential purposes;

(c) "turn-around" times for the re-letting of empty property; and

(d) its own action plan to achieve the targets set out in paragraph (b) above, including action by any public authority, voluntary organisation or other body or person whose activities are capable of contributing to the achieving of these objectives.'.

No. 9, in page 3, line 12, at end insert—

'(5A) In formulating a homelessness strategy the authority shall make specific reference to—

(a) the extent and nature of empty housing and vacant property within their district across all sectors and tenures;

(b) targets for the re-use of such properties for residential purposes; and

(c) a strategy for action to achieve the targets set out in (b) above, including action by any public authority, voluntary organisation or other body or person whose activities are capable of contributing to the achieving of these objectives.'.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The amendment deals with the duty of the local authority to formulate a homelessness strategy, which is outlined in clauses 1 to 3. We consider it against a background of the number of priority homeless rising from 102,650 in 1997–98 to 114,350 in 2000–01—a 12,000 increase in the past four years. The figures come from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions press release entitled "Statutory Homeless England, Second Quarter 2001". The number of people living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has soared by a staggering 152 per cent. from 4,500 in quarter 2 1997 to 11,314 in quarter 2 2001.

The duty on a local authority to formulate a homelessness strategy is extremely welcome, but we must get it right. Our amendment No. 1, which incorporates a number of other strategic partners, must be the right way forward. It should be the duty of a local authority to involve registered social landlords and other strategic partners—for example, representatives from the private rented sector and from non-governmental organisations, such as Shelter, Crisis or the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which have a particular role in a particular area. Given that background, it is important that we seriously consider this proposal.

Large-scale voluntary transfers have proceeded at a pace. The Minister announced that 27 local authorities will be able to proceed with

"32 transfers of all or part of their housing stock to registered social landlords."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 10W.]

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) told us that by 2004 the majority of all council housing will be run by registered social landlords. We would not expect such a huge change under a Labour Government. The Conservative party welcomes that change, provided that it is accompanied by tenant choice. Careful safeguards should be in place so that tenants can be properly consulted about changes before they take place.

Registered social landlords have far greater flexibility to borrow money from the private sector. The Government are a little chary of that, and perhaps could improve the situation. By levying more money from the private sector, they would have more money to build more social housing units and thereby reduce the homeless figures that I have just given.

Some of those large-scale voluntary transfers are from large authorities, such as Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow. It is not just the smaller authorities, such as my own, that have carried out large-scale voluntary transfers: large numbers of houses are being transferred from local authorities to registered social landlords. Under those circumstances, it would be illogical, if not bizarre and perverse, not to put a statutory duty in the Bill that those bodies should be consulted by local authorities when drawing up their homelessness strategy. I hope that the Minister will have something to say about that.

There is a second argument in this saga. Housing associations are, by and large, run by volunteers. It would be odd if they were not consulted under the homelessness strategy. I can see no good argument why people who are giving such good service—I emphasise that—in the

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

registered social housing sector should be excluded from the strategy. In my constituency, the Fossway housing authority does an extremely good job. I shall not go so far as to say that it does a better job than the local authority, but it does an extremely good job. It does much voluntary work. The Cirencester young persons housing association also does a lot of good work and is staffed by young people who put much energy into trying to solve the problems of young homelessness in the Cirencester area. To exclude such people from this homelessness strategy would be totally bizarre.

I do not believe that the fact that such bodies are voluntary should make any difference. They work with these difficult problems day in and day out. That proves that they are serious organisations. The argument may be put that they are too small to have any real input into the debate. I do not think that size makes any difference: if registered social landlords are small or large, if they represent a few or many private landowners or if they are deemed to have a realistic contribution to make to the debate, they should be included in statute.

We have been round this course twice before, so I know that the Government may try to resist our amendments. If they are not prepared to incorporate such bodies in the statute, as we think they should be, please may we have some pretty strong regulations that make it perfectly clear that local authorities would be expected to include them.

The third argument for including such organisations relates to the contention that they would undermine the strategic responsibilities of local authorities. As I have shown, within a few years the majority of the public sector housing stock will be run by registered social landlords. Admittedly, local authorities will still be involved and will have a vital role in determining public housing strategy, but it would be bizarre if these organisations were not included in the homelessness review.

There is a strong case for including those bodies. Amendment No. 5 is consequential on amendment No. 2, and on the organisations being included in the statute.

Amendment No. 8 sets out four considerations to which authorities should have regard in formulating a homelessness strategy. I think that the Government would have difficulty arguing that these matters are not important enough to be taken into account. The first is that the total and types of empty housing and vacant property within an authority's district should be based on regular audits of such property. Unless authorities are carrying out audits of how effective they are at turning property around, they are not doing their job well. Surely the Government's best value initiative will demand that audits are conducted. If the best value initiative demands that an audit should take place, why not put that in the Bill?

I can illustrate graphically the difference in efficiency between local authorities—the average turn-around of empty housing in the Isle of Wight is two days, whereas the three worst local authorities, which as one would expect are Labour controlled, including that of the Deputy Prime Minister, Kingston upon Hull—take many months to turn around their empty properties. I am sure that the Minister will argue that those Labour authorities have a much more difficult housing problem because they are inner-city authorities. That may be so, but that does not explain the huge difference between the Isle of Wight and the three worst Labour authorities—many other authorities are not far behind them in inefficiency.

We need to examine this problem carefully. If local authorities could bring up the average turn-around of empty properties and make it a little quicker, that would have a huge impact on the homelessness problem.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Is the whole amendment directed just at empty council housing?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Indeed it is not. The hon. Gentleman has given me a chance to add that we need to do something about the huge amount of vacant property in the private sector. The same applies: I think we should give all possible encouragement to private landlords to let their empty properties. We have had many debates about, for example, the letting of flats over shops—an asset that the country is not using enough. We could better use it in various ways, certainly through the use of tax incentives to encourage the letting of flats over shops by those who currently find that uneconomic because they are compromising commercial leases. There must be ways around that.

It follows that, where there is a dichotomy between the best and the worst authorities in terms of how quickly they can turn around their empty properties, targets should be set. That is the object of paragraph (b) of amendment No.8.

8.30 pm

Mr. Sanders: Has it occurred to the hon. Gentleman that this has very little to do with political control? It has much more to do with the action of housing markets in the areas involved. Where there is surplus stock along with a very short waiting list, there is no need to turn around empty houses, whereas in areas with high demand and long waiting lists there is such a need.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I agree with half of that. There is always a need to be ever more efficient when dealing with public property and public money, especially when people are waiting for housing in, sometimes, very distressed circumstances. We should never be complacent about the need to turn around housing. Indeed, if a local authority is particularly efficient—undoubtedly, it does happen—it will be able to accept more transfers from other areas. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman in that regard, but I agree with the other part of what he said.

I cited the three worst authorities in this respect, and pointed out that they were Labour authorities. They have bigger problems than others—they are inner-city authorities with run-down housing stock and various other disadvantages—but that is not to say that we, as a Government and a country, should not demand that they improve their efficiency. I register an interest as a chartered surveyor. I speak with a little professional knowledge. I think it possible for every local authority to improve its efficiency, which is why we want to set

"targets for the re-use of such properties for residential purposes".

David Wright: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in many circumstances, it is the amount of time taken to repair a property that is critical? The hon. Member for

Torbay (Mr. Sanders) mentioned the importance of considering different housing markets in relation to individual local authorities. I think that what is critical is the time taken by a local authority to take a void property and return it to use, not the time during which the property is sitting on its books while multiple offers are being made.

I have worked for a housing authority, and I know that properties can be offered eight or nine times. Authorities such as that—and it was a Labour authority—work very hard to ensure that properties are let as efficiently as possible. The hon. Gentleman fails to acknowledge that.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I accept that many people in local authorities throughout the country work hard to re-let their properties efficiently, and I accept that a change of tenant often provides a time during which a property can be refurbished. It is much easier to refurbish an empty property than it is to refurbish one in which someone is living. I suspect, however, that if some authorities maintained their housing stock a little better, they would not need to do so much refurbishment. I have seen some pretty innovative refurbishment of housing, and housing association schemes, in my authority—and, indeed, throughout the country, when I was a member of the Environment Select Committee.

If refurbishment schemes are conducted properly they should have a useful life of many decades, and there should be no need for major refurbishment. That is why I applaud a move to large-scale voluntary transfer to lever more money into the private sector, so that we can have more high-quality refurbishment. That is how we should be tackling some of our homelessness problems.

I find it hard to believe that any Member would rail against the idea that local authorities should be more efficient in re-letting their properties. I accept that some have more problems than others, but I do not accept that we should not make greater efforts. Paragraph (a) of amendment No. 8 is intended to reduce the time involved, paragraph (b) sets targets, paragraph (c) asks for an improvement in turn-around times for the re-letting of empty property, and paragraph (d) suggests that each authority should have an action plan for the meeting of targets. That would form part of the homelessness strategy.

Amendment No. 6 deals with the amount of time for which an offer shall remain open for acceptance. Let me, if I may, quote—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As amendment No. 6 has not been selected, I am afraid that I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to speak to it.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful for that advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Amendment No. 3 deals with the advice that local authorities must give in their homelessness strategies. This is an important matter, and we covered it in some detail in Committee, so I do not propose to do so again now. Suffice it to say that the regulatory code for the Housing Corporation and its registered social landlords may need to be examined. There are good and bad registered social landlords, and we must root out the bad ones and make sure that all landlords give proper advice to those registering as homeless. In particular, we need to make sure that proper registers of telephone numbers, fax numbers and e-mail addresses are kept. The Minister says that such registers do not exist, but I have seen them.

The Opposition are not the only ones saying that there is a variation in the quality of advice throughout the country. Shelter, an organisation that should know what it is talking about, conducted research, whereby people told different housing departments that they were single mothers, children or whatever in an attempt to get advice. In one case, a single mother received dreadful advice that was of no help at all.

When we were debating the Homes Bill in Committee, the then Minister, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), said:

> "The availability of housing advice, its quality and extent, should and will have to be considered as part of homelessness reviews."

In response to the hon. Member for Bath, he asked:

> "Will the hon. Gentleman accept that the notes will be incorporated within the existing code?"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 30 January 2001; c. 315-16.]

If those notes are to incorporated in the code, there is no reason why they should not be incorporated in the Bill. Surely housing advice to homeless people, and the quality of that advice, should be a major part of any local authority's homelessness strategy.

We touched on amendment No. 4 in our discussion on the rough sleepers unit. It covers housing provision for homeless people with pets. I accept that this is a sensitive issue, and I am sure that the whole House wants to treat it as such. There are some homeless people whose quality of life is hugely improved by the ownership of a pet, often a dog or a cat. Local authorities are not always as sympathetic as they might be to the need to provide housing that can accommodate pets.

I accept that much housing is high-rise and therefore unsuitable for pets, but pet ownership should be one of the factors considered when determining the suitability of housing for homeless people, and that should be stated in the Bill. Some might say that we should regard the homeless themselves as the priority, not their pets, but there are heart-rending cases of people being put into unsuitable housing and having to get rid of a much-loved pet. We need to think carefully before we deprive people who are already in difficult circumstances of their pets.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): Has the hon. Gentleman consulted the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or other animal welfare organisations in formulating amendment No. 4?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The RSPCA has commented previously on the matter, and I think that it is self-evident that that organisation exists to ensure that all pets in the United Kingdom are treated humanely. The RSPCA would certainly not condone someone with a pet being given housing that was unsuitable for keeping the pet in proper conditions.

There is quite a lot of meat to our four amendments in this group. We have already been round the course of annunciating the voluntary partners that should be incorporated in the homelessness strategy, but I believe that the Government should seriously consider specifying such matters in the Bill. If they will not include such provision, please may we have some forceful directives that make local authorities consider all those bodies?

Mr. Kidney: As my amendment No. 9, on empty homes, is linked to amendment No. 1, I should like to take this opportunity to seek two specific reassurances from the Minister, the first of which is on the guidance on empty homes that Ministers will, according to the Bill, give to local authorities. The second reassurance concerns local authorities' powers of compulsory purchase.

The Bill requires all local authorities to formulate strategies, and then to perform their duties and exercise their powers in accordance with those strategies to reduce homelessness. Amendment No. 9 states that the Bill should require local authorities to refer in their strategies specifically to tackling the problem of empty homes.

The Minister and I do not differ in recognising the importance across the country of the problem of homes that are standing empty. I suspect that we agree also that too many properties are standing empty needlessly. In England, at any one time, about 750,000 properties are standing empty, the vast majority of which are in private ownership. I think that she and I agree also that too little has been done to reduce the number of empty properties. The Empty Homes Agency, however, estimates that only about half of local authorities have a formal strategy to tackle the problem of empty homes.

I hope that the Minister agrees that public opinion supports tough action to fill empty homes, and that people feel very strongly about the issue, and not only when there is a campaign against a proposal to build a housing estate on a nearby greenfield site. I should think that all hon. Members in the Chamber share my experience of many constituents complaining about the waste of good-quality homes that are standing empty.

At one point in Committee, I felt that the Minister was perhaps suggesting that the empty homes problem is not shared uniformly across the country but affects only parts of the country. Subsequently, therefore, I tabled a written parliamentary question to ask whether she could provide the statistics for the number of empty homes by region. I hope that she will agree that the figures for 2000, which she provided in her answer to me of 18 July, show that the total number of vacant dwellings in every region of England, at least, is simply too high.

I accept that the statistics showing the number of properties standing empty are only a snapshot of the situation at any one time and that the number of empty properties varies over time, as empty properties are occupied and occupied properties vacated. Nevertheless, the total number of empty properties is simply too high in every region of England.

The Empty Homes Agency does a great job in the work that it does. It highlights scandalous cases of empty properties, collects and disseminates examples of best practice and gives advice to local authorities and others. The Empty Homes Agency is the strongest proponent of taking action along the lines proposed in amendment No. 9, requiring local authorities to identify the scale of the problem in their area, to adopt targets to reduce the number of empty homes and to work with partners to fill empty homes.

8.45 pm

During Committee stage, I corresponded with the Local Government Association about the amendment. However, it was not possible to get a considered response from the LGA until after the conclusion of the Committee. It is fair to point out today that the LGA's considered view is to ask me to accept that the amendment is unworkable and that this is a problem best dealt with by ministerial guidance.

Hon. Members may have received a briefing from the LGA for today's proceedings. The briefing summarises the objections set out in the correspondence with me. First, the LGA says that local authorities do not have full control of all the properties that are empty, and so it would be unfair to impose targets on them. Secondly, local authorities work in partnership with others and cannot impose their views on their partners. Thirdly, the amendment is described as unworkable.

I am not convinced that some redrafting of the wording could not satisfy the objections, but the thrust of the LGA's objections is that it is pleading for the flexibility that guidance gives. There are times when we should not agree to give Governments of any political hue flexibility, but when those who are to be on the receiving end of the guidance feel that that flexibility would be helpful, it is reasonable to listen. My amendment does not need be pressed to a vote as a result of the LGA's view.

The first point on which I seek reassurance is on the question of guidance. All local authorities are under a duty to formulate homelessness strategies. Will the Minister confirm that the guidance will say that tackling the question of empty properties is an important part of such a strategy? In this way, all local authorities will be required to have a strategy to tackle empty homes. This will plug the main gap that the Empty Homes Agency feels exists at present.

Will the Minister say something about the allocation of resources to local authorities? Can she confirm that when the Government allocate funding, the performance of local authorities in giving effect to the guidance will be taken into account? That would be a powerful message to local authorities to carry out what the Government say.

The second issue is compulsory purchase. I mentioned earlier that hon. Members will have received complaints from constituents about properties standing empty. I would like to illustrate that from my casework, with two spectacular examples of empty properties. For the first, I refer to my local newspaper of record, the *Staffordshire Newsletter*, and the on-going saga of a semi-detached property in a good residential area of Stafford town that, apparently, has stood empty for 30 years. In the report, a resident of the street is quoted as saying, rather mournfully:

"One day it may be resolved but goodness knows when. It goes on and on."

The second example concerns correspondence that I have had with a number of people, including the local authority, about a sturdy, characterful property on the edge of a conservation area that was once rented out by its private owner but has been kept empty since 1982. Owners in both cases have done just enough to avert the local authorities stepping in and exercising powers to require renovation, demolition or closure, but the properties stand empty.

My Empty Homes Bill in the last Parliament proposed that the power of local authorities for compulsory purchase should be tweaked. Local authorities should have the power in the pursuance of a strategy to exercise compulsory purchase to bring back into use empty homes.

Surely owners should not have an open-ended right to keep good quality residential properties empty for long periods. Local authorities should be able to acquire them at a fair price and ensure that they are occupied by local authority tenants, by a registered social landlord taking over the ownership and renting it out, or by an owner-occupier. Will the Minister say something about powers of compulsory purchase? I know that in the last Parliament there was an exhaustive—officials might say exhausting—review of compulsory purchase powers, but I hope that some action will now result.

I share the Minister's intention of reducing homelessness. I believe that tackling empty homes is an important step among the several measures that will be effective in achieving that.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): We in Plaid Cymru welcome the Bill and its emphasis on a strategic approach to homelessness and on strengthening the position of homeless people.

I support amendment No. 9 rather than amendment No. 8. It takes a complete approach to the entire housing stock

"across all sectors and tenures".

Much of rural Wales—and rural England, for that matter—has sufficient housing stock, with more than enough houses of the proper quality and in the right locations to meet community needs, yet those houses stand empty, out of the reach of local people because of the high price or the high rent. Many also stand empty for long periods because they are second homes.

Those houses are a fundamental part of the housing stock—perhaps 20 or 30 per cent., and more in some areas. In case anyone is taking comfort in the idea that they are in remote locations, it should be understood that many of them are in the centres of villages. They influence the entire provision, taking large parts of the stock out of the equation and causing housing need.

We also have substandard housing in rural areas, as was clearly shown recently by the National Assembly for Wales's new index of deprivation. Such substandard housing, which is now recognised whereas it was previously disregarded, again causes housing need.

In Wales, as elsewhere, we have homelessness. In my constituency, much of the recognised homelessness involves young people who live with their parents or parents-in-law or with friends in overcrowded and unsuitable bad housing. They are unable to rent because of high rents and the lack of suitable property, and unable to buy because they are on low wages, perhaps in seasonal employment, and are pushed out of the market by high prices. They are the victims of structural homelessness. It is no fault of their own.

As well as recognised homelessness, we have masked homelessness in rural Wales. It is masked by out-migration, not through choice but because of poverty and the lack of decent housing. We also have rough sleepers—yes, in rural areas, as was shown some time ago in my constituency by research carried out by a local group, Cywaith Joseph, which found people sleeping rough in the smallest of villages.

There are consequences for the viability and vitality of local communities, and there are particular pressures on communities in which the Welsh language is the everyday medium of community life. That was shown by research carried out by my constituency predecessor, Dafydd Wigley, this summer. There are many such communities in my constituency, and they are on the brink of losing the fight for survival.

Clause 3 is aimed at preventing homelessness and ensuring that sufficient accommodation is available for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. In the category of people at risk are those who have had to migrate out of their area. The clause is also aimed at providing services for such people. To accept amendment No. 9 would contribute considerably towards the achievement of those aims, especially in the circumstances of structural homelessness that I have outlined.

Amendment No. 9 refers to

"vacant property . . . across all sectors and tenures"

and calls for targets for reuse. That would encourage the planning of use across the whole of the housing stock, which, I submit, should include the purchase of existing stock by social landlords, rather than new build, which has been the pattern in much of Wales over the past few years. The amendment calls for a strategy for action—action that is sorely needed. I will draw it to the attention of my colleagues in the National Assembly for Wales ahead of their consideration of these matters, and for now I give it my wholehearted support.

Ms Keeble: The principal aims of the Bill are to set a coherent framework for local authorities to adopt in tackling homelessness, to strengthen the homelessness safety net and to extend choice. Those aims have generally been widely and warmly welcomed.

The Government may set the framework for tackling homelessness, but local authorities are best placed to co-ordinate strategies locally and to initiate preventive measures in their local areas. The Bill requires local authorities to take a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness.

A partnership approach is central to our proposals. We require local authorities to take a multi-agency strategic approach to preventing and responding to homelessness. Many agencies are involved with people who are homeless or at risk of becoming so, and it is important that those agencies work together to avoid duplication and gaps in the provision. A wide range of bodies should be engaged in reviews and strategies, and in the prevention and management of homelessness: probation services, voluntary organisations, housing associations, and organisations working with young people and those suffering from mental health problems. Organisations that deal with rough sleepers, too, have a vital role to play.

Amendment No. 1 would specify the bodies that should co-operate with local authorities. One, presumably unintended, effect of the amendment would be that many very small landlords and small organisations would be caught up in the obligation to participate in homelessness reviews and strategies. Co-ops and landlords of houses in multiple occupation are indeed important housing providers, and some will want to engage with the authorities. Where there is a willingness to co-operate, I would expect local housing authorities to welcome that, and to build real partnerships—but such arrangements cannot be forced, and I believe that they would be undermined by a statutory obligation.

[Ms Keeble]

My main objection to the amendment is that it would undermine the strategic responsibility that we are placing on local housing authorities. It is for them to undertake homelessness reviews—in partnership, and as part of their wider housing and community responsibilities. It is important that authorities accept that, and are clear that the responsibility rests with them.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I anticipated earlier that one of the Minister's arguments would be that local authorities would lose their strategic role in producing homelessness strategies if it was incorporated in statute that other agencies were to be included. However, as I said then, if by 2004 more than half of all public housing is run by registered social landlords, surely it is correct that they should be incorporated in statute as one of the consultees in the homelessness strategy policy.

Ms Keeble: The hon. Gentleman might think about the difference between the strategic purchaser function and the provider function. In this instance it is important that the local authority have a clear strategic role in identifying the views of the community and ensuring that provision is in place. Of course authorities will need, and want, to do that in partnership with local agencies and everyone involved in the community, but I would argue the reverse of what the hon. Gentleman says. As the provider role is dispersed more widely, it is even more important for the local authority to be absolutely clear about its strategic function of dealing with housing issues and ensuring that proper provision for homeless people is in place.

Amendments Nos. 2 and 5 are consequent on amendment No. 1. We must take a sensible and strategic view of what is necessary to establish a robust and coherent framework for undertaking reviews and delivering strategies—a framework that allows offices to run their affairs competently. That means taking a sensible view of the level of detail required on the face of the Bill.

Last week I made copies of a draft chapter of the code of guidance and draft good practice guidance covering homelessness reviews and strategies. It is available for Members in the Library. Hon. Members will see that the need for close co-operation and ways of achieving effective partnership working are thoroughly explored in those documents.

9 pm

Amendment No. 3 would require local authorities to review the availability of housing advice in their district as part of their homelessness review. I am grateful to hon. Members for raising that important issue. It is certainly our underlying intention that these provisions should do more than address the consequences of homelessness: they should help to avert it. Prevention, through advice, assistance and multi-agency working, will be an important aspect of all homelessness strategies and reviews. The availability of housing advice, and its quality and extent, should most certainly be considered as part of a homelessness review. I hope that that will give the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) the assurance that he seeks.

Not every issue that should be addressed in a review needs to be listed on the face of the Bill. Indeed, I take the view that housing advice falls clearly under 2(1)(b), read with clause 2(2)(c), which is the requirement that reviews look at the activities carried out for purposes of providing support for people in the district who are or may become homeless. Moreover, in the draft chapter to the code of guidance that I have made available in the Library, hon. Members will see that the provision of advice services is clearly included under the list of activities that contribute to the prevention of homelessness and that one would expect to be considered as part of a homelessness review.

Amendment No. 4 would place on local authorities, as part of their statutory duties to undertake homelessness reviews, a requirement to review provision for the welfare of animals under the control of homeless persons. I agree with Opposition Members that authorities should try to ensure that those placed in temporary accommodation are able to keep their pets, as far as it is possible and reasonable to do so. The issue is of particular concern to two groups. One is elderly people; it is important that local authorities make proper provision and treat the issue with great sensitivity. The second is homeless people; attachment to pets is often a substantial barrier to helping people get off the streets. A number of local authorities have made specific provision to deal with that problem—for example, providing kennels in night shelters, or removing the "no animals" clause from housing association tenancy agreements.

However, it is not appropriate to place such a requirement in primary legislation or to give it more prominence than many other important matters that local authorities will have to address in drawing up their homelessness reviews. The draft 1999 code of guidance for local authorities on the allocation of accommodation and homelessness already makes specific mention of an authority's need to be sensitive to the special needs of applicants, especially elderly applicants, with regard to the companionship they may get from their pets, when allocating accommodation. We will also ensure that the issue is covered in guidance in relation to homelessness. I am grateful to hon. Members for raising this issue and I fully recognise the concerns expressed, but the matter can and should be addressed through guidance, not through the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 8 and 9 would require local authorities to include an empty homes strategy in their homelessness strategy and are specific about the steps that they would have to take to devise such a strategy. Local authorities that are committed to effective action on empty properties will normally choose to set out their plans in the form of a clear strategy that matches resources to the scale of the problem in their district. Indeed, the housing investment programme encourages authorities to do so and we require them to report their performance through the best value in housing programme. That does not mean, however, that we should impose a statutory requirement on authorities to produce such a strategy or to set out prescriptively the procedures that they should follow in drawing it up. I am not convinced that that would in itself result in any greater commitment, or level of useful activity, on the part of some authorities. I am even less convinced that the Bill is the right vehicle for proposing such a duty on local authorities.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) for the points that he raised and I pay tribute to the work that he has done to highlight the issue and the work of the Empty Homes Agency. We are

looking again at compulsory purchase. I hope that my assurances on guidance will satisfy my hon. Friend that the Government are taking bringing empty properties back into use seriously. We will be ensuring that the revised code of guidance on homelessness takes full account of best practice in reducing the number of empty homes and converting redundant commercial property to housing use. However, if right hon. and hon. Members have any illusions about the complexity of the issues surrounding empty properties, particularly in the north of England, they should read the excellent report produced by the centre for urban and regional studies at Birmingham university on the problems of low demand in the M62 corridor. The report deals with the serious implications for housing strategies in areas where demand has collapsed. In both the public and private sectors there are real difficulties to do with bringing back empty properties into use that go far beyond issues of housing efficiency.

On the basis of the assurances that have been given, I would ask the hon. Member for Cotswold to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank the Minister for her very full reply. I would have more sympathy with her rejection of all our amendments if it were made in a different climate. Against the background of a rising number of priority homeless people and those housed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, I am a little sceptical about all these matters being put into the guidance and about whether they will affect the situation. However, we shall have to wait and see. The time is getting late and we want to allow enough time for Third Reading. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 8

REVIEW OF DECISIONS AS TO SUITABILITY OF ACCOMMODATION

Amendment made: No. 22, in page 5, line 43, leave out ", after subsection (1)" and insert "—

(a) in paragraph (f) of subsection (1), at the end there is inserted "or as to the suitability of accommodation offered to him as mentioned in section 193(7)"; and

(b) after that subsection'.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Clause 19

COMMENCEMENT, TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONAL AND GENERAL SAVING

Dr. Whitehead: I beg to move amendment No. 23, in page 12, line 15, at end insert—

'and paragraphs 3 and 7 of Schedule 1'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 24 and 25.

Dr. Whitehead: I trust that these amendments will be agreed by the House with acclaim. They all deal with one minor issue in providing that paragraphs 3 and 7 of schedule 1 will come into force on Royal Assent. Paragraphs 3 and 7 of schedule 1 amend existing sections 161(2A) and 185(2A) which were inserted in the Housing Act 1996 by section 117 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Section 161(2A) of the 1996 Act currently provides that the Secretary of State cannot prescribe in regulations that a class of person is qualified for the allocation of local authority housing under part VI of the 1996 Act if that class of person is excluded from entitlement to certain state benefits, including housing benefit, pursuant to section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Groups excluded by section 115 include persons subject to immigration control who have been given leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom on condition that they do not have recourse to public funds. Section 185(2A) makes similar provision in respect of eligibility for homelessness assistance under part VII of the 1996 Act.

The policy intention behind the 1996 Act provisions is to ensure that those not entitled to housing benefit cannot be prescribed as qualifying persons. We are not concerned with entitlement to the other benefits. Arguments put forward in recent judicial proceedings cast doubt on whether these provisions achieve the policy intention, and paragraphs 3 and 7 seek to make the position clear. However, they need to come into force as quickly as possible to avoid any further possibility of doubt. That is especially necessary if paragraph 3 is to have any usefulness as other provisions, namely clause 13, would repeal section 161 of the 1996 Act when commenced.

I commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 1

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 24, in page 13, line 15, at end insert—

'(2) This paragraph comes into force on the day on which this Act is passed.'.

No. 25, in page 13, line 33, at end insert—

'(2) This paragraph comes into force on the day on which this Act is passed.'.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

9.10 pm

Ms Keeble: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Homelessness Bill is a vital strand of the Government's wider housing strategy to ensure that everybody has the opportunity and choice of a decent home. It will empower local housing authorities to provide greater protection to vulnerable families and to individuals who find themselves homeless. It will provide for more effective strategies and services both to tackle cases of homelessness and to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. Most important, however, it will give homeless people more rights and, through regulation on which we are currently holding consultations, it will extend those rights to more vulnerable people.

The Bill has struck a chord with Members on both sides of the House. Whatever our disagreements on some of the detail, it is clear from the speeches made on both sides of the House that there is real concern about the homeless and real support for these proposals, which will really transform the life chances for many of the most vulnerable people in our society.

[Ms Keeble]

Our proposals will strengthen the homelessness safety net. They will promote a more strategic approach by housing authorities so that they can manage homelessness more effectively and prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. The Bill will encourage housing authorities to offer more choice to all people applying for social housing. Our proposals are designed to protect the most vulnerable people in our society, to promote housing choice, to help create sustainable communities and to confront some of the problems of social exclusion.

One of the most important changes that we want to bring about through the Homelessness Bill is to channel much greater effort into the prevention of homelessness. As I said earlier, our proposals will require housing authorities to adopt a more strategic approach to tackling the causes of all forms of homelessness and preventing its recurrence.

The Bill also strengthens the existing homelessness safety net by making several amendments and repeals to provisions in the Housing Act 1996. In doing so, it will remove some of the restrictions that have damaged the cause of some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The Bill will ensure that all applicants who are unintentionally homeless and have a priority need must be secured suitable accommodation for as long as necessary, until a settled home becomes available. The current two-year limit on the main homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation will be removed.

The Bill will make several important changes to current legislation to strengthen the protection available to homeless people. One of the most important of such groups includes people who are homeless due to violence, especially domestic violence. The measure makes it clear that applicants who would be at risk of any form of violence if they remained in their current home must be treated as homeless. It will prevent authorities from referring such people back to an area where there would be a risk of further violence.

In Standing Committee, I undertook to consider with my colleagues at the Department of Health and report to hon. Members on issues arising from the operation of the Children Act 1989 in relation to homeless families. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) for drawing that important matter to my attention. I share her concerns that social legislation should provide the vital safety net that it is intended to give.

The issue relates to the workings of the Children Act 1989 and was prompted by concern about two recent court cases. In both cases, the courts considered the nature of the obligation of a social services authority under the Children Act 1989 to provide accommodation and financial support for children in need, particularly when parents are unable to secure accommodation and a local housing authority is not obliged to help under the Housing Act 1996. I have discussed the issue with colleagues at the Department of Health; it is a complicated matter and we are giving it serious consideration, especially in the light of further information that has recently been received from Shelter. We shall therefore need to return to it once the Bill has been considered in another place.

Mr. Don Foster: May I press the Minister on that point? Can she give the House an assurance on the case of a homeless family seeking support from a local authority which, because of the behaviour of one family member, decides that the whole family is ineligible? Will the work that she will do with her colleagues to review the Children Act lead to support being provided under that Act, as it will not be provided under homelessness legislation?

Ms Keeble: The exact interrelationship between homelessness legislation and the Children Act is under dispute. Assurances have been given that the recent court cases do not change the obligation. However, we want to look more closely at cases that have arisen and we shall return with detailed advice which, I hope, will cover the points made by the hon. Gentleman.

In addition to dealing with immediate problems of homelessness, the Bill deals with wider issues in social housing. It includes measures to give improved rights to new applicants for local authority housing by setting standards for consistency both in the treatment of their applications and information. It also provides for more choice for new and existing tenants in the social housing sector who are seeking a transfer, which is an important, but often overlooked, aspect of the Bill. It opens the way for choice-based lettings schemes, which give new applicants and existing tenants who wish to transfer to another property more say in choosing where they live from the properties available to let that are appropriate to their needs. That is the best means of meeting the long-term housing requirements of those who need social housing in a way that is sustainable both for individuals and the community; it will create more solid and lasting communities. The Government's vision for the future of social housing is to increase choice and customer-centred approaches while continuing to meet housing need. The challenge for pilot schemes in choice-based letting is to examine how choice and need can be better integrated.

Our proposals for strengthening the protection available to homeless people go beyond the measures in the Bill. We have recently consulted on a priority needs order under the 1996 Housing Act, about which the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) asked, to extend the categories of homeless households with a priority need for suitable temporary accommodation. The order will ensure that, where necessary, local authorities must secure suitable accommodation for 16 and 17-year-olds. Wherever possible, we hope that efforts are made to reconcile those young people with their families and allow them to return home; but where there is real estrangement and 16 or 17-year-olds cannot return home, there can be no question that they will be at risk if they have nowhere to live and are forced out on the streets. It is right that housing authorities should provide a safety net in such cases and arrange appropriate accommodation and support.

The order will also give priority need to people who are vulnerable as a result of fleeing their home because of violence. Evidence demonstrates that a high proportion of people who end up sleeping rough come from institutional backgrounds, including people who have been in care, prisons, long-stay hospitals or the Army. Discussions earlier this evening demonstrated the concern of many Members about those people. The order will extend priority need to young people aged 18 to 21 who have previously been in care and the other groups which I mentioned. The key test in all cases will be whether the applicants are vulnerable. I hope that the House will agree

that a proper statutory safety net for vulnerable people is essential to protect them from the damage that homelessness and rough sleeping can inflict on them and to help them rebuild their lives.

The Bill represents a big step along the road to achieving the Government's goal of ensuring that everyone has a decent home. It will help all social tenants by promoting choice and encouraging local authorities to adopt customer-centred letting schemes that give people more say in where they live. Most of all, it will deliver on the Government's commitment to social justice by giving extra protection to the most vulnerable people, making sure that they have a roof over their heads. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.20 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in favour of the Bill, which, as Ministers know, has received support from the official Opposition throughout its passage. However, I am a little disappointed that although he was to have opened the debate on Third Reading, the Secretary of State is unfortunately not with us this evening. I dare say that he is preparing for tomorrow's debate, and well might he do so.

I said that we support the Bill, although as has been clear throughout its passage and through the detailed and very good debate on Report, that does not mean that we have not had questions about its operation, or that we do not continue to have reservations about its impact. Those issues were ably raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on Report.

As my hon. Friend pointed out early in his remarks, the measures that we are supporting tonight first appeared in a somewhat different guise as part of the Homes Bill, which was introduced prior to the election. It is worth recording again that had the Government not chosen to introduce in that Bill their ill-thought-out and unpopular measures relating to sellers' packs, the measures contained in the Homelessness Bill could have been on the statute book somewhat earlier.

As the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) observed, that delay gave Ministers time for reflection. From the comments made on Report, I hope that Ministers will accept that despite their time for reflection, there are still grave concerns about the full implications of some aspects of the Bill when they come into force. Despite the Minister's remarks on Third Reading, we must say that although we support measures in the Bill, it will not transform overnight the problem of homelessness in Britain.

I hope that Ministers have had time over the summer to reflect on the Government's record on homelessness. Before coming into government, the Labour party made a number of promises about the way in which it would tackle the problems of homelessness and empty homes. Back in 1996, the Prime Minister told a Labour housing conference that Labour would

"do everything in our power to end the scandal of homelessness, to tackle the spectacle of people sleeping rough on the streets and to end the waste of families sleeping in bed and breakfast accommodation."

During the various stages of the Bill's passage there has been debate on the figures for homelessness. It is worth putting on the record that the latest statistics from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which were issued in September, show that priority homelessness in England has risen from 102,650 in 1997–98 to 114,350 in 2000–01, and that the number of homeless in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has also risen from 4,500 households in the second quarter of 1997 to 11,340 in the second quarter of 2001.

Another statistic that is relevant to our debate on homelessness was mentioned on Report by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), who raised the important matter of empty properties. I entirely agree with him that in tackling homelessness, the issue of empty properties must be a priority. Again, before coming into government, the Prime Minister said:

"We need an emergency programme to reduce the number of empty properties, including those held by government departments."

Yet, as the figures stated by the hon. Member for Stafford show, there are a significant number of empty properties in the United Kingdom. From April 1997 to April 2000—the last period for which departmental figures are available—the amount of empty council housing in England has risen by 7 per cent. Local authorities and the Government need to address the issue of empty properties as a matter of priority. We all know the frustrations that constituents feel when they are desperate for housing and they see empty properties down the road. They cannot understand why something cannot be done.

I shall refer to press reports from earlier this year. For example, in June, *The Northern Echo* referred to an estate in Bishop Auckland. It stated:

"The tidy, well-kept gardens have been replaced with rows of burnt-out, boarded-up homes and overgrown gardens."

The *Western Daily Press* referred to the Upper Horfield estate in Bristol. The article read:

"Gardens of the boarded-up homes have become dumping grounds".

The Observer referred to the Halton Moor estate in Leeds. It stated:

"There are few people about because large numbers of the houses are empty, boarded up and vandalised."

Earlier this evening the Minister said that the question of empty properties is often complex. I accept that there are issues that often go beyond the efficiency of a local authority in dealing with its properties. However, there are complex issues connected with behaviour on estates that need to be considered. Problems on estates caused by drugs, vandalism and antisocial behaviour may make other residents move out, which means that properties are left empty and derelict. If we are to tackle homelessness, we cannot allow a significant number of properties to lie empty. They are often derelict, and effectively they are going to waste. At the same time, there are people who are desperate for homes. They need to occupy those empty properties.

The Government cannot rest on the laurels of their performance so far in tackling homelessness. The Bill will not wave a magic wand over the problem. However, I hope that it will encourage local authorities to take a more wide-ranging approach, to make it easier for them to tailor allocations to local circumstances and needs and enable them to provide greater variety of choice for those who find themselves homeless and reliant on the local authority or other providers for support.

I welcome especially the objective of dealing with those who are at risk of violence other than domestic violence. It is sad that that problem needs to be

[Mrs. Theresa May]

incorporated within a homelessness policy, but it is necessary to do so. I welcome the fact that the Government will be dealing with it. I welcome also the proposals to deal especially with young people who are vulnerable and homeless. My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) specifically referred to the scandal of the treatment of many young people who have been in local authority care. I hope that the Bill will go some way to provide the badly needed support for such young people.

The transitional arrangements for the new system include the abolition of housing registers and increased flexibility for the increased priority categories. It is important that those who are on housing registers with local authorities have full information about the transition and the new arrangements that will come into place. I am sure that we all know from constituency cases that problems can occur when people are given insufficient or inaccurate information about housing that relates to their local authority and their local area. It is important that everybody is made aware of the new arrangements and understands why they have been brought into place.

I shall comment briefly on the national homelessness strategy and the consultation that the Government have launched on it. It might seem slightly odd that at a time before the Bill is to be enacted, when the Government have only just launched their consultation exercise, we hear about a strategy that will set out action by central Government and local government to tackle homelessness. Perhaps the Minister will explain how the strategies that local authorities develop in response to the Bill will fit in with the national homelessness strategy.

Many reasons exist for the increase in homelessness, not least the way in which the Government have made the housing benefit rules more difficult for local authorities to apply. The myriad regulatory changes—almost one a fortnight—that they have introduced in recent years make it difficult for those who administer the rules. That has caused genuine problems for people, as the better regulation taskforce and the local government ombudsman have recently shown. It often means that people lose their homes because of problems dealing with the regulations.

We have questioned several other aspects of the Bill, and we await the full implications of its operation and its impact on homeless people. However, we share the Government's hope that the measure will enable local authorities to produce wider-ranging, more innovative approaches to homelessness in their areas. We hope that they will consider tackling their local circumstances and needs more flexibly. The different issues that different parts of the country experience will thus be addressed. I trust that, consequently, we can all look forward to making better provision for the genuine needs of those who become unintentionally homeless.

9.31 pm

David Wright: I concur with the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) about the quality of the debate on the amendments and on wider housing issues.

I am pleased that the Bill has been introduced early in the Parliament; that shows the importance of housing issues to Labour Members. However, there has been a welcome consensus about the need to drive the measure through.

Before I was elected to Parliament, I spent 13 years working in housing in the west midlands, dealing with the direct housing needs of local people and developing housing strategies for wider investment.

The Bill emanates from the housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all", which was published in April 2000. It is to the Government's great credit that they produced the most comprehensive statement on housing for more than 20 years.

The Government have declared an ambitious programme of housing investment in the next 10 years to secure a decent home for all. That largely involves activity to improve housing conditions in a framework of renewed neighbourhoods. However, a key policy strand must be to assist those in greatest need: homeless people.

I want to cover several issues that relate to the Bill and consider the way in which it will fit into the wider housing agenda. It requires housing authorities to adopt a strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness. I especially welcome the emphasis on partnerships with social services departments, registered social landlords and the voluntary sector. However, it is essential for the homelessness strategy to integrate fully with each local authority's wider housing and development objectives. The strategies should contain specific proposals for securing more affordable housing in urban and rural areas.

Estimates by independent studies suggest that between 80,000 and 100,000 homes are needed annually to meet existing demand. I believe that many planning authorities do not use the powers that are available to them under planning policy guidance note 3 or section 106 agreements sufficiently aggressively to secure homes for rent, allied to new development. The Government could do much work on that to supplement the Bill.

More resources are also needed through the Housing Corporation's approved development programme to deliver new rented homes. If authorities are to create homelessness strategies, they need also to adopt specific targets in their development plans for rented homes. The Government need to think about providing a more specific definition of affordable housing for target setting. At the moment, affordable housing targets in development plans do not include specific proposals on rented homes. If they did, it would be a particular advantage in alliance with the Bill.

In delivering the homelessness strategy required by the Bill, authorities will need to give careful consideration to the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Targets are needed to reduce its usage, which currently costs the public purse more than £150 million. The private rented sector will also figure as a resource in most strategies to tackle homelessness. We have to acknowledge the massive scale of disrepair in the private rented sector, and we need a more effective national strategy to intervene in that area. Licensing for houses in multiple occupation will be important, but we also need to develop co-ordinated clearance and redevelopment strategies for areas beyond the reach of effective rehabilitation schemes.

The best local authority homelessness strategies required by the Bill will focus in great detail on the special needs of individuals presenting themselves as homeless. A range of specialist housing provision with tailored support will be needed, usually linked to employment and training opportunities. There are opportunities for local authorities to ensure that that

will happen. When local authorities' housing investment programme submissions are considered, Ministers and officials will need to think, when ranking local authorities, how effective they have been in delivering the homelessness strategy in their area. That can be directly carried out, and authorities are currently graded in terms of their housing investment programme strategy. This element of work on homelessness should be a key component of that ranking and, therefore, a key mechanism through which resources can be distributed to the best local authorities.

In relation to the requirements on housing authorities, the abolition of the two-year time limit under clause 6 is particularly welcome. From experience, I can report that the current provisions are illogical and create great uncertainty in circumstances in which most local authorities act reasonably towards homeless applicants.

It is important that the Bill places the emphasis on the local authority to be proactive through the repeal of section 197 of the Housing Act 1996. Local authorities should be in a position to offer advice and assistance to people needing suitable accommodation. The current provisions, under which local authorities can largely sidestep the legislation and offer advice and assistance only when accommodation is available in their area, are not successful.

The element of the Bill that amends part V of the 1996 Act and prompts further choice is welcome in the context of creating sustainable communities. The Bill will support major progress being made on the neighbourhood renewal agenda. We need to generate a greater degree of tenure and income diversification on many estates, as identified by the social exclusion unit policy action team reports. Rented housing must be seen as a positive choice, rather than the tenure of last resort. For too long, we have allowed rented housing to be stigmatised, and have compounded that through inflexibility in the allocations process. The delivery of allocations needs to be transparent, but we also need to allow greater local letting activity, developed in partnership with local communities. In my experience, that can work very successfully if local people are given the opportunity to consider details in full. People are very flexible, and are willing to be accommodating to people who need to be housed.

It is important to consider the impact of the Bill on different housing markets across the country. It is clearly appropriate to set out a national position on homelessness, as the Bill does. However, it will be applied and used differently according to how local housing markets operate. There is massive pressure from homelessness in some areas, particularly in London and the south-east, where housing costs, land supply and economic migration create overwhelming demand. That is also the case in some other areas.

However, in many parts of the midlands and the north of England, there is a major problem of low demand and abandonment. Disrepair, antisocial behaviour, stigmatisation of rented housing and economic change have led to a spiral of decline in certain neighbourhoods. In areas of low demand, strategies developed under the auspices of the Bill will be radically different from those developed in, say, the London boroughs. The Government will need to consider regionally distinct approaches to those strategies and avoid a "one size fits all" response to housing market change. In many towns and cities, we shall need to consider the relatively new concept of housing market renewal areas, which will require significant co-ordination of Government resources. I hope that that will be a subject for further debate during this Parliament.

I note that housing, unlike many other matters that we debate in the House, touches all our lives. We all need and deserve good housing and this country has a long tradition of providing housing for those in greatest need. The Bill renews that commitment and is legislation with compassion at its heart. It is, however, only one component of a wider drive to give people quality and choice in the housing market, so I look forward to further Government proposals to transform people's living environment for the better.

9.40 pm

Mr. Don Foster: I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Telford (David Wright), who made an interesting and thoughtful speech from which many of us could have learned had he been able to make it when we began our deliberations many months ago.

The Minister rightly said that hon. Members on both sides of the House want to find ways to deliver a long-term reduction in the incidence of homelessness and that the Bill is a big step along the road. However, as the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) and other Members said, by itself it is insufficient. Much else needs to be done. The national homelessness strategy, which has been announced, will clearly play a key role in filling some gaps that cannot be filled by the Bill.

Important issues that must be addressed have been touched on—for example, the crucial issue of empty homes, which was referred to by the hon. Members for Stafford and for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). We might argue about the precise nature of the figures, but it is clear that the situation is obscene. There are about 750,000 empty properties and about 150,000 homeless households. We ought to be able to find far more effective ways of bringing those together.

Temporary accommodation is dealt with in the Bill, but much more needs to be done to reduce its use and to improve its quality and suitability. I am delighted to hear that the Minister is adamant that the work of the bed-and-breakfast unit and the new legislation on licensing houses in multiple occupation and other properties will target that issue.

We have debated how to help people who are already homeless, but we should not lose sight of the fact that the Bill refers to measures to prevent homelessness in the first instance. We have not dealt with that issue in detail, but I hope that the Minister will use every opportunity to draw attention to aspects of the strategies that local authorities must develop. We must make it a high priority. In that respect, she might be able to assist with a number of activities at national level, not least closer working relationships with mortgage lenders, to prevent some difficulties that people get into.

The Bill focuses on those in priority need, but it does not address the provision of support for non-priority homeless families and individuals. There is an urgent need to support those categories and to find more effective ways to deliver a service in all our local authorities, not only to priority categories but to non-priority categories of homeless people. I suggest to the Minister that the Government could quickly tackle one issue and thereby

[Mr. Don Foster]

provide enormous benefit. They should take urgent action to sort out housing benefit administration, which is a mess in so many places.

The Bill, important though it is, could be seen as rearranging the deckchairs. It is an important rearrangement that will provide great benefit, but unless we significantly increase the number of affordable houses we will not be able to provide the choice-based systems that we want local authorities to adopt. The House will be aware that the spending review is not far distant. Many of us will examine its outcomes to see what it contains on housing.

It is perhaps a strange occurrence that housing is the number one issue in the postbags of the vast majority of Members of Parliament and the number one issue raised in their advice surgeries, yet rarely have we debated housing. I am delighted that that is beginning to change, and that we have before us a Bill that, although not perfect, will provide great assistance to many of the least-well-off people in our society.

The Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), told us that in Committee we had frequently referred to the film "Groundhog Day". I suggest that that is not the best metaphor for what has happened tonight. Hon. Members will recall that in "Groundhog Day" events that started rather differently all ended up exactly the same. Today, we have tackled some of the issues that we have addressed before in a slightly different way, and we have made progress. We have had assurances from Ministers on various matters, and promises to consider issues in further detail. We have had assurances in respect of meetings with the Housing Corporation. I genuinely do not believe that "Groundhog Day" is the best analogy.

In Committee, I noted with interest that the Under-Secretary told us that his preferred film was not "Groundhog Day" but "Three Amigos" by John Landis. For those who wish to check the record, it is at column 23 on 10 July.

It strikes me that, regardless of the many differences that separate the major parties in the House and notwithstanding some minor differences, we have shown clear unanimity in our desire to see the Bill get on to the statute book as quickly as possible.

9.47 pm

Mr. Lepper: I welcome the provisions in the Bill. In my area, Brighton and Hove council is already doing many of the things that will be required of all local authorities. Preventive work through our housing advice centre has been important in preventing many local people from becoming homeless. We have devised a homelessness strategy, led by the local authority but involving, as hon. Members have said it should, the other partners in the development of that strategy, including the private sector.

However, there are constraints on what my local authority can do, especially under the Bill. Those constraints are the availability of social housing—only 15 per cent. of our housing stock is social housing compared with a national average of 22 per cent.—and the availability of affordable housing—87 per cent. of the households in housing need in my local authority area cannot afford suitable accommodation at market rents. In my area, the average price of a one-bedroom flat is £90,000, and the average rent for a one-bedroom flat is £583 per month. Average earnings per week are about £20 below the national average.

I welcome these measures, especially those relating to victims of violence and vulnerable young people. I welcome the Minister's assurance that they are only part of the strategy to deal with the problem of providing the housing that people deserve. Irrespective of the Bill, market forces determine that in the area that I and my hon. Friends the Members for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) and for Hove (Mr. Caplin) represent this will be only part of the weaponry that we need to deal with the problem of homelessness and threatened homelessness.

I seek the Minister's assurance that the Government will consider other measures to help to provide more affordable housing.

9.50 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am delighted to have at least a short time in which to sum up the debate. It has probably been one of the longest debates that we have had on homelessness for a long time. I am grateful to the Government for producing a Bill which, hopefully, will improve the current position rather than doing the opposite. As I said earlier, over the last three years the number of priority homeless has increased from 102,000 to 114,000. That is an unwelcome trend, which I hope the Bill will address.

Our Prime Minister recently vowed:

> "Our approach will be founded on the basic aim of ensuring that everyone has the chance to a decent home—both the majority who want to own their own homes and the minority who either cannot afford to buy or choose to rent."

We all say amen to that, and I hope that the Bill will help to achieve it. However, the record over the last four years is not over-promising.

Between 1993 and 1996, 150,600 new social dwellings were built by local authorities and registered social landlords, but, sadly, between 1997 and 2000, only 95,500 were constructed. The amount of new social housing has therefore fallen by 37 per cent. We must reverse that trend. Shelter has calculated—I think the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) mentioned this—that we need 100,000 houses over the next 10 years, and I welcome the Government's funding which is aimed at achieving that. If we could achieve it, principally through registered social landlords but with capital levered in from the private sector—

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I have very little time, but I will give way just once.

David Taylor: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that levering in private funds through "coerce transfer" of housing stock from good local authorities is a totally vacuous concept that does not bring in a single penny piece?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I rather wish that I had not given way to the hon. Gentleman. I have always got on well

with him in the House, but I could not disagree more strongly with what he has just said. Government funding is of course one method by which we will improve our total housing stock, but I feel that the private sector has a major role to play. I have seen some very innovative new housing schemes in my constituency in which registered social landlords have combined with the private sector. Some involve local authority allocation, some involve shared ownership and some are purely in the rented sector. If the hon. Gentleman does not approve of that he does his constituents a great disservice, because what he recommends would mean many fewer registered social housing units being built in this country.

As I have said, I welcome the Bill, but it is a pity that it is slightly in a vacuum in that it does not consider the Government's overall homelessness strategy. I look forward to the legislation that will follow the strategy, to the licensing of houses in multiple occupation, and to measures tackling private landlords who abuse their position in the registered housing sector. All that was announced recently in a press release from, I believe, the Minister of State. So we have more legislation to come, and it will be interesting to see how this Bill fits in with it. It would also be interesting to know when the Government will produce that further legislation.

It is all very well to come up with legislation, but those on the ground have to operate it, and the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Some of the Government's actions have not been at all helpful in dealing with homelessness. In her excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) referred to the excessive changes in housing benefit regulations. The amount that we pay out in housing benefit has soared, not entirely under this Government, but over the past 10 years. Moreover, local authorities are finding it very difficult to implement the regulations, partly because they keep changing so often. There are between 70 and 80 circulars a year—more than one a week. There are particular difficulties where local authorities have contracted out the management of their housing benefit.

Sadly, time does not permit me to deal with other aspects of the Bill. Suffice it to say that I welcome provisions to deal with antisocial neighbours and the priority needs orders dealing with vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds and 18 to 21-year-olds.

I hope that the Bill will achieve what it is designed to achieve, but I have some doubts, and I wish that the Government had been prepared to accept some of our amendments.

9.56 pm

Dr. Whitehead: For once we have had a long, informed debate on housing with a solid result in the form of a Bill that has the support and approval of hon. Members on both sides of the House. There have been differences, which were aired and examined in Committee and in the Chamber, and there have been changes to the Bill as it has made its often tortuous way through the House. It must be a successful Bill because I know that success has many fathers, and there have been competing claims to the paternity of the changes. I am delighted that, overall, it has enjoyed solid support at all its parliamentary stages.

The hon. Members for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and for Bath (Mr. Foster) demonstrated, in different ways, their support for the Bill. We realise that homelessness will not be transformed overnight, but the Government have the target well within our sights and we are taking action in a number of ways, not least through the Bill. Other initiatives include action on rough sleepers, the bed-and-breakfast unit, the target of 100,000 new affordable homes—not by 2010 but by 2004—new, wide-ranging housing investment, and the homelessness strategy, which is intended to tackle the problem with central and local government and key stakeholders in the housing and voluntary sectors. The strategy will help to set the broad context within which housing authorities will prepare their homelessness reviews.

We must take a wider approach to homelessness and housing need. I was delighted to hear the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright), who is new to the House but clearly demonstrated his great expertise. He will be a great asset to the House in housing matters. He is right to say that we must have a broad strategy, underpinned by the Government's actions. That approach was endorsed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper).

The Bill will strengthen the protection available to homeless people and will encourage local housing authorities to adopt customer-centred lettings schemes. Taken with the Government's sound economic policies, our substantial increases in capital investment in housing and the wider policies that we are pursuing following last year's housing policy statement, the Bill will help us to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent home. The Bill reflects our decency towards each other in society, whatever our circumstances. The House can be proud to support it, and I trust that it will receive a Third Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 19th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Question agreed to.

Abandoned Vehicles

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

10 pm

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak on a problem that has been causing me, my constituents and many other hon. Members great concern in the past three years—abandoned vehicles, or more accurately, abandoned cars. No one living in Britain today can have failed to notice the number of burned out and rusting hulks that are being dumped on the streets of our towns, in the playgrounds of our schools, in the car parks of our businesses and on the verges of our country lanes. Some of those cars stay in place for months. They provide a dangerously unsafe playground for our children and amusement for our vandals, who occasionally set them on fire.

In the past two years in my constituency, the number of cars removed and scrapped has increased by 67 per cent. However, it is a countrywide problem. Last year, in Birmingham, 10,000 cars were dumped and scrapped; in Dagenham more than 4,000 cars were dumped and scrapped, which is a 41 per cent. increase; and in Glasgow 2,000 cars were dumped and scrapped.

The reason behind the sudden proliferation of abandoned vehicles is simple. Scrap metal dealers used to pay drivers about £50 for their old cars; now drivers have to pay scrap metal dealers £50 to get rid of their cars. The change is due to a decline in the global market for scrap metal since 1998. Three years ago, scrap metal was worth £60 a tonne, but now it is worth only £3 a tonne. The worldwide decline in the price of scrap metal has led to a countrywide increase in the number of abandoned cars, costing councils such as mine and those of my hon. Friends a great deal of time and money.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems with abandoned cars is the length of time they have to be stored? Councils such as my own London borough of Merton have to pay to store such cars, so that a car's value is soon exceeded by the cost to the council of storing it.

Barbara Follett: That is precisely right. As many councils like mine have nowhere to store abandoned cars, the cars tend to be stored on our streets and in our lanes.

Contractors charge local councils a minimum of £25 per vehicle to remove cars, and many staff hours have to be worked before local councils can be legally rid of cars. Local authorities have the power to recover the costs of disposing of dumped cars from their owners, but as ownership is almost impossible to prove or incredibly expensive to prove, that power is more theoretical than practical. Currently, Stevenage borough council, like most other councils in the United Kingdom, is providing an almost free service to car owners who cannot or will not pay for their vehicles to be scrapped.

Depending on how it is implemented, the European Union end-of-life vehicles directive, which comes into force in April 2002, could make matters significantly more difficult and expensive for councils in the short term. The directive will impose strict controls on the hazardous components of end-of-life vehicles. It will also make the recycling of batteries, tyres and oil a priority. Under the European end-of-life vehicles directive, recycling can be done only after the vehicle has been transferred to an authorised treatment facility. How many councils have such a facility? I know that my council does not have one. Although all that is highly commendable and very desirable, it will significantly add to the cost, the complexity and, even worse, the time required to dispose of those vehicles.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the current long-winded process of removing abandoned and burned out cars is completely incomprehensible to our constituents who suffer that degradation in their neighbourhood?

Barbara Follett: I could not agree more. The way in which this problem brings down neighbourhoods is terrible. In one neighbourhood in my constituency, 10 or 12 cars are parked to a street. They are removed, but a week later they are back.

I am here tonight to ask the Government to act now to reduce the financial and administrative burden on local authorities. It is expected that when the directive comes into place in April, local councils could be charged anything between 50 per cent. and 250 per cent. more per vehicle than they are now.

There are four ways in which we can help. First and foremost we can shorten the period of notice required before councils can legally remove and scrap a vehicle. At present, the length of time is seven days. In my opinion, those are seven wasted days, as drivers almost never reclaim their vehicles. In a recent pilot scheme in Medway, around 600 abandoned vehicles were removed without notice and scrapped. I believe that only one driver came forward to reclaim his vehicle.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): One of the reasons why the scheme was so successful was that the DVLA and the local authority were operating together. If we allowed local authority officers to use DVLA legislation, they could react much quicker. The current legislation is the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978, which many of us—particularly my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment—will remember was not Labour's finest year in terms of collecting rubbish. We need to bring the two powers together.

Barbara Follett: I could not agree more. Indeed, my second point is that we should ensure that all local authorities have an electronic link to the DVLA. This would enable them to trace the last registered owner swiftly. My borough council has such a link, but unlike the local police, they have to pay for it. Could Ministers consider providing local councils with such a link free of charge, as they do for the police?

Thirdly, we could make the DVLA's registration process more effective so that the final owner of a vehicle can be accurately identified and action taken if they abandon their car. Fourthly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) said, we can encourage the DVLA and the police to work in partnership with local councils to speed up the disposal of abandoned vehicles. For example, a 12-week partnership called Cube It was launched at the beginning of the month

in Gravesham. Council officers there are working with the police and posting untaxed cars with notices. The DVLA's contractors come in immediately and remove them for scrapping. They then fold them into cubes, which is why the scheme is called Cube It.

Finally, it might be helpful if drivers of cars that are over three years old were obliged to display their MOT certificates on the windscreens of their cars. If a car was neither taxed nor had its MOT certificate—in other words, if it were deemed unroadworthy—and appeared to be abandoned, local authorities could be given the right to remove it and scrap it at once.

I know that the measures I have outlined are short term and do not address all the problems caused by the increase in abandoned vehicles and the introduction of the European directive. However, something has to be done urgently to prevent the proliferation of rusting hulks across our once green and pleasant land. Local authorities need national Government help now to tackle this problem. This is what I and other hon. Members are seeking tonight.

10.8 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): With the leave of my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, I will make a brief contribution.

You will know, Mr. Speaker, that hundreds of Members of all parties have asked you for debates on this issue, which is a matter of concern across the country and across all parties. You will know also that the Prime Minister raised the issue in a speech on 26 April this year. One might not think that this was an issue worthy of prime ministerial speeches, but it is of great concern—a quality of life issue—for people in towns and cities throughout the land. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage on raising the issue tonight.

I have taken the liberty of talking to a large number of Members, and I want to distil briefly what colleagues have told me are their priorities, which are shared by Nottingham city council and Nottinghamshire constabulary.

First, notices to remove vehicles under the Amenities Act 1978 should have immediate effect rather than being implemented only after seven days; otherwise, those vehicles are joyridden, abandoned and smashed in, and then another group of youngsters may set fire to them.

Secondly, we should extend to police and local authorities the powers that my hon. Friend mentioned, in line with those of the DVLA, to remove untaxed vehicles within one day, which would require amendments to the Road Traffic Act 1988.

Thirdly, we should provide greater resources to the DVLA to increase countrywide coverage for checking untaxed vehicles. At present, one contractor is employed to cover the whole country and has to move around from area to area.

Fourthly, there must be a greater use of police discretion in removing hazardous or obstructing vehicles. Again, a simple, cost-free guidance note from the Home Secretary to all local authorities and police would enable that to happen.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does my hon. Friend agree that nearly all abandoned vehicles are hazardous, because they are potential bombs? In Slough, the average abandoned vehicle—there are plenty to choose from—is burned out in short order, and is very dangerous because young children are involved.

Mr. Allen: We all know that, and our constituents know it, but unfortunately the police have to be extremely careful about the legal position. A clear and explicit guidance note would give them the security to act immediately on those problems.

Fifthly, greater use should be made of existing powers to prosecute those who abandon cars, linked into the faster track system of registered keepers to which my hon. Friend referred. Many vehicles change hands for a few pounds in the pub and nobody bothers to register them, making life extremely difficult for the police. People who abandon cars should also get penalty points on their licence for all future vehicles.

Many Labour Members are present and any one of them—along with 200 or 300 others—could speak on the subject.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that many local authorities, and indeed the police, are getting a very poor press on the issue, when it is no fault of theirs? Many authorities are doing a lot to tackle the issue in innovative and imaginative ways, but the legislation does not allow them to take the steps that we and our constituents so want them to take.

Mr. Allen: My hon. Friend makes the point eloquently. All we are asking, as a group of Members of Parliament, is that the Government take a number of simple, clear and almost entirely cost-free measures. They are small technical changes that will be welcomed in every town and city throughout the land. I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister not to delay on this heartland issue but to introduce a package of simple measures as soon as he can.

10.13 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) on securing this debate on an issue that is unquestionably of concern not only in Stevenage but throughout the country. The fact that so many of my hon. Friends have attended the debate and made a series of sensible points that the Government will take very seriously in the consultation that is now under way is an indication of the importance that we attach to the subject—but I note that not a single Opposition Member is here.

We are well aware that abandoned vehicles are a major and growing headache not only for Stevenage borough council but for many local authorities in England. My hon. Friend was right to mention the change in the scrap metal price and the fact that one now has to pay the car breakers to collect a car, rather than receiving money for it. That is the nub of the problem.

The number of old vehicles dumped in Britain last year is estimated at one third of a million, and the level of dumping has increased enormously in recent years. All too often vehicles are abandoned in residential streets, where, as my hon. Friends have said, they quickly become an eyesore and attract the attention of vandals. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Slough

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

(Fiona Mactaggart) said, in the worst cases they become an explosive nightmare. Many are burned out, which places an increasing burden on the fire service. The police, too, have to get involved when abandoned vehicles are in a condition that is dangerous to members of the public and to children who, unfortunately, find them particularly attractive.

Local authorities often have difficulty in tracing the last known keeper of a vehicle—I shall return to that problem in a moment—and are thus unable often to recover the costs of dealing with such vehicles. Those problems are now being accentuated because of the falling price of scrap metal and the fact that the value of old cars has fallen, as a result of which we know that old cars are changing hands in an informal market, without documentation, for no more than a few pounds.

What action are the Government taking? That is what my hon. Friends want me to tell them. Since the election, my Department and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have been working together on proposals for tackling the problem of abandoned vehicles.

The main proposals are as follows. We shall reduce the present notice periods used by local authorities, so that abandoned vehicles can be removed more quickly and efficiently, thus reducing the risk of vandalism and the likelihood that a particular vehicle will be reported as abandoned several times in different places. That will reduce costs. We shall also enable local authorities to use the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's wheel-clamping powers to remove unlicensed vehicles—possibly by acting as the DVLA's contractor—and provide better access to the DVLA's records. I shall return to that point in a moment.

In the longer term, it is proposed to change vehicle registration and licensing procedures to ensure that the DVLA's vehicle record is more accurate—although this would almost certainly require primary legislation. I am happy to tell the House that we now aim to consult on proposals resulting from those recommendations in the very near future.

What action is being taken by the DVLA? The DVLA has an interest in tackling unlicensed vehicles, which up to 80 per cent. of abandoned vehicles are. The agency operates a nationwide scheme to wheel-clamp and impound unlicensed vehicles to tackle the problem of vehicle excise duty evasion. To date, about 71,000 vehicles have been clamped or impounded, and about half of these have been disposed of, mainly by crushing. The scheme is proving very successful, and has already encouraged more than 384,000 extra motorists to relicense voluntarily—although "voluntarily" is a bit of a term of art. That brings in more than £47 million in additional revenue, which is quite useful.

Siobhain McDonagh: I am sure that all Members will be pleased with the increase in revenue and the effect of the DVLA tow-away vehicles, but I do not know whether my right hon. Friend is aware that there are only two tow-away teams in Greater London. That means that each constituency is visited less than once a year. Would it not be better to double, or even triple, the number of tow-away teams, given the high incidence of untaxed cars in the capital?

Mr. Meacher: It certainly would, and we intend to do exactly that.

A national scheme to detect vehicle excise duty evasion, using automated number plate reader camera systems, was launched on 11 October in London. The system, called Stingray, is van based and operated by DVLA staff. The system will be used to supplement the police and other enforcement agencies in detecting and deterring VED evasion.

A number of pilot schemes are being run to counteract the problem of unlicensed and abandoned vehicles. We look to the success of those pilot schemes in order to roll out similar schemes nationally. The first began in Kent, as my hon. Friend said—I cannot remember his constituency. [HON. MEMBERS: "Chatham and Aylesford".] How could I forget Aylesford after all the discussions? The first pilot scheme began in Kent, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) mentioned. It began on 22 January and involved the agency joining forces with Kent police, Kent county council, Medway borough council and Kent fire service. For the first time, the agency's wheel-clamping contractor targeted abandoned vehicles under the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978—to which several of my hon. Friends referred—as well as wheel-clamping unlicensed vehicles. The pilot scheme ran for eight weeks. It was called Operation Cubit, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage said—she gave the correct derivation of the name—and resulted in more than 700 vehicles being removed and destroyed. The downside was that the number of vehicle fires increased significantly, presumably as the local villains sought to destroy forensic evidence—you cannot win them all—but that is not a reason for not continuing or extending the project.

Mr. Shaw: As my right hon. Friend said, several hundred vehicles were removed from the streets of the Medway towns, including many in my constituency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) pointed out, the removal of those cars also meant the freeing up of several hundred legitimate parking spaces, especially for people who live in terraced housing where parking is at a premium.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is right. It is a win-win-win situation. It stops offenders, collects more money, ensures that the DVLA has more accurate information and provides more parking spaces, which are also none too available in London.

Two pilot schemes in London—in Newham and Lewisham—are looking at the scope for local authorities to use the DVLA's powers to wheel-clamp abandoned vehicles and remove them after 24 hours—I stress that time, because it is significant. Since 9 April, more than 900 vehicles in Newham have been wheel-clamped, with more than 460 released on payment of fees. More than 250 vehicles have been destroyed, mainly by crushing. The remainder are in the pound awaiting their fate. Lewisham experienced similar, albeit lower, figures.

If those pilots are successful, the Prime Minister has said—as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) pointed out, the Prime Minister

regarded it as significant enough to make it an important item in a speech earlier this year—consideration will be given to rolling out the scheme more widely. The initial assessment of the schemes suggests the makings of a solution to the problem.

Keeping the vehicle register up to date is also an important part of our armoury. The DVLA is very much aware that if the enforcement of abandoned vehicles is to be improved, and it is to support initiatives such as congestion charging and speed and red light camera enforcement, the vehicle register has to be accurate, up to date and capable of identifying the vehicle owner. Without that ability, there is no effective sanction against those who dump cars, and it is not possible for local authorities and the police to recover the costs of removing dumped cars.

The DVLA register is estimated to be up to 94 per cent. accurate, but it is clear that there is a significant hard core of vehicles for which it is not possible to trace a current owner. Those are also the vehicles that tend to be uninsured, without an MOT certificate, to be involved in fail-to-stop accidents and to flout parking and speed regulations. They are also the cars that are most likely to be abandoned. Targeting those cars effectively is critical. Car owners are under a legal obligation to notify the DVLA when they transfer a vehicle, but a minority of owners deliberately avoid notification to avoid the costs of keeping their cars taxed, insured and roadworthy, and to escape detection by enforcement cameras.

Keepers are under a legal obligation to notify the DVLA when they transfer a vehicle, but there is a minority that deliberately avoid notification in order to avoid the costs of keeping their cars taxed, insured and roadworthy, and to escape detection by enforcement cameras. They are, inevitably, largely old and low-value cars. Action is taken against those who refuse to comply when they are identified. Last year the DVLA pursued more than 36,000 motorists for failure to notify it of changes to vehicle ownership. That, of course, is only the tip of the iceberg. We need to consider how this hard core of vehicles can be brought within the system.

I believe that the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 has allowed some important initiatives to be launched. For example, the requirement for those applying for duplicate vehicle registration documents to provide proof of identity, making it more difficult for traders to sell on vehicles without documentation, is a useful extra weapon in our armoury, but we recognise that more needs to be done. The Government's consultation exercise will contain further proposals for tightening up the system and ensuring that the last recorded keepers of vehicles cannot avoid their responsibilities.

There are indications that the new procedure is fulfilling its objective of achieving higher compliance with registration requirements, thereby improving the accuracy of the information held on the DVLA's vehicle record.

Mr. Allen: My right hon. Friend has hit four of the five points that were of concern to many colleagues in my little round robin. To achieve the score of 10 out of 10, will he also deal with the question raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) and for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) about the removal of hazardous and obstructing vehicles and getting the definition right from the Home Office? If he does not have that information with him—I fully understand why that may be the case—will he undertake to write to me and to my hon. Friends about what the Home Office can do in that respect?

Mr. Meacher: I will. Burned-out vehicles are dangerous to children as they often contain noxious substances, as well as being an eyesore. Prompt action is needed to get these vehicles off the street immediately. The local police and the local authority must work together to achieve that. I understand that the arrangements in place in Stevenage borough council have been quite effective in this respect, and that the local police have a good record. I am keen to see more examples of such co-operation as it benefits all the parties involved. I will give a fuller answer to my hon. Friend's question in consultation with the Home Office.

I was trying to achieve five out of five, if not 10 out of 10, by referring to end-of-life vehicles which are an important part of the equation. The end-of-life vehicles directive's aim is to reduce and prevent waste produced from old vehicles. The directive is not about abandoned vehicles except in the sense that they often tend to be end-of-life vehicles. The directive introduces certain provisions which will require all end-of-life vehicles to be taken back and treated by authorised treatment facilities. The directive also requires producers to pay for all or a significant part of the cost of free takeback and treatment of an end-of-life vehicle from 2007 for vehicles made before 2002, and from 2002 for vehicles made from that date. That should reduce costs and ease the current burden of abandoned vehicles incurred by local authorities.

The directive also allows member states to fund free takeback and treatment between 2002 and 2007 at their discretion. That means that from 2007 the implementation of the directive should mean that local authorities should not have to pay for the takeback—

Barbara Follett: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way in the last seconds of his reply. Might he consider giving councils money under that takeback provision for European member countries?

Mr. Meacher: Obviously, that is an option. Under the European Union directive, that is at the discretion of member states. This is ultimately a matter for the Treasury, but the important point is that within a reasonably short time scale, local authorities, as a result of the operation of the directive itself, will be removed from the burden of the costs, which are considerable and growing.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 23 October 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Regional Government

1. **Rosemary McKenna** (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): What recent representations he has received on regional government. [5567]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): My ministerial colleagues and I have received a number of representations on this issue.

Rosemary McKenna: The Secretary of State will be aware of the success of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly in delivering local solutions to local problems. The case in point in Scotland—how foot and mouth was handled—is clear. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the next logical step is elected regional government in England?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the success of devolution through the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. A number of powers have been devolved to regional level because we have had an active regional policy in England since 1997. The difficulty and the real problem that we must now face is that decisions are being taken regionally with no democratic accountability. There is a democratic deficit in the regions of England. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] That does not meet with the approval of Conservative Members. We know their views on the regions. They neglected them for 18 years and did nothing about them. The Labour party in government has begun the process of devolving power to the regions, and in the new year we will produce a White Paper that will show how we can deliver on that commitment.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Does the Secretary of State not understand that it is the function of Members of Parliament from the regions to ensure democratic accountability for decisions that are taken in the regions? Will he accept that, given the derisory turnout in referendums in London and Wales, it would be an appalling and absurd waste of money to embark on referendums in the English regions?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman may want to deny people their voice, but if the people of the English regions want an elected assembly we should provide them with the opportunity to vote on that. If they choose not to have a regional assembly, that will be their decision. The important point is that decisions are currently being taken regionally in England by unelected bodies. Conservative Members are not involved in those decisions. We need to ensure that there is an element of democratic accountability. We believe that the English regions could be a powerhouse for the future. We want to ensure that they have the democratic accountability to deliver those policies.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government have not ruled out the possibility of one or more of the English regions having an elected assembly by the end of this Parliament?

Mr. Byers: I can confirm that progress is being made on the White Paper that the Deputy Prime Minister and I will publish in the new year. Regional elected assemblies could be voted on by the time of the next general election, depending on when it is called. We are making progress. I share my hon. Friend's desire for effective regionally elected bodies, and we are putting in place the measures that will see that in action.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In that case, how seriously should we take the Deputy Prime Minister's suggestion that that policy may not be delivered in the second term of a Labour Government, and may, heaven forbid, require a third term? What possible reason could there be for not giving the people of regions such as the north-east the opportunity to decide whether to have a regional assembly within the lifetime of this Parliament?

Mr. Byers: A third-term Labour Government will need to address many pressing issues, and we look forward to that. As the Deputy Prime Minister said clearly in his speech on Saturday, one of them will be the delivery of a constitutional settlement. That does not prevent progress from being made during this second term in English regions such as the north-east, which perhaps have a greater desire for a regional assembly than other parts of England. They can make progress more quickly, and I certainly want that to happen.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): May I urge my right hon. Friend to proceed with his policy on this matter with some caution? I do not detect a strong desire from the electorate in the north-west of England for yet another elected tier, which, in my view, does not have a clearly defined role in our political system.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend touches on two or three issues that will have an important bearing on how we carry forward the debate about elected regional bodies. The White Paper must say what the powers, the responsibilities and the functions of a regional assembly

will be, and how we can ensure that it has popular support in individual regions in England. If we do not address those issues, people will not vote for the establishment of regional assemblies. That is why there needs to be clarity and precision. People need to know exactly what they are voting for when we put the issue before them.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): When the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) was shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, he promised in 1997 that regional assemblies would go ahead only if independent auditors certified that no overall increase in public spending would ensue. Do the Government stand by that pre-election manifesto pledge, or are they determined to bury our shire counties through vindictive political dogma?

Mr. Byers: I stand by the 2001 Labour party manifesto. *[Interruption.]* Unlike the Conservatives, who set policies based on dogma in stone and never change them, we are prepared to listen to people's views. We want to act on the demand in some regions for elected assemblies. However, we have said that they will be introduced in areas of predominantly unitary authorities. We will thus overcome the problem that an additional tier of government would cause, and thereby ensure that public expenditure implications are limited.

Standard Spending Assessments

2. **Mr. Michael Foster** (Worcester): What plans he has to reform the standard spending assessment. [5568]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): We shall reform the current system to create a fair and transparent mechanism that enables councils to meet the needs of their communities. As we announced in the House on 20 July, those changes will be introduced in April 2003.

Mr. Foster: I look forward to a new funding mechanism, especially for education, that no longer disadvantages the children of Worcestershire. However, one more year of the old formula remains. Will my right hon. Friend consider some form of interim measure to help Worcestershire schools to close the funding gap?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out the unfairness in the current system; that is why it needs to change. We must acknowledge that unfairness exists. I have examined the figures for Worcestershire, other counties and metropolitan districts, and it is clear that a family of local authorities has been disadvantaged through the operation of the current formula. Effective change must therefore occur.

I am not sure that I can give my hon. Friend much comfort about the year ahead, but I am prepared to meet him and other colleagues to ascertain whether any interim measures can be put in place. Nowadays, a lot of money, especially for schools, goes directly to individual schools. Perhaps we could overcome some of the difficulties by using such mechanisms.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): As the Secretary of State implies, the real issue is the detail. When will he publish the details of the proposed new formula?

Mr. Byers: As the hon. Gentleman knows, many discussions are taking place with local government about the details and criteria for establishing a new formula. I hope that we shall be able to say something about it, but that will not happen until the new year. We aim to consult widely and introduce changes that will take effect by April 2003.

The current system of standard spending assessments has been in place for a decade or more. We must take our time to make sure that we get the changes right. I want the settlement for April 2003 to be open and transparent and to be seen to be fair. If it takes a few more months to achieve that, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is time well spent because the system will be far fairer than at present.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many people in local government believe that we have tended to overlook the fact that when the Tories introduced the poll tax and then the council tax, they simultaneously switched the percentage of funding from local government and national Government so that local government paid the larger portion? Does he therefore accept that if we change SSAs—previously grant-related expenditure assessments—the system will not be fairer or more acceptable unless we acknowledge that, in many parts of the country, we need to fund a larger share of local government expenditure at national level?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right that, as matters stand, approximately 25 per cent. on average of a local council's revenue is raised through council tax, and some 75 per cent. comes from central Government. That balance shifted dramatically because of the decision that was made when the poll tax was abolished. We intend to deal with the question of the balance of funding in a local Government White Paper, which will be published before the end of the year. It will thus be addressed before the changes are brought in through the standard spending assessment system.

My hon. Friend was right to point out that this is one part of an overall picture. We shall be looking at the matter as a whole to ensure that when we talk about fair funding for local councils we take account of balance as well as the formula.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The Secretary of State has stressed the importance of removing perverse incentives in the way in which central Government fund local services. What plans has he to reform the fire service component of the SSA, so that the welcome reductions in hoax calls announced on Friday lead to a reduction in the budgets for our fire services? Does he not consider it nonsensical that the fire authorities that have worked

hardest to reduce the number of hoax calls will be rewarded not with a boost in their budgets, but with a budget cut?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to one of the many issues that we are addressing, and has done so with his usual accuracy. This is clearly a criterion that militates against what we want: we are penalising success, and that should have no part to play in the standard spending assessment regime. When the details of our proposals are out for consultation, the hon. Gentleman will see that this is one of the things that we intend to change.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I hear what my right hon. Friend has said, but we were promised a reform in 1998. It is true that my right hon. Friend must get it right, but many parts of the country—particularly unitary authorities such as Stoke-on-Trent—suffer from major deprivation, and we are concerned about the funding gap that we shall experience between now and 2003. Will my right hon. Friend look again at the contingency fund that he talks about, and will he appreciate that, if the answer is to be matching funds, we do not have matching funds in Stoke-on-Trent, and we would want to be included in any meeting between him and unitary authorities?

Mr. Byers: I am acutely aware of the specific problems affecting Stoke-on-Trent, because my hon. Friend has drawn them to my attention more than once. She is, however, right to refer to the particular difficulties experienced by a number of the new unitary authorities in particular. We shall need to address that as part of the fundamental review.

I understand the concern that people feel. A review was promised in 1998, and progress has still not been made. I can tell my hon. Friend, however, that the review will go ahead, and will be in force in time for the April 2003 settlement. I believe that that will enable us to establish a fair system. In the interim, there are now ways in which money can get into local authorities over and above the SSA formula. Perhaps we should be looking at those if we wish to alleviate the problems faced by individual authorities.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Secretary of State has admitted from the Dispatch Box today that the current system of distribution of the revenue support grant is unfair. Is he aware that, during the past four years of Labour government, whereas the current system has taken £450 million away from London, it has taken £700 million away from the shire counties? That has caused council taxes to rise by four times the rate of inflation—or 40 per cent., in the case of my authority. How does that square with the right hon. Gentleman's 1997 manifesto pledge:

"New Labour is not about high taxes on ordinary families"?

When will he take realistic steps to end the unfairness?

Mr. Byers: First, I extend a warm welcome to the hon. Gentleman as he takes up his new responsibilities. I hope that it will not be too out of order for me to express the view that many Members on both sides of the House regret that he could not stick to his original portfolio. [*Laughter.*] Actually, I was making a serious point.

When the hon. Gentleman has a chance to look at the figures, he will see that we have, in fact, put in more money by way of the local government settlement. As for council tax increases, they are a matter for local determination. The important point is that, through the ballot box, local people can make their decisions about who they want to hold office locally. That is the best way: that is local democracy. Central Government are providing the resources, but the rest is for local determination.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I welcome the extra money that has been given to education under this Government compared with under the Conservative Government, but can my right hon. Friend ensure that when a new funding system is introduced, the damping mechanism will not continue to disadvantage authorities such as Cambridgeshire, which suffer under the current system?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point. For reasons often of good motive, procedures are introduced that, over time, have adverse consequences for individual authorities. I am conscious of authorities such as Cambridgeshire, which have been affected because of the damping arrangements that have been put in place. Certainly, when we consider the new arrangements, which will begin in April 2003, that is one issue that we shall want to examine properly.

Housebuilding (Hertfordshire)

4. **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): What representations he has received from councillors concerning housebuilding targets for Hertfordshire. [5570]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): My right hon. Friend has received no representations from individual councillors since comments were invited in November 2000 on the proposed changes to housing distribution, although local authorities made representations. There have been no representations since the final figures were announced in March 2001.

Mr. Prisk: Given the Government's clear commitment to reduce social exclusion, can the Minister confirm that in Hertfordshire and elsewhere she will not allow housing intended for affordable homes to be replaced with more expensive market housing?

Ms Keeble: The Government's approach is to ensure that there is an element of affordable housing in any housing application. That is clearly set out in the guidelines. We have also set out figures for housing densities. Our proposals will ensure that we provide for good-quality housing in urban areas and for people in all income brackets and that we protect greenfield and green belt areas.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): I confirm to the Minister that councillors in Milton Keynes and the business community take a similar view

to that expressed by Hertfordshire councillors—we need greater emphasis on affordable housing. In particular, will she ensure that the current study of housing need in the Bedfordshire-Northamptonshire-Milton Keynes triangle considers the successful model of Milton Keynes and its development corporation as a way to carry forward plan-led development, including affordable housing to the north of Milton Keynes?

Ms Keeble: The Government are well aware of the need to ensure that there is adequate affordable housing. That point has been raised by Members on both sides of the House. We shall certainly ensure that all the lessons that can be learned from the study in the Northamptonshire-Milton Keynes area are considered carefully and applied nationally.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Is the Minister aware that the urban capacity study commissioned by the incoming Conservative-controlled Hertfordshire council administration shows that there are enough brownfield sites in Hertfordshire on which to build all the houses needed not only up to 2016, but up to 2024, without needing to build on the green belt? Will she therefore take steps to rescind the approval disastrously given by the Deputy Prime Minister when he was Secretary of State for the Labour-Liberal plan to build an unprecedented number of houses on the green belt in Hertfordshire—an approval which will damage every county in the country with a green belt to protect?

Ms Keeble: I am aware of the capacity study being done by the new administration and I understand that it is studying the figures and deciding how best to take matters forward. I am also aware that the capacity study shows that the administration can provide for its target housing in the space that it has. It is not possible for me to comment on individual planning applications.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Is my hon. Friend aware that the sites that Conservative-controlled Hertfordshire county council has identified in my constituency are bits of green verge and small sections of greenfield land in an already congested town? It wants to protect areas in other parts of the county, but the need for the development west of Stevenage is clear. It is absolutely essential, as otherwise problems will be caused in my own constituency.

Ms Keeble: I repeat that I cannot comment on an individual planning application. Part of the proposals in policy planning guidance 3 provide for a sequential test, which would mean that the most appropriate sites for development should be taken first. It is important that that consequential test is properly applied to protect both greenfield areas and existing communities.

Congestion Tax (London)

5. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): If he will exercise his veto over the introduction of the congestion tax in London. [5571]

10. **Geraint Davies** (Croydon, Central): What assessment he has made of the impact of congestion charging in London on rail capacity. [5576]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Under the Greater London Authority Act 1999, the Mayor is required to seek the Secretary of State's approval only to his 10-year expenditure plan for the use of revenues from the scheme. I understand that the Mayor will submit the plan when he has considered the results of the recent public consultations.

When he does so, one of the issues that will need to be resolved is the provision for diverted commuters and the financing of that provision.

Richard Ottaway: I am surprised by that answer. If the Minister reads section 143 of the 1999 Act, he will find that he has powers to make directions. I am surprised that he does not make such directions. It was only last May—if I may have the Minister's attention—that the Labour party was campaigning against the congestion tax in the elections for the Greater London Authority. Will not the hon. Gentleman accept that the fundamental premise of the congestion tax has changed with the introduction of season tickets, which is likely to increase traffic and not decrease it? There will be a tax on congestion, not a congestion tax. I suggest that the Minister should return to the drawing board and adhere to his election pledges.

Mr. Spellar: I shall clarify the constitutional position. The Mayor and Transport for London are able to draw up the plan. The Department's discretion relates to the use of moneys obtained and financing in terms of commuters who may previously have travelled into London by car and who have now been diverted to other forms of transport. That is tied in with financial considerations. Considerable consultation is taking place. In some instances, it has been increased at the request of certain local authorities.

There are differing views throughout London within parties as well as within other groups. Issues are arising that stem possibly from some of the consequences not only on the periphery of the congestion charging area but further out. Those are issues on which there will have to be consultation. They will have to be drawn together and resolved. When that has happened, the Mayor will present his plan. It will need to be both practical and acceptable to the people of London.

Geraint Davies: When celebrations over the demise of Railtrack have subsided, will my right hon. Friend give careful consideration to building on the tripartite body of the Strategic Rail Authority, Transport for London and the Government in providing strategic investment for railways in London, and to extending that programme to operational management so that, alongside congestion charges, we can move towards a truly integrated system of buses, trams and trains enabling Londoners to move about more easily?

Mr. Spellar: Although it is north of the river, the tripartite body has made considerable progress with crossrail, which is of huge interest to the City and the business community. We are moving on and we have appointed Sir Christopher Benson as chair of crossrail.

My hon. Friend must acknowledge that many of the rail lines and routes originate from outside the London area. To put that system into the control of Transport for London, where accountability lies with voters in London, might cause considerable concern in surrounding areas of the south-east development area and the eastern region. There are broader issues that would have to be resolved. Integration of transport modes is extremely important, and co-operation between the various bodies is not precluded.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Is it the Government's view that Members should be charged the congestion tax? If so, does that not breach the Standing Order about the right of free and unfettered access from constituencies to Westminster, especially for Members travelling daily from their constituencies? If not, will the public at large not rightly resent an unacceptable privilege?

Mr. Spellar: I do not suggest that the hon. Gentleman try that argument with the next cabbie he rides with.

The question of exemptions is a serious one, which the Mayor is examining in consultation with a number of bodies, including major employers and services—not only the emergency services but many other essential services. The hon. Gentleman has highlighted—in slightly quixotic fashion, as is his wont—the difficulties that arise when exemptions create a demand for further exemptions. Transport for London and the Mayor are well aware of those difficulties, which will apply not only to congestion charging in London, but also where such proposals are being considered by authorities elsewhere in the country. There may need to be at the very least a minimum list of exemptions, but we shall need to see the outcome of the consultations and consider the feasibility of financing that will arise as a consequence of the level of exemptions.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): My right hon. Friend encouraged Transport for London to set aside some of the revenues that it might receive from congestion charging. Perhaps those could be used for any innovative tram schemes that might be proposed in attractive, highly desirable, northern outer-London suburbs, such as Harrow?

Mr. Spellar: That is certainly a request that my hon. Friend and the London borough of Harrow—whose excellent leader is a mutual friend of ours—would do well to put to Transport for London. We already have the Docklands light railway and the extremely successful Croydon light railway, and other proposals are being examined. Bringing all those together and examining the allocation of transport funding for London is the role of Transport for London, but the allocation of moneys collected from congestion charging—if that is the route that London decides to take—will be a matter for the Mayor, who will put forward a plan, and it is for us to decide whether it is appropriate and adequate.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): With regard to the second part of the question put by the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies), surely the rail regulator will have an important role to play in increasing the capacity on the railways. Does the Minister believe that, in an independent market, the independence of the regulator should be paramount? If so, will he explain why it was necessary to threaten the regulator, Mr. Winsor, with emergency legislation—apparently already drafted—if he sought to exercise the right to obtain an interim financial review of Railtrack? Does the Minister not trust the regulator's judgment? Or did he fear that the regulator would come up with an option that was cheaper and more viable for the public purse than the Government's?

Mr. Spellar: We have concern for the public purse, and I remind the hon. Gentleman that it was Railtrack that sought relief from the regulator. We had to have a range of contingencies—which I am sure will be examined in the debate that is to follow—in which we examined the various possibilities that might arise, and that we should have to handle in the event of a decision being made that Railtrack was unable to continue. One such consideration was that we could not have unlimited liability on the public purse, and that was the basis of our decision when we had to apply to the court. I hope that in our later debate the hon. Gentleman or one of his colleagues will be able to explain how much their unlimited liability on the public purse would cost, and whether the shadow Chancellor has signed off on it.

Road Maintenance

6. **Peter Bradley** (The Wrekin): What steps his Department is taking to improve the maintenance of local roads. [5572]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): The Government are committed to halting the deterioration in local road conditions by 2004, and to eliminating the backlogs in carriageway, footway, bridge and street-lighting maintenance by 2010. As well as providing the necessary funding, £10 billion over the next 10 years, we are promoting several initiatives to help local authorities to optimise their road maintenance programmes and improve the quality of roads. These include new codes of practice and computerised management systems.

Peter Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and, indeed, for the unprecedented increase in highway funding that local authorities such as Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin are enjoying. Having had such encouraging things to say for the motorist, will he give equal heart to people who live and work in rural communities and to those who enjoy the countryside, including those who ride on horseback, who cycle and who walk, by supporting and encouraging local authorities to produce schemes to reduce traffic speeds on country lanes and in villages and to generate quiet lane networks in our rural areas?

Mr. Jamieson: I have seen the early-day motion that my hon. Friend tabled nearly two and a half years ago, and I congratulate him on his excellent work on the matter. I am also aware that accident rates on rural roads are considerably higher than on other roads, which is why we will encourage local authorities to consider designating suitable rural roads as quiet lanes. He rightly identifies pedestrians and horse riders as being at risk from speeding on lanes and in villages, but we are more concerned with actual vehicle speeds than with speed limits, which may be difficult to enforce. Under the

10-year plan, we have halted the rapid decline in highway budgets that we inherited in 1997. This year, we have more than doubled funding to local authorities to improve local roads, including those in my hon. Friend's local authority of Telford and Wrekin.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): When the hon. Gentleman is considering local road maintenance, will he bear in mind the maintenance of the A47 to the east of Norwich, especially the area known as the Acle straight, which the Highways Agency suggests should be widened rather than dualled? I ask him to consider this issue most seriously, and I know that I speak for the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) when I urge him to consider dualling that dangerous stretch of Norfolk road, rather than merely widening it.

Mr. Jamieson: Although the hon. Gentleman did not mention it, he will know that there has been a threefold increase in the highways budget for his area, so Norfolk, along with other authorities, will have the opportunity to consider the schemes that he mentions. The hon. Gentleman often talks about cutting public expenditure, but I notice that he very seldom applies that to matters in his own constituency.

Regional Assemblies

7. **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): What proposals he has to test public opinion for elected regional assemblies in England. [5573]

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We are committed to testing public opinion, through referendums, before setting up elected regional assemblies. No region will have an assembly unless it votes for one.

Mr. Marsden: I thank the Minister for that reply, but given public opinion surveys and the evidence of conventions on the ground that show support for regional assemblies—particularly in the north-west, the north-east, Yorkshire and the west Midlands—does he agree that it would be sensible and, indeed, prudent to make allowance in the White Paper that the Secretary of State has just announced for a permissive process of referendums as soon as possible, so that if public opinion is in favour we might have regional assemblies in those areas by 2004?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend will be aware, given the Secretary of State's announcement, that we will set out our detailed proposals in the White Paper, which we intend to publish early next year. I can confirm that that will create a permissive framework, whereby those regions that wish to hold a referendum will be able to do so. The precise timing and other details for the holding of referendums and the creation of regional assemblies and their powers will be spelled out in more detail in the White Paper.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does the Minister accept that many people view regional assemblies as just a Government gimmick and that people actually want existing local services to be decently and properly funded? This year, Oxfordshire faces cuts of £3.5 million in its social services budget. I have to tell the Minister, who is a caring Minister, that that will undermine services, such as foster services, and reduce residential and nursing facilities throughout the county. People in Oxfordshire do not want regional assemblies; they want the county's existing social services to be properly funded.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman made two points, the first of which concerned local government expenditure. He is assiduous and he looks at the figures, so he will be aware that over the four years in which the Government have been in power there have been real terms, year on year increases in local government expenditure. By contrast, when the Government whom he supported and of whom he was a member were in power in the 1990s, there were year on year reductions in local authority expenditure. We will therefore take no lessons from the Conservatives about local government funding.

The Opposition have a deplorable record on regional assemblies. They abolished the Greater London council and removed Londoners' right to have their own democratic regional assembly. We gave that right back, and our decision was endorsed by the people of London in a referendum. We intend to follow exactly the same procedure for the English regions, to give them the right to have a democratically elected regional assembly if they want one.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): Given that one test of public opinion is the way in which the public have already responded to unitary local government in England, does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a severe injustice in the east midlands, where all the shire county towns, with the exception of Northampton, have already achieved unitary status? In 1996, the previous Government accepted that a review was necessary because of that injustice. Therefore, before any test of public opinion on regional assemblies, will my right hon. Friend agree to review the fact that Northampton is not unitary, as we seem to have fallen behind?

Mr. Raynsford: I am well aware of the concerns that my hon. Friend and other right hon. and hon. Members have voiced about the case for unitary authorities in their areas. However, those of us who remember the review unleashed by the previous Government under the chairmanship of Sir John Banham will not necessarily want to repeat that experience, which involved a great deal of time being spent on extremely argumentative processes that diverted the attention of local government from the proper concern of raising standards of service and acting as effective leaders of their communities. Our focus as a Government will be on improving standards of service and encouraging local government to act as effective community leaders, rather than diverting their energies into fruitless squabbles and disputes about the respective powers of different tiers of government.

Mobile Phone Masts

8. **Mr. Charles Hendry** (Wealden): What plans he has to restrict the granting of planning permission for mobile phone masts close to schools. [5574]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): Mobile phone mast development close to schools is subject to the telecommunications planning arrangements in place throughout England, which were significantly strengthened in August this year. We have no further plans to restrict the granting of planning permission for mobile phone masts close to schools. Under the new rules, before operators submit an application for planning permission or prior approval for a mast near a school or college, they should discuss the proposed development with the relevant body of the school or college.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to the Minister for her reply, but does she not understand the continuing dismay in my constituency and across the country at the fact that the Government have not taken account of the genuine concerns of parents, teachers and governors about the siting of masts near schools? Is not the right way to proceed to require that masts near schools, homes and hospitals go through the full planning process, not prior approval? Why will she not adopt the policy followed in Scotland, which requires companies to group together and share masts so that their number can be minimised?

Ms Keeble: The hon. Gentleman makes several good points. Since the new regulations were put in place, there have been representations about mobile phone masts, but they have not been made specifically in relation to schools. In fact, only 2 per cent. of masts are currently sited on schools. We have a two-tier system; one tier is for masts over 15 m, which require the full application; the other is for masts of 4 to 15 m, which require prior approval. Both have the same effect, although the procedures are different. I stress that the Stewart report does not propose that we should abolish permission for any mast to be sited on or near schools.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Does my hon. Friend recall the 1999 European directive, the so-called RETTE directive, which on health grounds enables member states to establish exclusion zones between mobile phone masts and the public? Will she confirm that the Government have incorporated the directive in United Kingdom law? If so, what guidance have they given planning authorities on establishing exclusion zones?

Ms Keeble: We have taken our approach from the Stewart report, which was published on 11 May 2000. It concluded that

"the balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of the guidelines."

The report—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is bad manners, Mr. MacKay, to shout at the Minister—or anyone else, for that matter.

Ms Keeble: The Stewart report, which is based also on international studies, does not propose that we should exclude completely the erection of any mobile phone masts on schools.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I hear what the Minister says, but is she aware that I have had meetings recently with residents from Woodmansterne and The Ridgeway and on Kingsley avenue, who have specifically raised concerns about the health implications of masts? Will she reconsider the position to allow health implications to be taken into account when assessing planning applications for telecoms masts?

Ms Keeble: The current regulations were discussed in July and introduced only on 22 August. They have already been exhaustively discussed by members of all parties.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Does my hon. Friend agree, however, that until there is categoric scientific evidence to prove that there are no health risks to children, it behoves the industry to alert residents to its proposals to erect such masts, so that areas have a much longer time scale to present their concerns to the local planning authority?

Ms Keeble: I appreciate my hon. Friend's points; she has been very concerned about this issue. There are currently no established health risks from mobile phone masts. Under existing arrangements, those who want to erect such masts must give the local community, through the local authority, notice of their intent to do so. They must also discuss proposals for masts on schools with governing bodies before submitting an application. So there is a good opportunity for local communities to be informed and to represent their views. Following that, the local authority has 56 days in which to take a decision. We have very significantly strengthened safeguards for the local community.

South-East Regional Chamber

9. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What the annual running cost is of the south-east regional chamber. [5575]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): The south-east England regional assembly has been established voluntarily by bodies representing the interests of the region. Its running costs are a matter for the assembly and its members. The Government have, however, allocated £500,000 to the assembly this year, and to each of the other regional chambers, to help them establish a stronger strategic and scrutiny role within their regions.

Mr. Swayne: What thought has the Minister given to the costs of replacing the south-east regional chamber with a directly elected regional government? Is it his intention that that regional government should have income tax-raising powers?

Dr. Whitehead: As the hon. Gentleman will know, and as has been previously reported to this Chamber, it is the Government's intention to produce a White Paper on regional government that will set out the grounds on which regional government in the United Kingdom will be strengthened and, in particular, become democratically accountable. The cost of democracy clearly enters that equation and will be a factor in the White Paper.

The hon. Gentleman's view about the costs of regional government and chambers does not appear to be shared by the 40 Conservative councillors who already serve on the south-east England regional chamber, by the chair of the regional assembly, who is a Conservative councillor, or by the assembly's four executive committee members, who appear to be in favour of it as it currently works.

Railtrack

11. **Mrs. Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside): What plans he has to increase the public accountability of Railtrack. [5578]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): The Government have proposed that a company limited by guarantee succeed Railtrack. That would have the interests of the millions of rail passengers as its top priority.

Mrs. Ellman: I congratulate the Secretary of State on bringing an end to the misery of the failed, privatised Railtrack, but will he explain in some more detail how the arrangements will ensure a railway system that meets the needs of the travelling public and the economy, including regional economies? Will he give a clear commitment that the modernisation of the west coast main line will proceed rapidly?

Mr. Byers: It is important that the No. 1 priority of any successor body to Railtrack is the need to invest in the railway network so that the operations, renewals and maintenance of the network are given the priority that they deserve. That has not been possible with Railtrack for reasons that I think the House understands. There was a clear conflict between its requirement as a public company to enhance shareholder value and investing in the network. As a company, it had to put the shareholders' interests first, which was at the heart of its difficulties as a network provider.

On the specifics of the west coast main line, the fact that Railtrack has gone into administration has not stopped the work and negotiations on its upgrade. The Government, the Strategic Rail Authority and the administrators are discussing the way forward for the upgrade, to which we remain committed. It is a vital part of the United Kingdom rail network, and we are confident that its full details will be agreed in the not too distant future.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): The Secretary of State will be aware of press reports that West LB is interested in Railtrack. Given that private sector interest, will he open the process up to others and undertake to meet anyone with an active interest in putting together a bid for Railtrack or financing options for the future? If there are a number of bids, what criteria will he use to choose between them?

Mr. Byers: I welcome the hon. Lady to her new responsibilities. I shall issue a written parliamentary reply at 3.30 pm, which will give full details on the matter. However, I am pleased to be able to respond in oral questions. We would certainly welcome other expressions of interest. One has been registered and there has been a meeting with the administrator, who will initially deal with them. It is right and proper that they are given detailed consideration, as the administrator and the Government will.

In order to make our position clear, it is appropriate to indicate how we will judge those expressions of interest. We intend to publish guidelines within the next few days so that people who might be interested will know exactly what we shall look for when we approve proposals that the administrator may suggest.

Mrs. May: I am grateful for that reply and note that the Secretary of State's next statement on Railtrack will be issued as a written answer today rather than being made formally as an oral statement in the Chamber.

Surely the real issue is that the Secretary of State pulled the plug on Railtrack because the Government would not fund the extra £700 million, yet under his new proposals the Government will guarantee an initial £1 billion. We knew that he had trouble with his maths when he was an Education Minister, but that is ridiculous. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) should not hold her breath with regard to the west coast main line because the real story is that the Secretary of State's actions mean that railway improvements will be delayed and the cost of funding investment will increase. The Government will have to provide exactly the guarantees—the blank cheques—for the new structure that they claimed they had avoided offering for Railtrack. There will be no improvements for passengers and there will be higher costs for taxpayers. Is it any wonder that the press call him "bungling Byers"?

Mr. Byers: I will address that in today's debate. The Government amendment to the Opposition motion allows us to discuss Railtrack. I shall address such matters in my contribution so that we can discuss them fully.

If the hon. Lady reads the bundle of documents that we put before the High Court, and which we have placed in the Library, she will see, and the judge agreed, that Railtrack would have had a deficit of £1.7 billion by next March. By implication, she is saying that Conservative policy would be to put that £1.7 billion into Railtrack. That confirms that there is, as we know, a big black hole at the heart of Tory financial thinking. The reality is that the company could not control costs or pay its debts; we had to take action to put the travelling public first.

The hon. Lady raises the difficulties being experienced by the travelling public. It is interesting to note the view expressed by George Muir, the spokesman for the train operating companies. When asked on "Channel 4 News" what the consequences of Railtrack being taken into administration were, he said that since the accountants have

"been appointed our members are telling us that decisions are being made",

that money is being made available, and that essential safety work is now being undertaken. That is happening as a result of administration. We have ensured that, through the demise of Railtrack, we will be able to build a far more effective and better railway system for the travelling public.

Key Worker Homes

12. **Mr. David Lammy** (Tottenham): If he will make a statement on the provision of homes for key workers. [5579]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): Our starter home initiative and the Housing Corporation's programme will help 11,000 key workers to buy homes in high-cost areas in the next three years. We are also reviewing planning guidance on affordable housing, including the scope for providing more key worker housing within new developments.

Mr. Lammy: I am grateful for that assurance. Will the Minister confirm that social workers are to be included in the understanding of key workers? In Tottenham, we await the decision of the Victoria Climbie inquiry, but many people throughout the country appreciate that social workers are as key as nurses and teachers in our communities.

Mr. Byers: I fully understand the concern of people in Tottenham and Haringey about the Climbie inquiry and its outcome. Clearly, the issue of social workers is important. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that they come within the definition of key workers. In the first allocation that we have made available to London, about 189 social workers, firefighters and transport workers will be covered, but I accept that that is only the beginning and that a lot more will need to be done. I assure my hon. Friend that social workers are included in our definition because of the vital role that they play.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the Secretary of State explain why in the past four years of Labour government 50,000 fewer social dwellings have been constructed than were constructed in the previous four years of Conservative government?

Mr. Byers: I should be interested to see how the hon. Gentleman's figures make that allegation stand up. We are moving quickly to ensure that key workers have the houses that they need, in particular in London and the south-east, where there is a pressing problem because of the increasing value of properties. We are providing support for about 11,000 key workers and we will do more, not only by providing the additional finance but by using the planning system far more positively than it has perhaps been used.

Local Transport

13. **Andy Burnham** (Leigh): What measures he is taking to improve local transport services in deprived areas. [5580]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Our 10-year plan, and our urban and rural White Papers, recognise the impact that transport can have on people's quality of life. The substantial increase in local transport capital investment that we announced last December, combined with additional funding for urban and rural bus services, will help authorities to improve local transport services in deprived areas, through better access and increased choice.

Furthermore, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has issued a circular to local authorities, clarifying the situation between quality contracts and quality partnerships and how they can improve the position on local bus services.

Andy Burnham: I thank the Minister for his reply, but is he aware that Leigh has the dubious honour of being the largest town in the country not to have a rail station? Does he agree that the long-term solution is to bring the metrolink service to Leigh? In the meantime, will he urgently consider the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority proposal to have a train station at nearby Golborne? Does he agree that that would not only help to regenerate a deprived former pit village, but also make great transport sense by bringing a rail link close to the M6-east Lancashire interchange, right on the doorstop of Haydock racecourse?

Mr. Spellar: As my hon. Friend will know, I visited the area in the summer and looked at a number of those schemes. He will accept that the Government gave Greater Manchester an excellent capital settlement last December, in recognition of its high-quality local transport plan. The amount for 2001–02 was some £116 million, a very substantial increase on the previous year's allocation. We will, of course, be engaged with the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority to look at precisely the matters that my hon. Friend has raised in order to benefit transport for people in his area, as part of our overall plan to remedy the very serious deficiencies and underinvestment that we inherited from years of Conservative rule.

Speaker's Statement

3.31 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a statement to make to the House. I have to inform the House that, as required by section 144 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, I have received the certificate and report of the election court in the case of the petition alleging corrupt and illegal practices in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency election of 7 June last.

The judges in the case have determined that the petition be dismissed, and have certified that the hon. Member for that constituency was duly returned at the said election.

I shall lay the certificate and the report on the Table, together with the shorthand writer's notes, and will cause the full text of both documents to be entered in the Journal.

Point of Order

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you are the protector of the interests of Back-Bench Members against the abuses of the Executive, may I ask whether your office would be prepared to help Back Benchers with a growing problem associated with the Government's answers to written questions?

You, Mr. Speaker, will be aware that "Erskine May" states on page 293 that, under Standing Order No. 22(4), the Minister shall give an answer to a written question on the date for which notice has been given. When Parliament was recalled during the recess on 14 September, I tabled a straightforward factual question in the expectation that it would receive a numerical reply from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions one month later, on 15 October. Unfortunately, contrary to Standing Order No. 22(4), I received a holding answer on 15 October.

Similarly, last Tuesday I tabled a written question to the Department of Health. I was seeking a straightforward factual answer to a question already in the public domain. Yesterday, I received a simple holding answer. In neither instance can I see any justification whatsoever for a holding answer, as the questions were not difficult to answer. More and more, this Government issue holding answers to written questions even though Standing Orders require them to provide substantive answers on a named day.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has a point. I hope that Ministers take on board the complaint that he has made.

Divorce (Religious Marriages)

3.33 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision enabling a court to require the dissolution of a religious marriage before granting a civil divorce.

This Bill is not a new idea—indeed, a very similar Bill was introduced in the previous Parliament by Lord Lester. It completed all its stages in another place, only to be blocked here in the end. I used the ten-minute procedure to bring in a Bill in the previous Session; it reached Second Reading but was talked out. This, therefore, is the third attempt in three years to introduce such a Bill. That shows how important the measure is, although it may also give the House a feeling of déjà vu.

The terms of the Bill were in essence previously enacted in the Family Law Act 1996, part II, but those provisions have not been brought into force and are to be repealed for reasons wholly unconnected with this Bill. I believe that the Government support the Bill.

The purpose of the Bill is to remedy a disadvantage suffered by Jewish men and women who are prevented from remarrying because of the refusal of their partners to grant or accept a religious divorce, which is known as a get. The basic Jewish laws on marriage and divorce are biblical, and therefore not subject to change. In Jewish law, marriage and divorce are consensual processes and an individual cannot be married or divorced against his or her will. That creates a problem in cases where one party seeks to end a marriage and the other refuses to grant or receive a divorce.

For a civil divorce to be effective in Jewish law, a get must be obtained. A get is a consensual divorce in which mutual co-operation between the parties is required. The husband has to go before a Beth Din court for a get and deliver it to his wife, and she is required to accept it. If he does not do so, the wife cannot remarry in Jewish law, although the husband may be able to do so. Jewish authorities have long been sensitive to the problem, especially where it is the wife who is trapped in a marriage that she seeks to end. She is called, in Hebrew, an agunah, meaning one who is chained to a spouse against her will.

In recent years, the Jewish community in Britain has done all that it can internally to alleviate the situation through its rabbinical courts. It has instituted a pre-nuptial agreement, which is currently signed by the majority of couples, binding them, should their marriage fail, to attend a Jewish court to resolve outstanding differences. Synagogue bodies have agreed to institute communal sanctions against recalcitrant spouses. However, the first is a voluntary undertaking and the second may simply be ignored by a determined spouse driven by the ill will that often accompanies divorce.

A well-publicised example of that was a case at the end of last year, in which a rabbi took an advertisement in the *Jewish Chronicle* to name and shame a recalcitrant husband, but to no avail. In another case, the agunot campaign organises a picket every Sunday morning outside the house of Mr. Israel Elias, who refuses to give his wife a get. One Sunday in the summer I joined the picket to show support and to talk to other women affected by the same problem. A civil divorce on the ground of cruelty was granted to Mrs. Elias in 1962.

There was a custody battle, and now, almost 40 years on, Mr. Elias still refuses to release his wife, despite the extensive publicity that the case receives.

Jewish women who want to conduct their family relationships within the framework of their religious beliefs have virtually no power to compel a reluctant husband to grant them a get. Without a get, a divorcee who has a child by her subsequent partner is defined as an adulteress under Jewish law. Her child becomes a mamzer, an illegitimate outcast, which is a stigma that carries on into future generations. If a wife refuses to accept her husband's get, he is known as an agun. However, he does not suffer from the same disadvantages. As a result, a husband can effectively hold his wife to ransom, and can demand money, property or other rights concerning custody or child maintenance in return for a get.

There are no reliable statistics on the total number of women affected, but seven cases in the Hendon area have been referred to me. No doubt there are many more in my constituency of which I am unaware. If that number is multiplied throughout the Jewish community nation-wide, the House can start to makes its own assessment of the scale of the problem.

The cases of which I have heard reveal devastating personal tragedies. For example, a woman left an unhappy marriage and her husband tried to get their child put into an orphanage. There have been long legal wranglings, but she still does not have her get. Another case involved a husband who left a 26-year marriage soon after the death of one of the children. He subtly tried to blackmail the father of his wife, offering to grant a get in return for large sums of money. A further case involved a woman who, at a young age, married a man who became aggressive. For example, he brought the garage door down on her head. He would not give her a get—his attitude was that if he could not have her, no one else could.

A very young woman with young children moved from Stamford Hill to Hendon to escape her violent husband, who had abused both her and the children. After six years of difficult and protracted negotiations, she finally succeeded in obtaining her get last year. A woman whose husband deserted her when she was eight and a half months pregnant had to sell her flat and move with the baby into a rented room so that she could pay him off in return for a get.

The Bill will not help every woman in such tragic circumstances. If the husband does not want or need a civil divorce, or a civil divorce has already been granted, as in the Elias case, the problem will remain. However, the Bill will provide a real remedy for women such as those in the cases that I have described, as it will rectify a serious anomaly in English law which creates this extremely undesirable state of affairs.

Under section 26(1)(d) of the Marriage Act 1949,

"a marriage between two persons professing the Jewish religion according to the usage of the Jews"

which has been solemnised on the authority of a superintendent registrar's certificate is recognised as a civil marriage, but a civil divorce may take place without a Jewish divorce having been given. This results in a so-called "limping marriage", where the parties are free to remarry civilly, but not religiously. That is why the Jewish community has now sought the assistance of civil law, in the form of the provisions in the Bill, whereby a judge would be given the discretionary power to withhold the grant of a civil divorce until a Jewish divorce has been granted, if it is just and reasonable to do so.

The Bill would thus enable the court to require the dissolution of a religious marriage before granting a civil divorce. That would provide a lever whereby pressure could be brought to bear on the husband to agree to a get. Where it would be unjust for him not to do so, he would not be granted a civil divorce, which would normally be sufficient for his purposes, without first agreeing to a religious divorce, which his wife would need to avoid the stigma that I have described. The playing field for ancillary relief would be levelled, avoiding the blackmail over financial settlements, custody or access to children that I have already illustrated.

Not only has such provision been enacted—although not brought into force for unassociated reasons—in English law, but similar provision is already part of Canadian, South African and New York state law, and is currently under consideration in Scotland. It would not resolve all cases, but it would resolve many, namely where the husband wants to remarry and thus needs a civil divorce.

It is important to understand that the Jewish community is not seeking the assistance of the civil law to solve a religious problem. It wants first, to end the anomaly whereby a Jewish marriage is also a civil marriage, but a civil divorce may be unaccompanied by a Jewish divorce, and secondly, to seek the assistance of the civil courts in bringing a couple to a Jewish court, which itself undertakes to resolve the dispute, allowing both parties to remarry according to their religious convictions.

The Bill also empowers the Lord Chancellor to extend its provisions by order to other faiths, so it could provide relief in similar cases in the Islamic community.

My Bill has the support of all synagogue bodies in Anglo-Jewry, as well as the Chief Rabbi, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and the Jewish Marriage Council. I hope that it also has the support of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Dismore, Mr. Andrew Love, John Cryer, Ms Karen Buck, Mike Gapes, Linda Perham, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody and Mrs. Louise Ellman.

DIVORCE (RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES)

Mr. Andrew Dismore accordingly presented a Bill to make provision enabling a court to require the dissolution of a religious marriage before granting a civil divorce: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October, and to be printed [Bill 35].

Opposition Day

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

Ministerial Conduct (DTLR)

Mr. Speaker: I must inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.43 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the culture of spin in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; condemns the attitude and advice of the Special Adviser to the Secretary of State, Ms Jo Moore, and Ministers who acted upon her advice, thus perpetuating that culture throughout Government; agrees with the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee that Ms Moore's e-mail of 11th September was 'incompatible with any idea of public service'; believes that as long as Ms Moore retains the confidence of Ministers, she brings Her Majesty's Government into disrepute; and calls on the Secretary of State to dismiss her forthwith.

I am sure that we will all remember the events of 11 September for the rest of our lives. Just as a generation defined themselves by what they were doing when President Kennedy was assassinated, so a whole generation of people will define themselves by what they were doing when they saw the events of 11 September. Up and down the country, people watched their televisions in disbelief and wondered if what they saw could actually be happening.

Let me refresh the memory of hon. Members about those events. At 1.45 in the afternoon British time, a plane travelling from Boston to Los Angeles carrying 92 people crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Centre. Fifteen minutes later, at 2 pm British time, a second plane carrying 64 people—

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No, I will not.

I am sorry to say that that intervention is an example of some of the appalling attitudes taken by members of the Labour party.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No. Certainly not.

Fifteen minutes later, at 2 pm British time, a second plane carrying 64 people hit the south tower.

Helen Southworth (Warrington, South): This is just exploitation.

Hon. Members: Ooh.

Mrs. May: At 2.30 pm British time, a third plane carrying 65 people crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, and workers in companies such as Cantor Fitzgerald, based in the World Trade Centre, phoned their loved ones and left messages telling them that they were about to die.

Between 2.30 and 3 pm British time, major Government buildings in Washington were evacuated in anticipation of a further strike. Between 3 and 3.30 pm British time, both towers of the World Trade Centre collapsed. At 3.30 pm, the Prime Minister abandoned his speech to the Trades Union Congress in Brighton.

I am sure that all hon. Members shared my sense of utter disbelief as we watched those horrifying scenes. Indeed, the world stood transfixed, unable to comprehend the horror unfolding before our very eyes. Yet, in the midst of all that, at 2.55 pm, Ms Jo Moore, special adviser to the Secretary of State, his appointee, sent an e-mail to her departmental colleagues that said:

"It is now a very good day to get out anything we want to bury. Councillors expenses?"

To think that someone's immediate reaction was to see what was happening in New York and Washington not as a human tragedy but as a political public relations opportunity that Ministers should make the most of is almost beyond understanding.

The events of that day marked a change in how we view our own position in the world but they also marked the time when the culture of this Government's news management stepped beyond the barely acceptable and became the disreputable. We have not tabled the motion lightly, but it is a sad commentary on the Government's attitudes and approach, and the culture of spin that they have nurtured, that Ministers' actions have brought us to this debate today.

Indeed, I am not alone in feeling that way. Speaking of the e-mail sent by Jo Moore, the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), said:

"The question is whether what happened is consistent with any notion of public service that I or anybody else has. I thought at the time it wasn't, and I haven't changed my mind now."

He also said that her actions were "incompatible with public service".

The hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) said:

"the behaviour she's displayed, it flies in the face of any public service ethos that I have ever heard of, and it flies in the face of everything the Labour party ever stood for."

The Prime Minister said:

"what Jo Moore said . . . was horrible, wrong and stupid."—[*Official Report*, 17 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 1165.]

Given those comments, and the sense of outrage felt throughout the House and outside, I find it incomprehensible that Ms Moore is still in her post. It reflects not only a lack of understanding on her part but a sorry lack of judgment on the part of the Secretary of State.

A number of questions still need to be answered. My hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) wrote to the Secretary of State on 12 October, asking him to state publicly whether Jo Moore still had his firm support, to give an assurance that no one acted on the advice in the e-mail and to say whether he had spoken to her before she sent it. So far, he has not replied.

I invite the Secretary of State, not only for his own sake but to restore some faith in Government, to take this opportunity to respond to the following questions. Where was he on 11 September? Did he speak to Jo Moore on that day, and if so, at what time? Did he speak to anyone

else in his office about her e-mail on 11 September, how did he learn of its existence and content, and who told him? I would be very happy to let him intervene if he wishes to respond now. I see that he chooses not to.

It has been pointed out that the member of staff in question was disciplined, but there are again a number of outstanding questions about the procedure that was followed. The Secretary of State needs to answer them, to allay concerns in the House and elsewhere.

It appears that, having initially not taken any action, when the story of the e-mail broke on 8 October, the Secretary of State disciplined Ms Moore personally. The normal procedure is for the permanent secretary to discipline civil servants and special advisers, yet in this case the rebuke that came later from the permanent secretary seems to have been made only after some delay, and only then because journalists were claiming that the Secretary of State had broken the rules on disciplinary action.

This is a case in which the Secretary of State said that Ms Moore had done wrong and the Prime Minister said that her action was "horrible", but one in which Ministers were determined from the outset that she should not lose her job. I wonder just what it takes for a spin doctor to lose her job in this Government. Why did the Secretary of State take it upon himself to protect her job before the permanent secretary had any chance to investigate? Is it not the case that he clings to Jo Moore because he knows that if she goes, he is next in line?

Later still, we had Ms Moore's apology, which took a week to be made and which contained no direct apology to the families of those involved in the horrific events of 11 September. Rather, she seemed most concerned to apologise to the Government and to Ministers. A further issue is the manner of her apology. Any interview with a special adviser should be authorised; we do not know who gave the authorisation in this case. Nor do we know why Sky News was chosen initially as the sole recipient of the apology. For many of us, however, the most telling aspect was not the apology but the look on Ms Moore's face when she turned away from the cameras. She spun her way in, and she tried to spin her way out.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): How can Conservative Members be so expert in giving apologies when my constituents have been waiting five years for an apology for the privatisation of British Rail? In my book, that decision represented a privatisation of the public service ethos to which the hon. Lady has referred. Will she take this opportunity to apologise to my constituents and to the United Kingdom for the privatisation of British Rail?

Mrs. May: I am sorry that, by his intervention, the hon. Gentleman has shown yet again that there are some Labour Members who simply do not seem to understand the extent and nature of what Ms Moore did with her e-mail on 11 September. The issue is not only about her individual action, but about the fact that that action represents the culture of spin that lies at the very heart of the Government.

Of course that e-mail is not the only example of spin from the Government—the canker of the culture of spin that lies at the heart of the Government. There are other examples even from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Ms Moore herself was involved in trying to persuade a junior civil servant to leak information to journalists that was aimed at discrediting Bob Kiley, the London transport commissioner, while he and the Secretary of State were involved in a dispute over the future of London Underground. The fact that she did so was confirmed yesterday in a written answer in *Hansard*, at column 94W. Surely that attempt was contrary to the code of conduct for special advisers, yet no action was taken against her. Instead, the Secretary of State, rather than reprimanding his special adviser, spoke to the Department's director of information, Alun Evans, who had protested on behalf of his junior member of staff. Five days later, Mr. Evans was moved to another post.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No.

The question is whether Mr. Evans left the Department voluntarily. Perhaps the Secretary of State would also like to answer that question today.

I understand that the posts of director of information and head of news at the Department are vacant and appointments are due to be made in the next few weeks. I think that it would help to restore some confidence among staff in the Department if the Secretary of State would today state categorically that Ms Moore will have no role whatsoever—will not be consulted or invited to comment—on those appointments.

The Secretary of State must answer those questions if he is to clear up some of the confusion that surrounds all those events. He has something of a record when it comes to press officers. In 1997, when he was a Minister at the then Department for Education and Employment, the press officer Jonathan Haslam resigned, reportedly after a row with the right hon. Gentleman, who had asked him to issue a press release criticising the record of the previous Government. *[Interruption.]*

The charge against the Secretary of State, and against those Labour Members whose jocularity shows how little they understand about the nature of the civil service, is that he has perpetuated the culture of spin by his connivance in the politicisation of civil servants who are press officers.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): There is no doubt that Jo Moore's e-mail was totally inappropriate. As the hon. Lady is so clear about what she is willing to condemn, does she also think that the culture that was created in the Conservative party by Archer, Aitken, Hamilton, Best and Allason did anything to damage the integrity of politics in this country?

Mrs. May: The point is that Ms Moore is still in her post. She has not been sacked, and she has not had the decency to resign. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to muse on the complaint brought against the Secretary of State by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory)—that while he was Secretary of State at the Department of Trade and Industry he suppressed publication of a report into the affairs of his hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson).

[Mrs. May]

The Secretary of State must also answer the accusation that, although the Government outwardly professed to be as disgusted as the rest of us by Ms Moore's e-mail, internally they seem to have followed her advice, because a number of bad news stories were released in the immediate aftermath of the events of 11 September.

We all know that the now infamous councillors' expenses story was released the following day, although according to press reports the Minister for Local Government has insisted that the announcement was cleared for publication the day before. Press reports also suggest that the release was unusually sent to the *Local Government Chronicle* only one hour before its press deadline. As Chris Mahony, its news editor, put it:

"To be thinking of such things at such a time shows that these people's minds are even weirder than we thought."

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On the matter of the minds of certain people, it was clearly horrible, stupid and wrong to write that e-mail, but at a time when our country is engaged in a war against terrorism, when our armed forces are committed in Afghanistan, when there is a crisis in the middle east and in Northern Ireland, is it not horrible, stupid and wrong for the Conservative Opposition to waste a day on the career of a junior adviser and the Government's relations with the press?

Mrs. May: I think that when the hon. Gentleman reflects on the remarks that he has just made, he will realise that it was inadvisable to pray the armed forces in aid on this issue. If he has accepted that what Jo Moore did was horrible, wrong and stupid, what is the next stage? In doing something of this nature, she brought politicians, politics and the Government into disrepute. What she did has implications for us all. It is not surprising that the electorate are so cynical about politicians when they see such spin from the Government's spin doctors.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No, I shall make some progress.

On 12 September, there was a release on pensions for councillors and the release of new planning guidance for the west country, which will force the construction of 200,000 more buildings on green fields, irrespective of local wishes. On 14 September, the Government published exam results, which showed that standards in maths among 11-year-olds were getting worse. On 4 October, the announcement was made of the cancellation of the proposed Picketts Lock athletics stadium, jeopardising our chances of hosting the 2005 world athletics championships.

Let us consider the Government's handling of their decisions on Railtrack. What exactly was said in the telephone call between the Department and Ernst and Young on 11 September? *The Independent on Sunday* reported that Alan Bloom, head of the accountants' insolvency arm, was called on the afternoon of 11 September to discuss plans to force Railtrack into administration. Mr. Bloom told colleagues at Ernst and Young that he had been told to "get stuck in" at Railtrack. The fact that the Government were applying for Railtrack to go into administration was leaked to the press on the evening of 6 October. We now hear that they have had to employ a City public relations firm to do their spinning on Railtrack instead of Ms Moore. That means more taxpayers' money.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): If the Government deliberately used that period to release what the hon. Lady describes as bad news, will she assure hon. Members that, had the announcement on Picketts Lock and the other matters that she listed been delayed for a month, no Conservative Front-Bench Member would have jumped up and down to complain about withholding bad news?

Mrs. May: The question that the hon. Gentleman needs to answer is what should happen to Ms Moore, in the light of her e-mail on 11 September.

The past few days have provided more examples of the problems of spin. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had to come to the House yesterday to defend herself against allegations of spin after issuing a significant press release on errors made in tests on sheep brains for BSE late one night without a press conference.

Perhaps even more significant was yesterday's personal statement in another place by Lord Macdonald. He apologised not only for giving an unclear answer in the House of Lords, leading their lordships to believe that the number of special advisers had increased under Labour from 78 to 81, when it had gone up from 38 under the last Conservative Government to 81 under Labour, but for attempts by his officials to persuade *Hansard* to change the written record of what he had said.

Not only Opposition and Labour Members have expressed disgust at Ms Moore's attitude and that of Ministers defending her, as any perusal of newspapers' letters pages will confirm. I have a letter from Mr. Jonathan Lord, who lives in Cheshire. It states:

"I . . . wanted to express my own thoughts about the matter in the hope that you could pass them on to whomever might be able to influence the final outcome of this unfortunate affair . . . If she truly understood what she has done she would have resigned to redress the moral balance and because of a shame that needed time to heal in private . . . The whole episode confirms that politicians and their acolytes have an enduring faith in the gullibility of the electorate and I think it stains the whole political process. If Government truly wishes to try and tackle what it perceives as the cynicism of the electorate then their handling of this issue could not have been a more retrograde step."

Mr. Lord's letter strikes at the heart of the debate.

Alan Howarth: The hon. Lady speaks of a stain on the political process and the importance of maintaining a good reputation for politics, yet she displays a remarkable zest in her hounding of Ms Moore. Is she aware that nothing is so unpleasant in politics as the pack in full cry in pursuit of an individual that it has decided to tear to pieces? The hon. Lady is engaged in the politics of the mob; she should know better.

Mrs. May: I am sorry about that intervention because I expected better of the right hon. Gentleman. I expected him, along with some of his colleagues, to understand the full nature of what Ms Moore had done through her e-mail and the ministerial reactions to it. As I said, Mr. Lord's letter gets to the heart of the debate.

This issue goes beyond the actions of one Government spin doctor. It is not just about what Ministers have referred to as a single mistake; it goes to the very heart of the approach that this Government take to the electorate and, indeed, to our parliamentary democracy. It typifies a culture of spin that says that whatever the issue, spin matters more than substance. Little wonder that there is an attitude of cynicism towards politicians and politics among the general public, when they hear of actions such as this which tell them that the Government are more interested in burying a few announcements than in the feelings of people who witnessed or were involved in those horrific tragedies on 11 September.

This issue strikes at the heart of a relationship that has underpinned and strengthened our Governments over the centuries—that essential relationship between non-political civil servants working hard and with dedication whoever is in government, and the politicians whom they serve. I wonder what decent, hard-working civil servants think when they see Ms Moore keeping her job.

The culture of spin brings Government and politicians into disrepute. It tarnishes Parliament; it affects all of us.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No.

Sadly, the whole approach of this Government has been to place emphasis on the ephemeral and ignore the substantial. That was, perhaps, summed up when Mo Mowlam said:

"all Jo did was to take the process to its logical conclusion".

After 11 September, the Government did indeed issue bad news stories, but in this whole sorry saga we have a bigger one. It is a bad news story that, at a time when all thoughts should have been focused on support for our allies in the United States, people were reading in their newspapers that politicians were intent on pulling the wool over their eyes. It is a bad news story because, at a time when people needed clear leadership, straightforward talk and honesty from all in Government, they had a sense that they were being deceived.

The Government have a particular responsibility at times such as this to put their conduct beyond reproach, but in the matter of Jo Moore they have failed in that duty. Despite all the available evidence, against the advice of senior Labour Members, and contrary to the better judgment of some members of their own Cabinet, they have decided to retain their confidence in her. In the process, they have inflicted unnecessary damage on our national life.

By her actions, Ms Moore has demeaned the whole notion of public service. By his failure to sack her, the Secretary of State has tarnished the Government; and by their failure to act, the Government have debased politics itself.

4.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"believes that Ms Jo Moore's e-mail of 11th September was horrible, wrong and stupid; notes that she has been dealt with under the Department's disciplinary procedures and that the Permanent Secretary has given her an official warning as to her conduct and that she has expressed her heartfelt regret and offered a full apology; welcomes the decisive action that Ministers have taken in regard to Railtrack which will be welcomed by the travelling public; rejects the policies of the Opposition, who would have continued to pour money into propping up the company, thus amplifying the problems caused by the way they privatised the rail industry; and further welcomes the work of DTLR Ministers in developing positive policies, to improve the position of local government, to tackle problems of homelessness and urban regeneration and to develop proposals for regional government and contrasts this with the policies of the Opposition who decimated local government, ignored the problems of deprived communities and centralised power.".

We heard a number of serious allegations from the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) about my Department. I intend to address all of them individually, specifically and in detail. My objective will be to replace innuendo with reality, allegation with truth, accusation with fact, and then to address the key issues—the substance—facing my Department, and how we intend to meet those challenges in the months ahead.

I intend to give more details about our proposed replacement for Railtrack, and how we mean to put the interests of the travelling public first. I intend to put our action in relation to Railtrack in the wider context of a programme of modernisation and reform of our essential services, but also to refer to our 10-year transport plan, totally ignored by the Conservative party; to the steps that we are taking to provide decent homes for people, totally ignored by the Conservative party; to our support for neighbourhood renewal and regeneration, totally ignored by the Conservative party; to the new freedoms that we want for local government, totally ignored by the Conservative party; and to our recognition of the importance of our regions—totally ignored by the Conservative party. It should come as no surprise that the hon. Lady ignored housing, neighbourhood renewal, regeneration, local government and communities for the last 30 minutes, because they were ignored for 18 years under a Conservative Government.

Mrs. May: If I am so uninterested in issues such as housing and homelessness, why was I prepared to attend and speak in the debate on Third Reading of the Homelessness Bill last night? The Secretary of State bunked off.

Mr. Byers: I have confidence in my ministerial team; the hon. Lady does not have them worried—and, having seen the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) perform last week, I can understand why. Let me deal with the allegations that have been made.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is not it a fact that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) was able to attend the debate on the Homelessness Bill only because the Government introduced that Bill? The Conservatives spent 18 years creating homelessness.

Mr. Byers: My right hon. Friend's reply is far better than mine and he is right. I return to the allegations, which I shall deal with individually and specifically.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State has made it clear that he will take the debate much wider than the motion. There is a rather disagreeable news management element to that:

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

getting other stories out and disguising the main purpose of the debate, which was initiated by the Opposition. How appropriate is it for Members to depart from the main tenets of the motion tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends?

Mr. Speaker: Although we are debating a motion, an amendment has also been selected. If the hon. Gentleman reads the amendment, he will find that there is enough scope for everyone to have their say, including the Secretary of State.

Mr. Byers: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker. I moved the amendment when I began my speech.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): With that in mind.

Mr. Byers: Conservative Members seem reluctant to deal with the specifics of the allegations, which I will come to, but I shall be grateful if they bide their time and listen to what I have to say on the issues.

On the specific allegations, the first relates to councillors' allowances and issuing the press notice as a result of the events of 11 September. The press notice on councillors' allowances was provisionally planned, at the end of the week before, to be released on Wednesday 12 September. The publication of the press notice, along with the consultation documents, went ahead as originally planned on 12 September. The details of the press notice were cleared by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government on 10 September. Those are the facts of the case.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): If indeed the events were as the Secretary of State describes, what on earth was the meaning behind Ms Moore's e-mail?

Mr. Byers: The point is that the publication was planned the week before. The allegation made from the Dispatch Box by the hon. Member for Maidenhead is that we somehow altered the programme because of the events of 11 September. I am trying—*[Interruption.]* No. If hon. Members read the record, they will see that the allegation is that we rushed through the announcements because of the events of 11 September. I would be grateful if the hon. Lady would confirm that that is exactly what she said.

The allegation—with respect, it is not to do with the e-mail—is that we rushed out news because of the events of 11 September. I am telling the House that it was agreed the week before that that information would be published on 12 September, and 12 September was the date on which it was published.

Mrs. May: If, indeed, the press release on councillors' expenses was due to be published on 12 September, and that had been planned the previous week, why was councillors' expenses the very example of bad news that the Government needed to bury that was put in Ms Moore's e-mail of 11 September?

Mr. Byers: It was presumably advice that she was putting in the e-mail. I did not see the e-mail, so I do not know. That is the reality of the situation.

The point raised by Conservative Members is clear, and their motion is very specific. It talks about

"Ministers who acted upon her advice",

and the reality is that it was advice that was not acted upon, because the press release was already planned to be published on 12 September. That is the issue.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) *rose—*

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I will give way once more.

Mr. Boswell: If, as the Secretary of State says, he did not see Ms Moore's e-mail, can he tell the House who saw it and what action they took on it?

Mr. Byers: I am making the point that no action was taken on it. I certainly did not see it. The first time I saw it was on 8 October, and that is on the record. That is the reality of the situation. Like the hon. Member for Maidenhead, most of us were concerned about other events on the afternoon of 11 September. That is the true position.

Mr. Heald: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: No, I want to make an important point. An e-mail was sent to two individuals—Alun Evans and Robin Mortimer—and copied to another special adviser. The advice was not acted on; the press notice went out, as planned from the week before, on 12 September. It really is as simple as that.

Mr. Heald: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: No. That is the position in relation to councillors' allowances. The other information that the hon. Member for Maidenhead alleged was rushed out as a result of the events of 11 September was planning guidance in relation to the south-west. That is the other substantive allegation that was made. It was alleged that we rushed out information on councillors' allowances: not true. The second allegation was that we rushed out information on planning.

The situation in relation to planning guidance in the south-west is as follows: I agreed the final text at the beginning of August, and agreed at that time a planned publication date of 5 September. The delay between the beginning of August and 5 September was to allow the document to be published. As a result of production delays in the Stationery Office, it became clear that printed copies would not be ready in time. As a consequence, it was agreed before the end of August to delay publication by a week, until 12 September. Copies were finally received in the Government office of the south-west on 10 September. They were posted to all who had taken part in the public examination on the morning of 11 September, in advance of the formal publication the next day. I have to say that the idea that a document of such size could suddenly be brought together overnight, to be put out on 12 September, really beggars belief. That is the reality of the situation.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: No, I want to make this point. The two central allegations of information being rushed out on

councillors' allowances and on south-west planning simply do not stand up when we look at the facts. That is the reality of the situation.

Mr. Duncan: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: Is the hon. Gentleman's question on south-west planning?

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Byers: Yes, of course.

Ms Abbott: The minutiae of the Conservatives' motion are a matter for them. The Secretary of State will be aware that the question in the public's mind is whether, for this Government, questions of news management take precedence over every other issue. We are all aware that the Tories, in their time, were as ruthless at news management as anyone. However, is the Secretary of State also aware that it is not enough to say to the country that the Tories were just as bad? People in 1997 voted for something different and better.

Mr. Byers: I accept the thrust of the argument that it is important to ensure that we can properly debate such matters and that people have confidence in the information provided. In addressing the two central allegations on councillors' allowances and planning for the south-west made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead, I have sought simply to go through the facts, so that people are aware of them, and the facts are very clear and precise. There was no news management. Those announcements went ahead as planned on 12 September. That is the truth of the situation. No innuendo; no accusations—that is the reality.

Mr. Alan Duncan *rose—*

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire) *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I give way to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice).

Mr. Paice: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, but he is being very selective about which allegations he wishes to rebut—*[Interruption.]* He has listed only two. I draw his attention to the announcement about the receivership of Railtrack. Does he think that many people in this country will believe that it was a coincidence that that announcement was made during a weekend, just a few hours before the military action in Afghanistan began?

Mr. Byers: I have to respond to five or six allegations, and I have only got to No. 2, but as Railtrack has been mentioned specifically, I shall address the issue. There were two aspects, but the precise point that the hon. Gentleman raises was not mentioned by the hon. Member for Maidenhead. She referred to Alan Bloom and a conversation that allegedly took place on 11 September, and I shall come to that in a minute.

On the timing of the Railtrack announcement, it beggars belief that someone would have timed those events to coincide with the outbreak of hostilities in Afghanistan. When I met John Robinson on the evening of Friday 5 October, I had no idea that hostilities would begin on the Sunday; I am not even sure that that had been agreed at that time. But once that meeting had taken place, we were on course to apply for administration by petition to the High Court on Sunday 7 October. That was the sequence of events; it had nothing whatever to do with the outbreak of hostilities in Afghanistan. When the hon. Gentleman has time to reflect on that, he will realise that that simply must be the case.

Mr. Alan Duncan *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I want to answer the point on Alan Bloom, and I shall then come to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan).

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Byers: I want to answer this point first. The hon. Member for Maidenhead refers to the front page of *The Independent on Sunday*, which said that Alan Bloom, who is the Ernst and Young administrator with responsibility for the administration of Railtrack, spoke to me on the afternoon of 11 September. There is no truth in that; Mr. Bloom has said very clearly on the record that no such conversation took place on 11 September, and I hope that the hon. Lady will accept that. Perhaps she should not believe everything that she reads in newspapers. That article was wrong and inaccurate, but I am afraid that it is an example of what we see reported in the press. When there is a smell of a good story, we often do not see the facts reflected in some of the information that is printed.

I come now to the allegations about Alun Evans, who was director of communications in my Department. The hon. Lady says that there was a disagreement about the provision of information in relation to the London underground and that, as a result, he was moved to another post five days later. Alun Evans took up his new post on 1 October, and I understand that the disagreement that people are referring to took place in the middle of July. My mathematics is not too good, but I know that there are more than five days between the middle of July and 1 October, so there is no substance to that allegation. The important point is that—

Mr. Blunt: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: I shall explain the circumstances, and then I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman. When Alun Evans first took up his appointment, it was envisaged that he would return to policy work at some future date in the civil service, which is where his expertise lies. That has now been done. He has taken up an important post working with Dr. Iain Anderson on his inquiry into the handling of the foot and mouth outbreak. I understand that Mr. Evans discussed his next posting with the permanent secretary in the normal way and that he welcomed the opportunity to work with Dr. Anderson on such an important issue. That is the position with regard to Alun Evans. He was not forced out of his post; he is developing his career in the civil service.

Mr. Blunt: Will the Secretary of State give the House an undertaking that Alun Evans' replacement as director

[Mr. Blunt]

of communications for the Department will not be, as has been the case with many other appointments under this Government, someone like the ex-*Daily Mirror* journalist who is head of the news department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but someone drawn from the Government Information and Communications Service?

Mr. Byers: The appointment of a director of communications is not made by the Secretary of State. It would be improper for me to try to influence that decision. The hon. Gentleman is showing his ignorance of how the civil service works. The appointment is made by an independent body and, as Opposition Members who have been in government will know, not by the Secretary of State. That is the truth of the matter—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the Secretary of State speak. I cannot hear him at times because of the noise.

Mr. Byers: I must give way to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) who has been up and down like a jack-in-the-box.

Mr. Alan Duncan: What explanation did Ms Moore give the Secretary of State for singling out the issue of councillors' expenses in her memo as bad news to be buried when, according to him, the process for announcing it the next day anyway was already in train?

Mr. Byers: When that e-mail was drawn to my attention, which, as I think that I said, was on 8 October, there were more important things that I needed to consider about why it had been sent and that concentrated my mind. As the amendment says, it was "horrible, wrong and stupid" and should not have been sent. Given that we all condemn what Jo Moore did, the issue is the punishment that should be imposed on her. I took the view that the appropriate process was for her, as a civil servant, to be dealt with according to the official disciplinary procedure. The permanent secretary conducted that and, as a result, issued her with an official warning. That is the situation.

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) hoped that the next director of communications in the Department would not be an ex-*Daily Mirror* journalist. Will my right hon. Friend guarantee that his next director of communications will not be an ex-journalist from *The Guardian*, like Bernard Ingham?

Mr. Byers: My right hon. Friend has revealed why it is probably better for Secretaries of State to be kept out of the appointment process.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: No, I have a number of outstanding allegations to which I must reply.

Mr. MacKay *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I have given way extensively; I want to answer the allegations made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead and get on to the substance of the real work going on in my Department. She made an allegation about the position of Jonathan Haslam, arguing that he left his appointment as director of communications in the Department for Education and Employment when I was a Minister there. Mr. Haslam himself made his position clear, insisting that he had not quit and saying:

"I have taken a career decision after being offered a wonderful job. David Blunkett"—

the then Secretary of State—

"has been very kind to me. I get on well with him and all his ministers."

That is what Jonathan Haslam said on the record about his position.

There is one outstanding allegation—about dirty tricks against Bob Kiley—to which I must reply, and then I will have dealt with all the allegations made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead. I have spent more than 20 minutes going though them and I want to finish with that final allegation before moving to matters of substance.

I want to take hon. Members through the position in relation to Bob Kiley. I have never embarked on any dirty tricks against Bob Kiley, who commissioned from Parsons Brinckerhoff a report on standards and safety in the London underground and the possible impact of the Government's proposals to modernise the system through a public-private partnership. It came to my attention that Mr. Steve Polan, one of Bob Kiley's assistants, had received a draft copy of the independent report and its conclusions. Mr. Polan had marked up changes on the report that he wanted to see. In his covering letter to Parsons Brinckerhoff, Mr. Polan says:

"the report should not endorse in any way the possible wisdom of undertaking the necessary standards review after the award of the PPP contracts. My changes were intended to convey this, as well as to make the conclusions a bit more pointed".

He continues on the independent report:

"I've eliminated some of the quoted material . . . for reasons that are self explanatory the quotes were not particularly helpful".

The report was supposed to be independent. I felt that people had the right to know; no dirty tricks, no attack on Bob Kiley. When Opposition Members read what actually happened, they will wonder who embarked on a dirty-tricks campaign.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: I have addressed all the allegations made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead. If I have missed any, I should be grateful if she would intervene to point out where I have done so. I think that I have comprehensively addressed every single allegation that has been made.

Mrs. May: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: On the allegations, I will give way.

Mrs. May: The Secretary of State has missed the overall allegation of my speech. In failing to act against

Ms Moore and in keeping her in her post given what she had done, he has brought this Government, politics and politicians into disrepute.

Mr. Byers: The issue was the culture of spin, to which the hon. Lady referred eight times. In her speech, we witnessed spin around allegations that have no substance. We have dealt with each of the allegations that she has made. In relation to Jo Moore, I did what was appropriate. That was that she should be subject to the normal disciplinary procedures of the Department. She is a serving civil servant and deserves to be dealt with as such according to the disciplinary procedures—and, by the permanent secretary, she was.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: Now that we have dealt with all the allegations—specifically, individually and in detail, I hope—made by the hon. Lady, let us move on to the real issue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister has indicated that he is not giving way.

Mr. Byers: The record will show that I have given way on numerous occasions. I want to address the issues that Conservative Members do not want to address: why we took action against Railtrack and what we are doing with our 10-year transport plan, and for regeneration of our communities, for housing, for our regions and for local government. I shall address those issues in the time that is available to me. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must have some calm in the Chamber. The Chamber must come to order.

Mr. Byers: First, I shall consider what we think might well replace Railtrack: a company limited by guarantee. As I said during Question Time, it will ultimately be for the administrator to assess and make recommendations on proposals for the transfer of Railtrack's assets out of administration, as a going concern. Under schedule 7 of the Railways Act 1993, I will have to approve any such transfer. However, there is every possibility that there will be more than one proposal before the administrator. The Government and I welcome that. At the same time, however, it would be irresponsible if we did nothing and simply left it to others to work up a viable successor to Railtrack plc. We have therefore developed what we regard as an attractive successor vehicle, and will put a proposal to the administrator for a company limited by guarantee to take over Railtrack plc's railway assets and its role as a network operator. We are confident—

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) *rose—*

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I want to make some progress. I have spent nearly half an hour on the first part of the debate and want to address some of the issues in our amendment.

We believe that when people have had the opportunity to look at the detail of our proposals for a company limited by guarantee—a detailed written reply has been made available this afternoon—they will realise that there is substance behind them, and most important, that the financial arrangements with the private sector will be in place and successful.

Mr. Redwood: Will the Secretary of State guarantee that a clear amount of funding will be laid out for any potential bidder who is interested in Railtrack plc? Will he confirm that that will be the same for all bidders and that he will not offer certain sums for his preferred option that he will not make available for others? In the interests of the travelling public and Railtrack group shareholders, he needs to offer firm and clear money that will be delivered, unlike last time, and have a proper competition to see who makes the best proposition.

Mr. Byers: If the right hon. Gentleman is saying that we have to put the interests of the travelling public first, he is right. As I said to the hon. Member for Maidenhead at Question Time, we shall issue guidelines in the next few days to address those issues. It is right and proper that when people put together a bid or submission, which might be expensive, they know the terms under which such approaches are made to the administrator.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West) *rose—*

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton) *rose—*

Mr. Byers: What a choice. I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) first.

Kevin Brennan: On Railtrack, does not my right hon. Friend's announcement undermine the Opposition's case that the Government have been trying to bury bad news stories? Do not most people think that the Government doing something to sort out the mess of the Tory privatisation of Railtrack is a good news story?

Mr. Byers: It is important to remind ourselves that Railtrack went into administration because of its financial circumstances. We have to use that as an opportunity to remodel the railway industry, which our proposals will do. As a result, Railtrack's successor will be able to put the interests of the travelling public first. As we know, Railtrack was compromised on that and found it very difficult to achieve.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Labour Members in general welcome the expeditious way in which he has moved against Railtrack? Will he remind the House of the extra handout that it demanded at the crucial moment?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend asks a difficult question. The proposal was uncosted and Railtrack wanted a blank cheque. Contained in the bundle of documents that we put to the High Court, which are in the House of Commons Library, was the statement that Railtrack would have a deficit of £1.7 billion by next March. We decided to put taxpayers' interests first and that Railtrack would have to

[Mr. Byers]

go into administration. As I said in last week's statement, we chose to put the interests of millions of railway travellers before the interests of Railtrack's shareholders.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I give way to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd).

Mr. Shepherd: Is not the Secretary of State missing the point on behalf of the Government? The country has entered a perilous time. We are engaged in Afghanistan and our citizens, whom we represent, are vulnerable. Of all times, this is when we must be most able to trust the Government, but Ms Moore has put into our minds the thought that this is a manipulative episode. We want to be able to trust, and the Prime Minister will want us to be able to trust him, so that when he asserts something, we believe that it is true.

Mr. Byers: I have a great deal of time for the views of the hon. Gentleman, but the hon. Member for Maidenhead made assertions and I have tried to address each one in turn, factually and specifically. With respect, I think that the record will show that I have done that. I have no reservations about responding. It is right that I should and I hope that I will satisfy Opposition Members about the circumstances that we are in.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement on Railtrack's successor body, which will be able to raise capital in the financial markets. Can he give a logical reason why the same facility should not be extended for investment in London Underground and other transport projects in respect of which a revenue stream is generated?

Mr. Byers: When my hon. Friend looks at the proposals for London Underground, she will recognise that it will continue to be a publicly owned and operated system. It is important always to remember that. People have made the comparison with Railtrack, but the two companies are quite different. London Underground will remain publicly owned. There will be no privatisation of that company.

I should like to make some progress and to outline the issues that the Department is dealing with. On the 10-year transport plan, £8.4 billion is already—

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan) *rose—*

Mr. Byers: This will be the last time that I give way.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Before he leaves the subject of Railtrack, we all welcome the moves that he has made but will he assure us that, whatever arrangements he makes, projects to which funds have already been committed by Railtrack, such as the Vale of Glamorgan passenger railway line, will still go ahead under any new set up?

Mr. Byers: I have to admit that I am not totally on top of the details of that. I offer my hon. Friend my profuse apologies. I will find out this evening and write to him about that plan.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Byers: My worry is that the intervention may concern another local transport project of which I am not aware, but of course I will give way.

Mr. Henderson: I thank my right hon. Friend. Does he now agree that it was wrong to give shareholders £700 million while the industry was crying out for further investment into its infrastructure for safety reasons? Does he think that it was wrong that although the company would have suffered from a £700 million deficit by the end of this year, it gave shareholders another £88 million? Does he agree that that was a sign of a directorship that was out of control and had no interest in the industry?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right about the figures, which show the conflict that was at the heart of Railtrack. On the one hand it obviously had to enhance value for shareholders, but on the other it needed to invest in the railway network. It was a conflict with which it could not come to terms. We all know the results.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I must make some progress as many hon. Members wish to speak and I have taken longer than I intended.

The Department is involved in regeneration and community renewal and in ensuring that our regions share in national prosperity and that every part of our country has decent housing that is fit for the 21st century. Within three years, we will ensure that 300,000 children are no longer in unfit homes. We will meet our target on rough sleepers by March next year.

On Saturday, I announced proposals for the private licensing of landlords, which will help local authorities to ensure that private landlords can no longer neglect communities. Our new deal for communities is targeting support for those areas in greatest need and our neighbourhood renewal project will ensure that all neighbourhoods get the prosperity that some are receiving at present.

The charges laid against us today have been serious. I hope that we have been able to deal with all of them. We will not allow those charges to divert us from our task. We must deliver a new and positive agenda for the future. In so doing, we must ensure that the negative forces do not stand in the way of measures to build a better Britain—a Britain of opportunity where all can achieve their full potential and a fair Britain underpinned by social justice. This is a bold and ambitious vision for our country. It is one that we can achieve and I commend the amendment to the House.

4.44 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Given the present international situation, it is perhaps surprising that the Conservatives have chosen to use precious parliamentary time to debate this issue. It is less surprising that they have chosen in their motion to deal with the style of Government operation rather than to engage in debate on key policy issues, as the Secretary of State said.

Mr. Andrew Turner: My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) asked the Secretary of State whether trust was at the heart of the issue. The Prime Minister asks for our trust. If we believe that we cannot afford him that trust, is not that a very serious problem? Does not it justify raising this matter today?

Mr. Foster: If the hon. Gentleman can be a little more patient, he will discover that I have much sympathy with the points that he has just made, as I believe that the Government have brought on their own head this debate on their conduct in government. The Secretary of State attempted, towards the end of his lengthy remarks, to deal with new and important announcements in respect of Railtrack. I worry that that shows the very desire to manipulate the media about which many hon. Members are concerned.

However, the debate should not concentrate solely on the behaviour of one of the Government's special advisers, Jo Moore. The debate should deal with the climate of spin and manipulation that is evident right across the Government. Jo Moore's e-mail plumbed new depths, but the Government have taken spin and manipulation to new heights. At the taxpayer's expense, they have doubled the number of so-called special advisers, raising it from 38 to 81. The Government have become past masters at double counting figures, and announcing good news stories again and again—each time pretending that the story is new. They have sought to become adept at manipulation but fortunately they do not always get away with it.

The Secretary of State was asked what the purpose of the Jo Moore e-mail was if the timing with regard to the question of councillors' expenses was already planned. Many hon. Members will have been slightly confused by his answer, but it served the purpose of ensuring that people looked carefully at what the Government did on 12 September.

On that date, the Government published a consultation paper on the issue of councillors' pensions. I hope that the Minister for Transport, when he responds to the debate, will confirm that that document recommends a set of procedures that run counter to what was agreed following a Liberal Democrat amendment during the passage of the Local Government Act 2000. The Government agreed then that it would be right to allow all councillors, regardless of their function, to have access, if their councils wished, to a pension. In the consultation document, the Government have completely reversed that decision. It is no wonder that they wanted to keep that out of the public domain.

As we have heard, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Lord Macdonald, only yesterday had to make a personal statement in another place to apologise for giving an unclear reply about the number of political advisers on the Government's payroll. I argue that it is just that approach to the political process that brings it—and politicians of all parties—into disrepute. If we want to explain the declining turnout at elections, we need look no further than the way in which spin and manipulation erode confidence in Government and politicians.

In such a climate it is no wonder that an editorial in today's *Daily Mail* can suggest that "a zealous spin doctor" such as Jo Moore might feel it perfectly okay to suggest that Government bad news could be buried in the immediate aftermath of the 11 September atrocities. So far, both Ministers and the media have understandably tended to focus on Ms Moore's e-mail, but it was astonishing to discover that the wider concerns, expressed by many people over the years, about the conduct of special advisers should have been proved to be so right, in such tragic circumstances.

I can agree with at least one element of the Government's amendment. It rightly states that Jo Moore's e-mail was "horrible, wrong and stupid". It certainly was. Jo Moore clearly has no sense of public service, and no notion that there is a difference between party interest and public interest. I am absolutely convinced that no one who operates or thinks in the way that she did should be working in the public sector.

Ms Moore would have us believe that this error of judgment was a lapse in an otherwise blameless career. What other construction could possibly be placed on her remark that she could not believe that she had sent the e-mail? But it was not a momentary lapse. It is clear from what civil servants and others have said that she has been controversial throughout her career in government. Ministers, other advisers who have no interest in public exposure and civil servants who risk their career if they make complaints are usually the only ones who see what special advisers are up to. The difference this time is that Jo Moore's particular style of operation has been laid open to public scrutiny.

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman made a specific criticism about the number of special advisers and spin doctors. Do I take it that he believes that the number of Liberal Democrat special advisers in the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament whose posts have been created since 1997 should be cut?

Mr. Foster: No, the issue is one of proportion. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that it is valuable to have special advisers working within the system. I hope that he also acknowledges, and this is the crucial point, that those special advisers operate according to a clearly agreed code of practice, and they must abide by that. I shall turn in a moment to that matter as it relates to the Government's special advisers.

We have heard that a disciplinary procedure has operated in this case. The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) asked one question about that procedure, and I want to go further. Given that we have been told little about the precise nature of that procedure, will the Secretary of State tell us whether the reprimand was confined to the single issue of Ms Moore's e-mail, or whether it covered other matters? Does the reprimand mean that Ms Moore has received a written warning that will remain on her record, and if so, for how long will it remain on her record? Has she been told that any repetition will result in dismissal? What steps are being

[Mr. Foster]

taken to monitor her conduct? Do we have to wait for the unlikely event of a further leak about a similar e-mail, or is her conduct now being monitored within the Department and, if so, by whom? Equally importantly, to whom will that person report?

Many have described the sending of the e-mail as evidence of gross professional misconduct and therefore the basis for dismissal without further inquiry into Ms Moore's other activities. I do not believe that that would be sufficient. Indeed, it is not right for the House to determine the employment or dismissal of civil servants. Our concern here should be the terms and conditions of employment, and the code of practice for such civil servants. It is not enough simply to demand that Jo Moore go and assume that all will be well. With her out of the way, things could return to normal and the system carry on as before, without the opportunity to debate the wider issues. That is why the Conservatives' call for Ms Moore's resignation misses the point—her resignation by itself is not enough.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): The hon. Gentleman has asked a question that is in my mind: what exactly is the Department's procedure for dealing with breaches of discipline? He set out his view of the position. Is it his interpretation that it would not have been possible legitimately to dismiss Jo Moore for this particular offence, although there may have been others which would have been relevant? That is certainly my interpretation of events.

Mr. Foster: I asked my questions because we do not know the answer to that particular question. I hope that the Minister who responds to the debate will answer it.

We must address the much wider question of Ms Moore's behaviour and the way in which it has been handled by the Government. There needs to be a full inquiry into her conduct. So far, we have had feeble responses not only from the Secretary of State today, but from the Deputy Prime Minister in an appearance before the Public Accounts Committee and from Lords Falconer and Macdonald when they answered questions on this matter in another place last week. Their refusal to conduct any sort of inquiry despite well-sourced and numerous reports of wrongdoing undermines any faith we might have had in the Government's attempts to regulate their own advisers' conduct—a point that was made earlier.

Even more worryingly, the Deputy Prime Minister has gone so far as to suggest that the only circumstances in which evidence of misconduct will be investigated are when a serving civil servant raises a formal complaint. That is simply not good enough. The longer this goes on, the greater is the risk that Ms Moore's apparent immunity from investigation will undermine faith in the ministerial code. I hope that Ministers will realise that those who fail to investigate and correct misconduct are in effect guilty of it themselves. There must be a clear investigation into at least two issues.

Ms Abbott: The argument in favour of Ms Moore is that she only made one mistake. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in many spheres of the public sector one mistake can, in effect, finish a person's career? Why should things be different for Ms Moore?

Mr. Foster: The question is whether that particular mistake warranted such an outcome. The argument that I am trying to make is that there are several wider issues involving Ms Moore that should lead to a full investigation and the appropriate disciplinary procedure, and that until we have held that inquiry it would be wrong to make a judgment.

The two particular issues that should be included in the investigation include the alleged smear campaign against Mr. Bob Kiley, to which the Secretary of State referred, and the briefing that took place when Railtrack was placed in administration—a matter that has not been referred to in detail today. Both incidents suggest that unless a formal investigation is announced by Ministers during this debate, the code of conduct for special advisers will not be worth the paper on which it is written.

There is no doubt that a smear campaign was conducted against Mr. Bob Kiley. Despite the Secretary of State's comments, the evidence is clear, not only from numerous newspaper reports, but also from Polly Toynbee, who said on "Any Questions" the week before last that she had been on the receiving end of such a campaign. She also said that the campaign emanated from the offices of the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

On the same programme, when the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), was asked about the matter, he did not deny that there had been a smear campaign. He even justified it, arguing that the Government had to do something about the campaign against the public-private partnership. It has been alleged to me, by a credible and senior source, that Jo Moore was intimately involved in that campaign, and that, if not a prime mover, she certainly instructed a junior member of the Department's press office to start leaking material. The Deputy Chief Whip appears to question what I am saying, but I have to advise him that, unfortunately, the Secretary of State has also provided that information, so I did not need to obtain it from another source. The hon. Gentleman will find the information in a written answer from the Secretary of State in the *Official Report*, column 94W, on 22 October.

The interesting point in that answer and in what the Secretary of State has said is that Ms Moore instructed not the head of the communications department but a junior member of the Department's press office. Surely, that is in clear breach of the arrangements that should be enforced. She should have been talking to the senior person in that Department.

Mr. Todd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way once more. He is pursuing an interesting line. Could he refer back to the Opposition motion, which calls on the Government peremptorily to dismiss Ms Moore? Presumably he disagrees with that judgment, as it would obviously be outwith any procedure that is available to the Minister or his departmental officials?

Mr. Foster: I have already shown that I agree with that view—notwithstanding my strong condemnation of what Ms Moore did and my deep concern about other activities

in which she appears to have been engaged. As I have already said, it is only appropriate that the decision should be made by the proper authorities—through the civil service—not by the House, and that it should be taken after a thorough investigation has taken place. I am concerned that such an investigation is being denied by the decision of the Secretary of State and of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman has referred several times to the code of conduct for special advisers. Is he aware that the code says that one job of a special adviser is "devilling" on behalf of a Minister? Does he agree that such an absurd term should perhaps be revisited in the light of all that has happened?

Mr. Foster: I absolutely agree that the code of conduct should be revisited. I have been calling for that for the past three years. The word "devilling", in my understanding—although I would want to check it in a dictionary—means finding out information, not acting in the way that the hon. Gentleman seems to be implying.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): In earlier exchanges, the Secretary of State sought to avoid the central allegation about his judgment and why he did not sack Jo Moore in the light of her despicable e-mail. From the hon. Gentleman's remarks, it seems that there should normally be the ability to dismiss someone summarily for gross misconduct. It is hard to envisage anything more gross or more of a misconduct than what we have heard set out as the facts surrounding Jo Moore.

Mr. Foster: I can think of little more, but we need to abide by the arrangements that have been laid down, and according to those the Secretary of State does not have the power to make that summary dismissal. It must be done by the civil service, through the civil service rules. I maintain that there needs to be an investigation into all the activities surrounding this case. I would not be surprised in the slightest if the outcome were dismissal, but I do not want to propose anything that would be against the very rules that I am seeking to have upheld.

Much has been made of the effect of Jo Moore's involvement in seeking to blacken the name of Mr. Bob Kiley in relation to what happened to Mr. Alun Evans. The Secretary of State sought to persuade us that Mr. Evans's move out of his job as director of communications had absolutely nothing to do with any concern that he might have about people at a junior level trying to persuade staff in the Department to bury news or do anything untoward. He told us that Mr. Evans has quite properly moved on to develop his career.

I suppose that we have to take the Secretary of State's word for it, but I do so with considerable difficulty. I note that Mr. Evans has been transferred to work in the Cabinet Office on a foot and mouth inquiry due to last only six months. This is a man of whom the Department's press release, on his appointment on 18 February 2000, said:

> "Mr Evans, 41, is a career civil servant. He is currently working in DETR on secondment from his post as Head of the 10 Downing Street Strategic Communications Unit. Before that, he was Principal Private Secretary to David Blunkett, Gillian Shephard and Michael Portillo at the Department for Education and Employment."

It does not strike me as a very sound career move for such a man to be buried away on a short-term investigation.

The clear question for the Secretary of State is this: can he say with absolute certainty that he did not breach clause 58 of the ministerial code, which specifically requires Ministers not to issue instructions contrary to the civil service code and requires them to behave as good employers? Can he confirm that for the record?

Mr. Byers: I confirm that I did not contravene that section of the code.

Mr. Foster: I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for that confirmation. In a moment, I shall ask him another question on that matter and on a parliamentary answer that he has given in relation to it.

The Deputy Prime Minister, who is in charge of the Cabinet Office, clearly feels able to rely on Alun Evans's discretion, and he will not say anything for fear that it would have a direct impact on Mr. Evans's job. Lord Macdonald has claimed, as the Secretary of State has just now claimed, that the Government are confident that all the relevant codes are operating perfectly as they should be doing. However, Opposition Members have tabled various parliamentary questions about the operation of those codes of conduct. One such question asked very specifically whether the Government have kept a full record of all contacts between Ministers and their special advisers. I ask the Secretary of State to tell us later whether such a record has been kept and whether that record will, as we have requested, be made available.

The other issue that I should like to raise is on the Government's decision to place Railtrack into administration. I am sure that the Government are aware of the leak, in *The Times*, of the Department's "Ariel plan" which itemised in detail precisely who in the Department would do what. For example, Jo Moore was given the task of fixing up most if not all the key ministerial interviews and media appearances and another special adviser in the Department was given the task of talking to academics in the transport sector.

My question for the Minister is why political appointees were needed for that task. The clear impression given by the "Ariel plan" was that the Department's press office and the director of communications, Mr. Alun Evans, were routinely bypassed, with political appointees operating as a parallel press office. Jo Moore herself is described by many journalists as their first point of contact for the Department. Is that really consistent with the job description that is provided in the model contract for special advisers, and does it not suggest that the Department's most important and sensitive media activities have become politicised and that the civil servants who are concerned with the press and media have been sidelined?

When he was asked on the "Today" programme about Jo Moore's conversation with *The Sunday Times* business section that weekend, the Secretary of State said that he did not know whether such a conversation had taken place. I hope that we will discover the answer to that question in the Secretary of State's answers to parliamentary questions. He is supposed to keep a written record of all contacts that he has on such matters with his special advisers. I therefore hope that, although he could not answer that question on the "Today" programme, the House might soon receive an answer to it.

The Secretary of State is also aware that he is required to give specific instructions to special advisers on the activities that they can undertake in briefing the media.

[Mr. Foster]

In a parliamentary question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), the Secretary of State was asked

"what contacts he has authorised between his special advisers and the media since 7 June in relation to Railtrack."

The Secretary of State answered:

"Special advisers contact the media as necessary on issues across the range of the Department's responsibilities."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 94W.]

The answer certainly seems to be a clear indication of special advisers having been given blanket permission by the Secretary of State. Consequently, I believe that the Secretary of State is in clear breach of his specified responsibilities to monitor and authorise the work of his special advisers. I should be interested to know whether he accepts that interpretation.

The keeping of records is certainly vital. It is equally vital that the Secretary of State monitor and authorise the work of his special advisers, as failing to do so could cause huge problems for those special advisers, not least the possibility that they could fall foul of the law of insider trading, as the Railtrack case has vividly highlighted.

Jo Moore may well have deserved dismissal on more than one count, but that is not the main focus of my concern. Whether she stays or goes, action is urgently needed to lend substance to all the Government's fine words about standards in public life. When the Government came to office, in 1997, they were committed to a civil service Act to give the civil service and all relevant codes a statutory footing for the first time. That was part of the Cook-Maclennan agreement that was struck before the 1997 general election. At that time it was a particularly live issue, because of the Conservative party's abuses of power and the precarious position in which it put the civil service during Margaret Thatcher's "one of us" regime.

The Government remain nominally committed to introducing such a Bill, but in four years they failed to do so. Worryingly, an unnamed Minister was quoted in *The Independent on Sunday* on 21 October as saying of a civil service Act:

"We wouldn't want that. That would definitely be opposed. I would be very surprised if the government even started down that road."

I hope that we will be given confirmation that the view of that Minister is not held by the Government at large.

It is vital to start down the road towards a civil service Act. The Government must investigate all the issues surrounding the Jo Moore case, or the cynicism of which Ministers often complain will multiply, and they will only have themselves to blame.

There is an old adage that those who live by spin die by spin, but sadly it is not accurate. The spin and manipulation that have become so much a part of the Government's culture must end. If they do not, it will not be only the Government who will suffer, but the whole political process, which is sadly already in such disrepute.

5.11 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): If there is one thing harder to stomach than the Conservatives in indignant mode, it is the Liberal Democrats in sanctimonious mode. I suppose that we should be grateful for the fact that it was not the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) who spoke for them. It is fascinating that we had that lecture on morality from the Liberal Democrats, given that they invented the "Focus" leaflet, which has turned lying into such a fine art that it ought to be eligible for a lottery grant.

I suppose that I have residual expertise in the subject of the debate, as for a few years I was what has since been described as a spin doctor when I worked at No. 10 Downing street. In fact, I was more of a spin anaesthetist, because I regarded it as my job not to get things into the newspapers and on the television, but to prevent them from appearing. When I was telephoned at home by Harold Wilson asking me to ring up the editor of ITN or of a newspaper to complain, I promised that I would do so and instantly forgot about it. I recommend that course of action to my right hon. Friends.

Let me make it clear, as I did on the "Question Time" television programme the week before last, that I regard what Jo Moore did as inexcusable, and that it would have been better if she had left or been removed from her job—but for the Opposition to take up one of its scarce days in the House of Commons to deal with the case of a fairly unimportant Government employee must be regarded by anyone who does not live in the enclosed climate of this place as utterly inexplicable.

Our constituents are worried day by day about the fighting that is taking place in which their husbands, sons or brothers are putting their lives at risk; they are worried—whether validly or not we do not know—about the anthrax threat; and they are worried about the present floods. Indeed, there is a series of issues about which ordinary people living normal lives are seriously concerned, but I can break it to the Opposition that one of those issues is not Jo Moore.

I have listened to the debate with growing incredulity. We appeared to be hearing an indictment of a combination of Lucrezia Borgia and Cruella de Vil, yet all that we have is one deeply unfortunate, regrettable, deplorable e-mail. It is interesting that Conservative Members have tabled a motion that begins:

"That this House deplores the culture of spin".

They appear to be unaware of what happened before 8 October when the e-mail was revealed, before 11 September and before 1 May 1997. It is fascinating that the political party that degraded communication between the Government and the press in the post-war period to new depths has tabled such a motion.

Conservative Members have omitted to take account of the first rule of politics, which is enunciated in St. John's Gospel: "

"He that is without spin"—

sorry, "sin"—

"among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

We should all take account of that because we live in glass houses. However, no glass was ever so fragile as that of the house in which the Conservative party has lived for many years.

The Tories' record on spin makes the Government look like backward denizens of a kindergarten. They are guilty not of one culpable remark in one e-mail but, for example, of a serious conspiracy at the highest—or lowest—level

of Government. I refer to the Westland affair, Sir Bernard Ingham and the way in which a civil servant acted politically and managed the deliberate destruction of a member of a Conservative Cabinet—Michael Heseltine.

Let us consider the events. Patrick Mayhew, the Solicitor-General, was urged by Margaret Thatcher to write a letter to Michael Heseltine about three words that he had used on Westland when he was Secretary of State for Defence. The letter was marked "confidential". The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) asked about interpretations of Government rubrics, and I shall therefore provide the official definition of "confidential", which means that,

"unauthorized disclosure would be prejudicial to the interests of the nation".

Bernard Ingham ordered Colette Bowe, chief of information at the Department of Trade and Industry, to leak the letter to the detriment of Michael Heseltine. She was a conscientious civil servant and she refused to do that. Ingham said to her:

"You'll . . . well do what you're . . . well told."

The letter was leaked and when Ingham was asked about his conduct, he said in a speech to the Independent Broadcasting Association:

"I must tell you that I—and I am sure my colleagues—have never regarded the Official Secrets Act as a constraint on my operations. Indeed, I regard myself as licensed to break that law as and when I judge necessary; and I suppose it is necessary to break it every other minute of every working day, though I confess the issue is so academic that I have not bothered to seek counsel's advice."

That was the Prime Minister's press secretary, talking about the law of the land which he, as a civil servant, had had to sign. So it is not surprising that although Ministers in the Conservative Government always connived with Ingham at the lies and slander and traducing in which he was involved, one of them who was at the receiving end, besides Mr. Heseltine—namely John Biffen, described by Ingham as a semi-detached member of the Cabinet—said of Ingham, when forced out of the Cabinet, "He is not the sewage, he is the sewer". That is what a former Conservative Minister said of someone whose actions transcend beyond all recognition the kind of thing that Jo Moore unwisely and deplorably did a few weeks ago.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As the Member who, sitting where the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is sitting now, named Colette Bowe in the House, may I remind my right hon. Friend that we argued that it was quite improper for Bernard Ingham and, indeed, Sir Charles Powell—as he now is—to remain civil servants, and that they should have been paid with party funds?

Mr. Kaufman: My hon. Friend is right. He will remember the evening of the first ballot for the Conservative party leadership, which saw the ejection of Margaret Thatcher. He will remember the scene on the steps of the British residence in Paris, when Mrs. Thatcher came down to say that she would fight and stand in the second ballot. Who should be next to her but Bernard Ingham, a civil servant, at a party political event?

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I will give way later—*[Interruption.]* As the Leader of the Opposition might say, they do not like what they are hearing.

Mr. Miller: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kaufman: Will my hon. Friend allow me to continue for a moment?

We then come to another event 10 years later—only five years ago. This is a subject in which my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is greatly interested and, although he and I have disagreed on it, he has shown considerable integrity in pursuing his point of view. I refer to the export of arms to Iraq.

Does the House remember—if not, I feel obliged to remind it—the Scott report? That report concerned not a remark in one e-mail by one civil servant, but the deliberate violation by a Conservative Government of their own arms embargo on Iraq, which included Alan Clark advising arms salesmen on how to evade it and enticing people into circumstances in which they were prosecuted and could have been sent to jail. That is the Conservatives—that is the way they do it. Not only were they breaking their own embargo and exporting arms to Iraq up to the moment when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, they were granting him trade credits up to that moment.

Mr. Redwood: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for elderly Members to embark on reminiscences of former Prime Ministers and other Ministers whom they knew, which do not seem to be covered by the subject of the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): That is not a point of order. If what is being said were not related to the subject of the debate, I would of course have stopped it.

Mr. Kaufman: I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) objects to my speaking directly on a Conservative motion about "the culture of spin", which is what I am doing.

Let us come to the culture of spin. The Scott report was published on 15 February 1996, only a year or so before the Conservatives lost office. What did it contain? It consisted of five volumes and 1,806 pages, plus appendices. A civil servant who was the Prime Minister's press secretary—Ingham had gone—withheld it from publication, and also withheld it from the Opposition until three hours before the debate. It was only because of the brilliance of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that the Conservatives were trounced on that. The fact is that the Conservatives—by spinning, by withholding, by lying—deliberately tried to prevent the House of Commons from validly debating the Scott report. Let us move on.

Mr. Key *rose—*

Mr. Kaufman: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I am about to refer to a constituent of his.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. For the record, let us remember that Tony Benn invited

[Mr. Key]

Bernard Ingham to leave *The Guardian* and join the Government information service. There is no parallel between the Ingham case and what is happening now.

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Gentleman's memory is not accurate, but I shall not argue with him because he has given me an opportunity to note that my good friend Eric Varley went to the Department of Industry having been Secretary of State for Energy. Eric Varley was contemplating bringing Bernard Ingham from the Department of Energy to the Department of Industry. I did my best to persuade him not to, because I remembered Bernard Ingham's career on the *Yorkshire Evening Post* and the *Leeds Weekly Citizen*.

I advise the hon. Gentleman that I am coming to one of his constituents—namely, Sir Edward Heath. We are bringing ourselves up to date. *[Interruption.]* I would not want the Conservatives to think that I dwell only on the past, so let us come to Amanda Platell, communications director under the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) and former editor of the *Sunday Express*. She published a front page carrying a huge lie about me, for which the Press Complaints Commission forced her and Rosie Boycott to apologise.

The Conservatives are good in respect of the ex-journalists they pick up. They employed Amanda Platell and every one of us remembers with relish, coupled with a certain nausea, watching her television election diary. We remember her saying how she was so worked up about *The Spectator* interview with Sir Edward Heath that she telephoned the editor, the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson), and in the middle of an election campaign tried to de-spin what had already been spun by achieving some repudiation of what Sir Edward said.

What we have from the Conservative party is an extremely long—

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Could the right hon. Gentleman possibly give way?

Mr. Kaufman: Not only possibly, but probably.

Mr. Francois: I acknowledge the right hon. Gentleman's seniority in the House, but we would not want him to miss anything out. Is he aware that a recently published biography of the Duke of Wellington claimed that he once resigned because he thought that a letter written to him by Castlereagh had been delayed by two hours? Does the right hon. Gentleman consider that an example of spin by the Conservative party and would he like to chuck that in too?

Mr. Kaufman: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on getting that on the record. It is likely to be as irrelevant a remark as any he makes throughout his parliamentary career.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State tried to widen the debate by talking about the various achievements of the Government, including Railtrack.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I must apologise to the right hon. Gentleman for interrupting his speech, but I fear that there may be about to occur a much more dramatic example of the culture of spin, which the House is debating, than any he has mentioned. At 5 o'clock, the IRA made a statement on decommissioning and I understand that the Prime Minister has summoned the press to be at No. 10 at 5.45 pm. He wishes to make a statement of his own in response to the IRA statement.

So far as I know, there is no indication that the Prime Minister has the slightest intention of coming to the House, to which he has a prime responsibility to account, to give hon. Members an account of this important matter and of the Government's attitude towards it. Do you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have any indication, contrary to my assumption, that the Prime Minister does, indeed, intend to come to the House, and, if not, what we can do about it? How long do we have to go on being treated in this dismissive fashion in Parliament by this Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have no knowledge of the matter to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The Speaker's views on these matters are well known. Hon. Members on both Front Benches will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. It is not for me to comment further.

Mr. Kaufman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman intervened with his customary sincerity and I do not quarrel with him for being concerned about that matter. His point of order was a great deal more sincere than anything else we have heard from that side of the House this afternoon.

Mr. Miller: This news has also just been brought to my attention. I have listened to my right hon. Friend's wonderful speech with the usual enthusiasm that I give to his speeches. Does he agree that the news that has just been announced illustrates once more just how petty the Conservatives are being? There are far more important things affecting this country—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) answers, I must tell him that I have allowed him a reasonable amount of latitude in this debate so far. I do not want him to wander too far from the original motion or from the amendment.

Mr. Kaufman: Of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me point out something to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), as I gave him notice that I would do. He is a great expert on cinema, and the chairman of the films group in the House of Commons. I recommend that he go to see the new Ken Loach film, "The Navigators", which is about the privatisation of the railways and the disaster inflicted by the Conservative party on the railways with regard to Railtrack and to the operating companies. That is the kind of subject that we ought to have been debating today, and the kind of thing in which people in this country are interested.

I said to the Conservatives on the day of the Queen's Speech, and I repeat it to them here and now, that they were beaten by a landslide in 1997 and by a landslide in June this year. That will be as nothing compared with the drubbing they will get at the next election, unless they somehow reconnect themselves to the real concerns, interests and worries of the people of this country.

They show no signs of doing so. They continue to be an irrelevant rabble, and this debate, which they have initiated, is proof of that.

5.33 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who, as always, was occasionally entertaining and, even more occasionally, accurate in his remarks and observations. I want to pick him up on the point with which he started, when he sought to belittle the motion before the House in the Conservative party's name and, by implication, the subject under debate.

I believe that this issue goes to the heart of the democratic process. Democracy requires knowledge so that people can make informed choices. Knowledge requires information that is timely, accurate and freely given. We are not political innocents in this House, and we know that, in addition, Governments have a legitimate interest in putting the best complexion on their activities. However, the activities of Ms Jo Moore, as described in the debate, go so far beyond anything legitimate or constitutionally proper that they should engage the serious attention of the House; otherwise the people whom we represent will continue to be disillusioned about the political process. That is also reflected in the disgracefully low turnout in all the elections in which we participate. So I believe that this important subject should concern all hon. Members.

The example that I wish to cite goes a very long way beyond the normal political knockabout that enriches the British political system. It also goes way beyond the Jo Moore school of news management. It concerns a political cover-up, by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, involving a report that was embarrassing to the Government. I wish to describe the circumstances in what I intend to be a short speech—it is the only point that I wish to make, but I think that the House will agree that it is important.

I refer to the inquiry into the business affairs of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), which involves his links to the late Robert Maxwell and, in particular, the treatment of an apparently undeclared payment of £200,000 to the hon. Gentleman by a Maxwell company. I shall not discuss the details of that payment because it is the subject of an inquiry by the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges—a Committee of the House. In other words, my subject is not the conduct of the hon. Gentleman, but rather the conduct of Ministers, especially the Secretary of State.

The House will know that, in May of this year, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Mrs. Elizabeth Filkin, whom I regret to say is not to be reappointed to her position, reported on the case of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West, and upheld the serious complaints and charges made against him. The Standards and Privileges Committee deliberated and decided to postpone judgment for three months, until after the general election. That period expired in August, and I understand that the Committee deliberated today on whether to accept Mrs. Filkin's observations and, if so, what to do about the hon. Gentleman. All that is well known, but it is less well known that everything that Mrs. Filkin investigated earlier this year, and all that the Committee is deliberating on, was already known to Ministers two years ago. Quite simply, they covered up that information for reasons of political expediency.

The background can be easily and quickly described. In 1998, I first wrote to Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry about serious breaches of company law, involving companies in the Maxwell group. I also stated that stock exchange regulations had been broken and that tax laws had been similarly breached. I referred to the undeclared payments to directors in the group. I wrote a total of four letters to the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I specifically asked for an external, impartial inquiry into the matters about which I had written because I knew that the Department was investigating the affairs of a Labour Member and ex-Labour Minister. Instead of accepting my request, the DTI carried out an internal inquiry during 1999. We now know that that inquiry found everything, but the result was given the Jo Moore treatment. I believe that Ms Moore was working for the right hon. Gentleman at the time and either directly, or possibly through her influence, succeeded in burying the report. On the day before the Christmas recess in December 1999, the right hon. Gentleman, who is now Secretary of State of the Department under review today, answered a planted parliamentary question, saying that the inquiry was complete and that no further action would be taken.

Mr. Redwood: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that there are no Ministers on the Front Bench? Does that not show the utter contempt in which they hold the House of Commons? My right hon. Friend is making serious allegations, but there is no Minister present and the Whip is making no effort to secure one to hear those charges.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: That is certainly a monstrous discourtesy to the House, which is typical. I could not help noticing that the Secretary of State scuttled out of the Chamber when I rose to speak; I think that he knows a lot about his doings in his previous post. The conclusion of the investigation, revealed in answer to a planted question, could have been the end of the matter. However, I, of course, corresponded with the right hon. Gentleman and pointed out that I was still awaiting a substantive reply to the four letters that I had written to the Department in 1998. I pointed out that it had not even given me the courtesy of providing a copy of the answer to the planted parliamentary question. The Secretary of State refused adamantly to engage in any further correspondence.

That would have remained the position but for a curious twist. Mr. Tom Bower, an investigative journalist, discovered the material on which inspectors and officials from the Department of Trade and Industry had worked in 1999 and publicised it in a book called "The Paymaster". It was only because of that that Mrs. Filkin, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, could reopen her inquiry—*[Interruption.]* Ah, the Minister for Transport has returned. The material discovered by Mr. Bower is alluded to in the 170 pages of Mrs. Filkin's report, published in May, which I have already mentioned. It contains details of the £200,000 payment and information about breaches of stock exchange regulations and tax rules. Of course, it goes beyond the duties and responsibilities of Mrs. Filkin to pronounce on apparent breaches of tax regulations, but that information is in her report. I draw to the attention of the House the fact that all that information—and more—was in the earlier DTI report, which had been drawn up two years previously and suppressed.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

The Secretary of State told me that he was prevented from publishing his internal report, but that is only because he chose to conduct an internal, in-house inquiry instead of the external, independent inquiry, followed by publication of its findings, that I had demanded. In any case, even if he could not, for reasons of commercial confidentiality, publish the entire report, he could certainly have acted on its contents. He could have sent its findings to the relevant authorities; otherwise, what is the point of having an inquiry at all? The Secretary of State said that the report was handled solely by civil servants. Why, therefore, did he answer that parliamentary question in December 1999? By doing so, he took responsibility for the report. He must therefore take responsibility for the inquiry and what happened to it. In any case, it is simply inconceivable that experienced civil servants should overlook the importance of what they discovered during that inquiry in 1999.

The reason for the cover-up is simple: one Secretary of State in a Labour Government was investigating the affairs of a colleague—and someone who had recently been a Treasury Minister. That inquiry involved the affairs of the late Robert Maxwell, who was the great Labour tycoon. Therefore there was motive and opportunity for a cover-up, and there most certainly was a cover-up. There is simply no other rational explanation.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he has given notice of what he is saying to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson)?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As I explained at the start of my remarks, the object of this debate and my contribution to it is not the conduct of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West. That is being investigated separately by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. It is not my duty to pronounce judgment on another Member of this House. The object of my remarks is the conduct of Ministers and specifically the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

I believe that there has been a cover-up, and it is an insult to the House if there has been one. It is an indictment—and a serious one—of the Government's entire attitude towards openness and the truth, and will remain a stain on the reputation of the Secretary of State until he discloses the content of the secret report.

5.46 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I have a difference of judgment from that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), and perhaps a difference of experience. In my experience, many of our fellow citizens have rightly or wrongly become deeply interested in the issue of Ms Moore, which they see as involving the heart of the Government. Those at the Linlithgow constituency Labour party meeting on Sunday were deeply interested in and very concerned by the issue. In addition, when my right hon. Friend worked for Harold Wilson, he was paid by the Labour party. He was not paid out of public funds. That makes a bit of a difference.

I want to address the matter of the civil service ethos which is based on "neutrality of process"—I understand that that is the technical term. Neutrality of process makes it possible for civil servants to serve faithfully Governments of different political complexions, and justifies payment from public funds.

All those on the Government Front Bench will recognise that, when they came to office, they were welcomed strongly and warmly by civil servants who had been working for Ministers of another party for 18 years, and that those same civil servants became very protective of the incoming Ministers. Similarly, when the Conservative Government entered office in 1979, I am sure that those who had been working for Labour Ministers became, overnight, protective of Ministers with very different views.

I know from my experience as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Richard Crossman that when he came to office after Keith Joseph—a man of remarkably different views—the civil service, overnight, became loyal to its new "master".

If people such as special advisers are to be paid from civil service funds, one wonders whether the neutrality of process can continue in the way that we have accepted in Britain.

Going back to the distant past, the Cabinet Minister to whom I was Parliamentary Private Secretary had three special advisers when he was Secretary of State for Social Security. They were Professor Richard Titmuss, the leading sociologist of the day; Professor Brian Abel-Smith, who probably knew more about pensions than anyone else in England; and Peter Townsend, who had written a seminal book on family life in Bethnal Green. Other Departments had special advisers. The Treasury had Nicholas Kaldor, who was an extremely distinguished economist whatever anyone thinks about his economic views. They were totally different from today's special advisers, who seem to be factotums for Ministers. What special expert advice do they bring to a Department?

I recollect that the same Mr. Crossman had a press officer called Peter Brown who was a career civil servant of weight. When Crossman wanted to do something that was slightly party political, Peter Brown said, "No, Mr. Crossman. I will not put that out for you." Not once did Crossman argue. Peter Brown's judgment was paramount: it was either, "Yes, Mr. Crossman" or "No, Mr. Crossman." Departments' press officers should be career civil servants who are prepared to say unpalatable things to Secretaries of State, however powerful, when those Ministers cross the line. If the Secretary of State cannot understand that Ms Moore has committed a sackable offence, it raises questions about his fitness for that job.

There is another matter to consider, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). What would happen to other people who made a single mistake of such enormity? A doctor would get into great trouble, and so would another civil servant.

What do senior civil servants in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions think about that? I am not pretending that I have talked to them, but it does not take much imagination to determine what they may say. People in Ms Moore's position will ask those civil servants to make a judgment. When she does that, they may well reply, "What judgment?". I get the impression from constituents that there is searing resentment in the civil service about what has happened.

Errors of judgment are one thing, possibly technical mistakes. Moral lapses are another matter. I fear that I come into the category of those who think that what happened with Ms Moore on 11 September was more than a technical judgment; it was a moral lapse. It mocks attempts to build up idealism and demonstrates the aggressive cynicism of media management culture. As I said to the Prime Minister's face, I fail to understand his inability to recognise that Ms Moore's continued employment in her capacity of special adviser sullies his Government. If hon. Members think that I am going over the top, we should all reflect on the 58 per cent. turnout at the election, which showed what people think of the profession of politics.

Had a Secretary of State for Transport under a previous Labour Government been in the position of my right hon. Friend, I have no doubt that whatever else they were doing, Harold Wilson or James Callaghan would have sat beside him in the House. I noticed that he was left to dry on the Front Bench. No other Cabinet Minister was present, not even the Leader of the House or Chief Whip. Only the Minister for Transport was here.

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Did my hon. Friend hear the information that was conveyed earlier? It gave a good reason for Ministers not being present. They are involved in an important historic event and he is getting things grossly out of proportion.

Mr. Dalyell: I happen to think that the House of Commons is important. When it has such a debate, I ask myself what events require all senior Ministers to be elsewhere. It is not a question of amour-propre, but of parliamentary democracy.

Ms Abbott: Whatever this evening's circumstances, it is not the first time that senior Ministers under pressure have been hung out to dry by their Treasury Bench colleagues. On the subject of Ms Moore, she should at least have been suspended. At best, the failure to suspend her suggests collusion with the attitude behind her e-mail; at worst, it raises the suspicion that she cannot be moved because she knows too much.

Mr. Dalyell: I had better not be drawn into such speculation. I undertook to make a short speech.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dalyell: No, forgive me, but not at the moment.

I told the Whips on Saturday that if the Conservative amendment is narrow and confined to the general issues of Ms Moore's case, it will have my vote, and that is what I will do tonight.

5.57 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who gave a fine speech. He was more eloquent on the Jo Moore case than I could possibly be.

I have declared my interests in the Register of Members' Interests. I have also noted that several Labour Members of weight and experience who deeply love parliamentary democracy believe that there has been an offence. I hope that we will hear more of that during this important debate.

I want to concentrate on the Secretary of State's counter-attack. He claimed that he had important work to do on the railway industry and represented bankrupting it as a triumph. He suggested that we should acquit him of the serious charges of which he stands arraigned by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and others because of that work. I want to demonstrate why he should be condemned and lose his position in office. In addition to the matters eloquently raised by other hon. Members, he has made a catastrophic mess of the railways and of the contribution that the public-private finance initiative could make to our economy.

The Secretary of State did not do the House the courtesy of setting out his proposals for Railtrack during the debate, although he said that he would like to refer to them. For the sake of greater accuracy, I have been able to get a copy of the written answer that he provided through the normal channels when the debate was taking place. It would have been much better had he told us of its contents prior to the debate or as part of his contribution to it. Such matters should not go unexamined simply because he finds it more convenient to weasel out such details around the back while we listen to a serious debate on the Floor.

Mr. Spellar: Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that the Secretary of State should not have given way to the Opposition's numerous interventions on other issues? He might join us in regarding them as less important, but his colleagues wanted to focus on them and they would have criticised my right hon. Friend had he not given way and responded.

Mr. Redwood: Of course the right hon. Gentleman should have taken those interventions and attempted to answer the serious charges levelled against him in this Opposition day debate. He decided to try to hijack the day by also referring to the railway industry. It is a discourtesy to the House that he did so by means of a written answer, which we could not easily obtain as we were in the debate, while pretending that we knew what he was on about in his other remarks.

The right hon. Gentleman split his speech into two halves. I am glad that he took interventions from colleagues on the Opposition Benches. It was the least that he could have done in the circumstances. I give him no particular marks for doing so—I would have given him anti-marks had he refused—but as he spent about 20 minutes on the railways, it would have been better if he had told the House more about what he had in mind.

In the written reply, the Secretary of State claims that his successor company limited by guarantee will have the same sources of income as the Railtrack company that he has just helped to bankrupt, namely, that it will have

"property income, track access charges and grant."

He goes on to say:

"Some 90 per cent. of the company's income would therefore be covered by stable long-term contracts."

Would it? The Railtrack company in administration thought that its income was covered by suitable long-term guarantees and contracts. Its report and accounts for the last financial year available made it clear that on 2 April 2001

[Mr. Redwood]

it had negotiated with the Strategic Rail Authority and the Government and had been offered accelerated payments of £1.5 billion so that it could carry on trading. It clearly needed those payments in view of the safety and regulatory burdens placed on it by the Government and the regulators.

The company thought that those were guaranteed payments. It was on the basis of that promise—that contract, which is recorded in the accounts—that the directors and their auditors signed off those accounts on a going-concern basis. This is a deeply serious matter. People bought and sold shares on the back of that arrangement. People lent money to Railtrack to carry on with new projects on the back of it. Bankers took comfort from it to finance the railway industry as we would want. We discovered that although the Government were said to be party to that guarantee of £1.5 billion in accelerated payments, they could, at the drop of a hat, change their mind and remove the money.

How is anyone to be sure that if the Government set up the new structure—a company limited by guarantee—their promises of funding for a substantial portion of the money that it needs will be any more worth while than those worthless promises to the shareholders, employees and all those involved in the business of Railtrack?

We also learn from the statement that the successor company will have access to the same property income as the predecessor company. How can that be true? In his haste, the Secretary of State decided to bankrupt Railtrack plc, the subsidiary company, and not Railtrack Group, which is the company in which people have a shareholding interest and which was the larger company that was privatised with all the assets and interests. When he does some of the more detailed work, he will discover that some of the properties are owned by Railtrack Group but are not also owned by Railtrack plc. Surely he must admit that some of the property is available for sale and distribution to the shareholders of the company that is in suspension owing to the bankruptcy of its principal subsidiary, thanks to him, and that it will not necessarily be made available for the future good of the railways and to buttress the balance sheet of the successor company. It is going to need a lot of buttressing if it is to persuade people to lend it substantial sums of money.

This extraordinary answer goes on to say that the new company that the right hon. Gentleman has in mind

"would not need equity to raise debt finance."

It will be the first company in the world that does not. Anyone who knows any elementary banking—I thought that all Labour Members now had to learn it to praise the public-private finance initiative to raise money from banks—will realise that the first thing that a banker looks at is whether the company has any wherewithal or resources of its own. If things go wrong, will there be a reserve that it could pay out from when the bankers understandably want their money back because of failure? The Secretary of State now says that he can invent a company that does not need any reserve or equity in the early days and that somehow people will mysteriously lend it money on his say-so, even though it is a company of straw.

The right hon. Gentleman goes on to say that the company will be encumbered with Railtrack's existing debts, which makes it even less exciting for those thinking of venturing into business once again with the Government. The written answer says that the company will be able to borrow from the debt markets as necessary.

Even odder is the Government's statement that this new company—with no equity, lots of debts inherited from the old company and a wobbly guarantee from the Government on whether it will get any grant—will have

"a solid investment-grade (i.e. at least BBB) credit rating."

How will it do so if it has no equity and no Government-granted reserve on day one?

Does the Secretary of State realise that the company that he bankrupted had a single A credit rating, so he is aiming for a substantially lower rating for his successor company? Surely that makes him a bit of a noodle. It will certainly mean that he will end up borrowing money, through this company, on a much more expensive basis than did the predecessor company. Far from making the service cheaper and better for the rail travelling public and all those involved in the rail industry, by his own admission he wants to create a company with a worse credit rating, which will have to pay more for its money. On the basis of the prospectus so far and the few flimsy paragraphs that I have here, I do not see how the company could possibly have a BBB credit rating. It is more likely to have the junk bond rating that is accorded, for obvious reasons, to Railtrack in administration.

The answer goes on to inform us that the company will overcome some of the obvious problems by being offered

"a standby, subordinated loan facility"

by the Government, which will be capped but does not have a Government guarantee. Let us work that one out. What great gobbledygook and rubbish is herein described. Either the company has a Government guarantee or it does not. If it has one, it is public money and it has to be raised from the taxpayers and scored against the borrowing requirement of the country as the Government get us into the red again, as they undoubtedly will. If it does not have such a guarantee, it will not do anything for the company when the City is assessing it. People will say that it does not have a guarantee on the money from the Government, so they will not give it much credit for having such a facility or arrangement.

The Secretary of State optimistically says that all those problems will eventually be resolved because, over the years, the company will build up a big reserve out of the profits that it will undoubtedly make. Has he seen the figures for the most recent trading period of the old Railtrack company? Does he not understand that the company was burdened with about £750 million of additional costs by regulatory and Government decisions? Unless he is about to lower safety standards and change the regulatory requirements, those costs will continue, so how is the new company suddenly to make money when the old company was unable to, struggling as it was with the regulatory burden?

The right hon. Gentleman lives in the realm of fantasy when he concludes his answer by saying that the structure of the company will enable the Government to deliver its much-loved

"ten year plan commitment of some £30 bn of public expenditure on the railways but with much improved value for money",

and the famous £34 billion of private investment that that money will lever in. If the Government are seriously planning to spend £30 billion of taxpayers' money on the

railway, would it not have been sensible to have paid the amounts owing under the accelerated contract agreed with the old company for only £1.5 billion, which would have avoided the need to put it into administration? Will the Government now set out in detail how much of that £30 billion is payable to whoever may be taking over from Railtrack in administration in the next three-year period, year by year?

The Secretary of State should now grasp this important point. As he decided to put the junior company into administration, he will have a problem in ensuring that he does not intervene unnecessarily in the affairs of a private sector company with private sector shareholders that is not in administration, namely Railtrack Group. He also has to be careful not to offer anything unreasonable for one possible solution to the mess that he has created without offering similar facilities to other bidders and potential buyers.

Railtrack in administration may have an asset surplus or deficit. The administrators will work that out in due course. What is for sure is that if there is any asset surplus, it resides in the hands—and is to the benefit—of the shareholders of the group that owned the company before it went into administration.

It is now incumbent on the Secretary of State, as well as on the directors of the company and the administrator, to work to ensure that the proceeds of any onward sale or disposal of the company in administration are maximised. The way in which that can be done is crystal clear. The Government must set out the amount of money that they will offer the railways. They must also set out the regulatory framework, and guarantee that they will not change it unreasonably or unnecessarily. They must make a statement about what they want the railways to achieve and then, through the administrator, put the project out to bidders. In that way, we will be able to see who will produce the best result.

It is not the Secretary of State's job to think up a half-baked scheme for a company without equity—a scheme that is meant to take the dividends out of profit making and, it is claimed, plough back what will probably be make-believe profits into the future of the railway. Effectively, the scheme is trying to freeze out other possible solutions that may be more profitable and successful, and more capable of levering in private finance.

I can see no way in which the Secretary of State's proposed company limited by guarantee could lever in anything like £34 billion in the early days, weeks or even years of its progress. Unless the Government change the flow of grant, subsidy and regulation, nor can I see any way for that company to be profitable and successful. It certainly will not be if the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is, effectively, the shadow chairman or director of the whole enterprise, as the written answer implies that he wishes to be.

We learn through the press, but not from the Secretary of State, that the Government are looking for a chairman of the new enterprise, and that they will pay the princely sum of about £1 million a year. That is a very generous incentive, and it might be attractive to many people. However, any eventual office holder might be wise to ask the Government to pay the cash up front. As we have seen with Railtrack, the great danger is that the Government can make a promise one day, but fail to pay the bills thereafter. I assume that such a large pay offer has been made not to wind up Labour Back-Benchers—who may find it offensive—but because the Government know that a person who takes on such an extraordinary task needs to be offered danger money.

Instead of offering danger money to see whether there is someone who can be tempted, the Government should think again about the whole project. They should say that a company limited by guarantee under these circumstances, with the stakeholders that they have in mind, is not going to work, and they should acknowledge that they have a duty to let the administrator put the company up for sale in the usual way. As far as winning back the trust of the British public in the railways is concerned, the Government should set out how much money they are going to offer, and on what basis they will offer it.

In my constituency of Wokingham, I was very close to getting the old Railtrack and other interested parties to agree on a project for a new station and a proper transport interchange. They are much needed. I am now told that the matter has been put on ice and that the administrator cannot make decisions about new projects because he is not sure how much money he will get, day by day, from the Government, or how much will be available in future for capital expenditure.

In March this year, the Railtrack accounts showed that capital expenditure to a value of £1.777 billion had been contracted for but not undertaken up to that point. Is that capital expenditure still going ahead, or will the Government renege on the contracts? If it is going ahead, will the Government stand behind it and make the money available? If the Government are not going to make the money available, how on earth do they think that that capital expenditure can be paid for? Why will they not come forward with plans that will allow them not only to undertake the capital expenditure of £1.777 billion, but to accomplish all the extra schemes—such as my scheme for Wokingham station—that have not yet been agreed but were well advanced and in the pipeline?

The Labour party will rue the day that a Labour Secretary of State bankrupted a trading enterprise in the private sector. The Government's lack of belief in true public-private partnerships has been exposed. The Secretary of State's decision has raised the cost of capital for the railways, delayed capital expenditure and undermined what trust the City had in the Government's actions and inactions. Ministers have lost trust in all sorts of ways, but I suspect that the Secretary of State has lost trust most damagingly in the past week or two through his actions and antics with the railway industry. The future of that industry is now much grislier as a result.

6.14 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): It gives me great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who gave one of the most extraordinary—not to say bizarre—speeches that I have heard from a former Conservative Cabinet Minister. It was bizarre because the right hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that Railtrack ought to be given more than another £1 billion in taxpayer's money—even though my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knew that the company would be in debt by more than £1 billion by April next year, and close to financial meltdown.

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

The idea that the Government should throw good money—taxpayers' money—after bad in that way belies almost everything that Baroness Thatcher stood for when she was Prime Minister. The right hon. Member for Wokingham seems to have turned on its head the notion that companies should not be bailed out by the taxpayer. He seems to be a convert to some form of Keynesianism—or to a form of left-wing socialism that even the former Member of Parliament for Chesterfield might have found a little too red.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood—probably deliberately—what I said. I said that, if the Government promise £1.5 billion, they should deliver. They will find out that their ridiculous alternative to the company that they have decided to bankrupt will cost them much more than £1.5 billion. The bankruptcy occurred because the Government intervened and over-regulated the railway.

Mr. O'Brien: Railtrack's financial meltdown occurred because of the way in which the industry was privatised by the previous Conservative Government. There are Conservative Members who have been in the House a long time who bear a major responsibility for the problems of poor services on this country's railways. They also bear a responsibility for the problems faced by shareholders who invested in the botched privatisation of the railways which created Railtrack.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State faced a clear choice. Railtrack was in serious financial difficulties. It was demanding further inputs of taxpayers' money which would have been lost in due course. There was a need for the Government to intervene. The Tories' only answer to the problem is to throw more taxpayers' money into a company that was collapsing. My right hon. Friend did what the public wanted. Years of privatisation had failed to deliver effective services, and some services had deteriorated badly. For example, Water Orton station in my area of north Warwickshire used to win awards, when the railways were a nationalised industry, for being one of the best-kept and best-run stations in the country. Since privatisation, services have constantly gone down hill. The responsibility for that lies in the privatisation of the railways, and especially in the failures of Railtrack.

The public wanted action, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State delivered it. He has set out new proposals to deal with the problems of under-investment in our railways. The proposals will ensure that private investors will be able to invest in the railways in the future. They will also ensure that creditors can be paid by the company itself, in so far as that is possible, and that employees' pay and pensions are safeguarded. That is an important consideration for me, as my father and most of my other relatives worked—or, indeed, still work—in the railway industry. They want to ensure that their pay and conditions are protected.

Mr. Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I have given way to the right hon. Gentleman once. I shall be generous to him and give way again, even though in his ministerial past he showed no such generosity to Back Benchers. I forgive him that, as Labour Members belong to a forgiving party. However, we will not forgive him for voting for privatisation of the railways.

Mr. Redwood: I think that the record will show the hon. Gentleman that I was very generous, as a Minister and shadow Minister, when it came to giving way. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way now.

Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Government will stand behind all the court actions brought by the families and relatives of people involved in rail crashes? Those actions could result in substantial and successful claims. The hon. Gentleman will know from the Railtrack balance sheet that there are many unresolved claims. Will the Government pay damages to the victims?

Mr. O'Brien: I very much hope that the Government will stand behind the British public and ensure that we have a decent rail service, that taxpayers' money is spent properly and that we are not constantly bailing out the failures of a Conservative privatisation that has caused all the problems.

I had not intended to speak in this debate because the matter of Jo Moore has not caused me a great deal of angst, but I was moved by the sheer hypocrisy of the approach adopted by Conservative Front-Bench Members. Jo Moore is, after all, a fairly junior adviser who sent a very stupid and wrong e-mail. If every Member of the House who had done a stupid or wrong thing were sacked as a result, the Benches on both sides of the House would be far more sparsely populated than they are even today.

The Conservatives' position shows us how deeply out of touch they are with the British public. They do not even understand that there is a great deal of national concern about very serious issues such as the anthrax scare, the way in which the war on terrorism is being conducted and the fact that, today, it appears that there has been an historic announcement about the Provisional IRA. Those are the sort of matters that the House would have been debating if we had a serious Conservative Front-Bench team.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you received any information about whether there is to be a statement to the House about the historic announcement to which the hon. Gentleman referred? I understand that the Prime Minister is speaking to the media. Surely the House should be addressed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): A point of order was made earlier, and the Chair gave a ruling at that time which I cannot go beyond. This is not strictly a point of order for the House, but no doubt Ministers will have heard the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. O'Brien: It is indeed a bizarre turn of mind—to use the phrase employed by Opposition spokesmen—that has caused the Conservatives, on this of all days, to choose to discuss the career of a junior official and the Government's long-term relationship with the press. These are matters that one might say are, to use an American expression, inside the beltway. They are not of immediate concern to most members of the public.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred to constituents of his who are concerned about these matters and who raised them with him, and he might be surprised to hear that the only comment made to me by a constituent came from a councillor, who said, "They're not going to sack that woman, are they? It seems that she was very stupid, but is it a sacking offence?" This matter is on the front pages of the newspapers, and is of deep concern only to Conservative Front Benchers.

I accept that matters to do with the morality and proper running of the Government are ones about which the House ought to be concerned. I accept also that the Government's relationship with the press is a matter of public interest and concern, but there is a question about the priority that one affords those concerns when there are so many more important issues before us.

Ms Abbott: I listened with care to my hon. Friend saying that the general public are not interested in the details of the Jo Moore affair, and I am prepared to concede that the man or woman on the No. 73 bus is not discussing it as we speak. However, my hon. Friend must understand that the accumulated weight of such incidents is a concern of the general public, and it breeds a cynicism that lies behind the very poor electoral turnout in many constituencies earlier this year. If colleagues insist on claiming that the ordinary public are not concerned about the aura of sleaze created by such incidents, we will see an even greater drop in turnout in forthcoming elections.

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend plays right into the hands of Conservative Front-Bench Members, who seek to make the issue of what they call "spin" into sleaze, which damaged them when they were in government. They have not got us on that; there are no incidents of sleaze that they can hang on the Government, so they are now trying to use the Government's relationships with the press to suggest that we cannot be trusted.

I turn now to the reasons why we should, from time to time, be conscious of being—I say this advisedly to my hon. Friend, whom I have known for many years—on-message.

Ms Abbott: It is a bit late for that.

Mr. O'Brien: Yes, it is.

The Conservative party's hypocrisy in this matter was clearly set out in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), but he omitted a reference, which is well worth making, to the leak of a certain memo sent by a special adviser to the then Prime Minister in 1992. The memo, which was about campaigning, dealt with the fact that the Conservatives were failing to make enough of the asylum and immigration issue to stir up votes. Conservative Front Benchers will realise who drafted that memo, because it was a colleague of theirs who now sits on the Front Bench. There was no call from Conservative Front Benchers at that time for the dismissal of the individual involved. Perhaps what is good for one person ought to be good for another.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: Yes, because I have referred to a particular individual.

Mr. Pickles: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that the incident to which he referred was reported in a newspaper article and that the person involved was not a special adviser?

Mr. O'Brien: I gather that the individual worked for Conservative central office, advising the party leadership on campaigning matters. The reprehensible advice given in that memo was cause for dismissal, but it resulted instead in the individual's promotion. I might also refer to the embarrassment caused by the previous shadow Chief Secretary during the election campaign, but I will not go into that. The individual concerned appears to have got promotion out of the incident.

I am concerned by the vilification of Jo Moore to which one of my hon. Friends has referred. Jo Moore is an otherwise fairly inconsequential person who sometimes speaks to the press and sometimes gives advice to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Certainly, her memo was very unpleasant, but the blame culture in which Ministers and parliamentarians accept they live is not something to which we should expect civil servants, whether or not they are special advisers, to be subject. In industry, and indeed in the public sector, good managers are desperately trying to move away from a blame culture in which every time someone does something wrong, they must cover it up or risk losing their job.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak) *rose—*

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle) *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: If hon. Members will bear with me, I will give way in a moment.

Good managers in the public sector and in industry seek to move away from the blame culture to ensure that people are more open about what they do, so that they do not feel that they will automatically be dismissed if they do something wrong. Managers want to know what is happening in their business. They want people to know that they should not be afraid to come forward if they have done something wrong, because they will be disciplined sensibly and reasonably and it will not necessarily be the end of their career.

The Secretary of State has decided that the disciplining of this particular special adviser by the permanent secretary is the end of the matter. That was a courageous decision. It may also have been a good management decision. Time alone will judge whether it was good politics. It was certainly a move away from the blame culture that civil servants worry about all too often as they make decisions. Indeed, as we move towards freedom of information it will be especially worrying for civil servants to realise that much of what they do can find its way quickly into the public arena.

We must get away from that culture of blame. The decision may not necessarily have been right, but it was certainly courageous, just as my right hon. Friend's decision about Railtrack was courageous.

Mr. Levitt: My hon. Friend has a legal background. Does he share my view that if someone had been

[Mr. Levitt]

dismissed from their post in similar circumstances to those faced by Jo Moore, no employment tribunal would have upheld that dismissal? In fact, she would have been reinstated had such a case come about.

Mr. O'Brien: It would certainly have been difficult if an industrial tribunal had been involved, although I doubt that it would have been in these circumstances. It would have been difficult for the Secretary of State to sustain a dismissal over an e-mail of a few words, no matter how reprehensible. As I said earlier, if every MP who made a stupid error of judgment, who said something crass or indeed, to quote my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, horrific, were to lose their job, the numbers sitting in the House would be much fewer.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Does the hon. Gentleman think that it would add to the ability of the House properly to gauge the merits of the action taken by the Government if a full copy of Ms Moore's employment contract, together with any side letters and supplemental agreements, was put in the Library during this debate?

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman wants the contracts of employment of people employed as civil servants to be placed in the public arena. He should be extremely cautious about doing that. In some parts of the public sector people are employed under contracts with specific responsibilities which are quite proper, and for all sorts of reasons they may not want those details made public. There is already enough concern about working in the public sector—something that the Government are trying to address. We should not go in that direction.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett), who has evidently not done his homework. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Library research paper No. 42 which actually gives details of the model contract of employment for special advisers. He would be well advised to read it.

Mr. Burnett *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way again as I want to deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). She asked about the culture of spin. The history is that during the 1980s, the Labour party was in a mess. The Conservative party was rampant. As Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher—as she was then—was putting the best light on the party's activities, to use the description given by an Opposition Member. The way in which the Conservatives presented things was to spin to an extraordinarily successful extent.

The Labour party, on the other hand, was disunited during the 1983 election. Discordant messages were coming from Front Benchers—a little like the present Conservative party. However, we learned two lessons during that period. The first was that in order to communicate effectively with the public, to get through the barrage of tittle-tattle, speculation and personality politics that sometimes passes for political comment in some of our media—although there are honourable exceptions—we needed a clear message on policy, on the key issues of education, crime, the national health service and jobs. That required all members of the Labour party—not only those on the Front Bench but those who were standing for election—to be able to set out that clear message. That involved the second lesson: it required an element of discipline. It required an acceptance that the fratricidal battle in the Labour party during the 1980s—a battle currently taking place in the Conservative party—should not continue; that we should have a clear view of our party's message to the British public; and that we should set it out, especially on issues such as crime, education, the health service and jobs—the things about which people were concerned. Party unity and discipline were important. The old trade union adage "Unity is Strength" was not merely a slogan; it was an essential requirement for us to be electable as a Government.

By 1997, the Labour party was united, had a clear message and was—indeed, is—ready for Government. Some people may not agree with the Labour Government. Indeed, some of my constituents did not even vote for me—

Hon. Members: Shame!

Ms Abbott: Name them!

Mr. O'Brien: These things happen. We learn to carry the burden.

At least people know that the Labour party has a clear set of policies and a clear agenda. It presents that agenda well, with skill. Okay, there have been excesses and mistakes, but that discipline and that unity are necessary. Those discordant notes are now restricted, with a few exceptions, to the Opposition. That is why the spirit of unity that has enabled Labour to win two important and spectacular victories must be preserved.

It is right that people should follow their conscience from time to time. I have no problem with that; it is an important right for Back Benchers. However, it is also important that the Government should have a clear policy which they set out, and that their Whips should perform the job they have been given to do. Previously, they were elected; they are now appointed by the Prime Minister. They have to ensure that the Government deliver what Labour MPs were elected to do.

The amendment is wide-ranging and I have one question for my Front-Bench colleagues. Last Friday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was in Atherstone in north Warwickshire, where he spoke to Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat local authority leaders and chief executives. He received an enthusiastic response to his comments about the Government's consideration of reform of local authorities, to free up local government and ensure that we make progress on the regional agenda—points covered in the amendment. He mentioned that the Government were looking at the power to borrow against assets, which was met with great delight by chief executives and leaders of all the political parties. Will Ministers confirm that in the next few months—hopefully, before Christmas—a White Paper will be published on the issue of local government reform and, specifically, on the power to borrow against assets? That would greatly reassure many councillors of all parties.

The reform of local government finance is close to the heart of everyone in Warwickshire. In the early 1980s, under the Conservatives, we experienced education cuts that resulted in school closures and teachers having to leave the profession. There was a cut in our police force of 11 per cent. Social services were devastated.

Since 1997, there have been substantial improvements. Much more money is flowing into education, although not enough. Some of the policing issues have been addressed, but I shall not be diverted into that. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State confirm that the problems relating to local government finance faced by the shire counties will be addressed as part of the Government's overall examination of the background to local government?

During the past four years, the Government have not freed local authorities in the way that they and I had hoped. We now have the opportunity to do something radical on finance and by giving councils the freedom to make the decisions that local people want. That is the way in which we shall revitalise politics. That is how people will know that those whom they elect locally can make real decisions about the future of their locality.

Making politics relevant is about talking about the issues that concern people. It is about education, the health service, local government and social services. It is about ensuring that we are effective on law and order. People will not be moved to vote at the next general election on the basis of whether Jo Moore is employed as a special adviser. They want to know that they will be treated properly when they go to hospital and that their kids will get a decent education. They are interested in the simple things that make a difference in their life. The Government need to deliver on those. I believe that they will, and that is why they deserve to be re-elected.

6.40 pm

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien). I share his views on the dangers of identity cards, but I am disappointed by his failure to understand the danger to democracy posed by issues such as Jo Moore. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). It was refreshing to hear such an honest, sincere and non-partisan speech in the House. It is an important moment when the Father of the House questions the survival in post of a Secretary of State from his own party.

This is an important debate—it not only highlights the appalling behaviour of Ministers and their advisers in one Department, but demonstrates yet again that we have a much wider problem with politics today. For a Minister's special adviser to say to a reporter from *The Sunday Times* that if he were to write that Railtrack was bankrupt and about to be taken over by the Government he would be viewed by the public as—I almost quote—a certain type of idiot is, not to put too fine a point on it, a blatant lie. He would not have been seen as an idiot, he would have been seen as prescient and well informed. Jo Moore was trying to deceive. From their unwillingness to do anything about it, it is clear that she was doing so with Ministers' backing.

Mr. Spellar: If the hon. Gentleman looks beyond the first paragraph of the article in *The Sunday Times*, he will see that the reporter asked not only whether it was true that the Government were not going to bail out Railtrack, but whether they intended to renationalise it. That was the question posed. As the Government had no intention of renationalising it, clearly to have said that they did would have been making a mistake. The hon. Gentleman should look at the real question that was posed.

Mr. Gibb: I have looked at it. The full question was whether Railtrack was bankrupt, whether the Government were going to take it over and whether it was to be renationalised. Jo Moore also denied the two other points, about Railtrack going bankrupt and the Government taking control of it. She denied those suggestions point blank.

Sneaking out bad news stories while the country—let alone the media—was focused on the terrorist atrocity in the United States was another outrageous attempt to deceive, this time by concealment. Such an approach is all about protecting the image of a political party and has absolutely nothing to do with good government. It is about keeping one party in power. It is as though the whole purpose of politics was to keep a certain group of individuals in control of the levers of power, in their salaried ministerial positions.

Those two incidents reveal clearly, for all to see, the state of politics in this country today. It is no wonder that the popular perception of politicians is that they are all the same and all in it for themselves. The previous Speaker, Lady Boothroyd, said in her valedictory speech:

"I know from my postbag how much disillusion about the political process there is among the general public. The level of cynicism about Parliament, and the accompanying alienation of many of the young from the democratic process, is troubling. It is an issue on which every Member of the House should wish to reflect. It is our responsibility, each and every one of us, to do what we can to develop and build public trust and confidence."—[*Official Report*, 26 July 2000; Vol. 354, c. 1113-14.]

I am afraid that there seems to have been very little reflection of those concerns in the House until this afternoon. If I were to say that politics should not be about personal ambition, that politicians—including Ministers—should be honest in their pronouncements and motivated by conviction and a determination to do good, I am sure that many would regard such a statement as naive. Some hon. Members follow such an approach to politics, but many do not and the public believe that none of us does.

One thing is clear—Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are certainly not seen by the public to be conducting themselves on that basis, yet that should be what motivates us all. There is a hunger among the public for a new and honest approach to politics, and if we are to restore people's faith in our democratic process we need to adopt it.

There are thousands of examples of the deeply cynical approach to politics practised by all the political parties. Jo Moore provides an example of the worst excesses. The Prime Minister led us to believe in 1997 that he had no plans to raise taxes, but over the past four years taxes have risen by 4.8 per cent. a year. The Conservative party was elected in 1992 on a clear platform to cut tax year on year, yet over the following five years taxes went up by the equivalent of 7p in the pound.

The Prime Minister said before the 1997 election that he loved the pound. Straight after it, he announced plans to join the euro, in principle, when the economic

[Mr. Gibb]

circumstances made it beneficial. It is no wonder that people are so deeply cynical about politicians and the political process.

The classic example of deeply cynical politics was the handling of the National Air Traffic Services issue by the then DETR. In opposition, the Labour party was totally opposed to privatising the air traffic control service. The current Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), famously said,

"Our air is not for sale",

but in government Labour went ahead with a public-private partnership, the next best thing to privatisation.

As the PPP was the next best thing to privatisation, one would have expected the Conservative Opposition to support it, but the prospect of a potential defeat of the Government by joining the hard left of the Labour party in the Lobby was too great a temptation for us to resist. It was not our finest hour of principled politics.

There is no doubt in my mind that politics has become far too tribal: Tory good, Labour bad, or vice versa. The yah-boo of Prime Minister's Question Time infuriates the public, who find the whole process a bizarre way of conducting business.

Political parties are a useful shorthand, bringing together people of broadly similar views and outlook, but it has now gone beyond that—the tribalism of contemporary politics, the desire to control everything, seems to require us as Members of Parliament to behave in a way that hon. Members in the past would not have countenanced.

In discussing any issue—health, education, transport—I am expected to cite statistics that have March or June 1997 as the point of comparison. Government Members are expected to denounce the whole 18 years of Governments up to 1997, but how can the Prime Minister and his colleagues denounce the whole of that period, when he and the whole new Labour project are about how Labour got it wrong in the 1980s and have adopted huge swathes of our policies from the 1980s and 1990s, including a wholesale acceptance of monetarism, which was the very hallmark of those 18 years of Conservative Government?

When we are debating the important issues of the future of our railway system and roads network, the public expect a debate on the issues themselves, such as whether the railways should be run by the private sector or by the state. If they should be run by the private sector, should the tracks be owned and operated by the same company? What type of regulator should we have? Simply to attack Conservative Members for mishandling the railways until 1997, as some hon. Members have done today, or to attack Labour Members for mishandling the railways since 1997, as some Opposition Members might do, is tedious and irrelevant.

Moreover, the Government's whole approach to the problems faced by Railtrack reveals a deeply cynical mindset. When the Secretary of State reached the conclusion that Railtrack needed to be restructured, he should have come to the House and explained that Railtrack needed a new structure, how that structure should be created, and how shareholders would be compensated. However, rather than facing up to the restructuring of the whole industry after careful thought, he has simply pulled the plug on shareholders and Railtrack, thereby precipitating a crisis. He has redesigned the whole industry on the back of an envelope and in a hurry. That is no way to run a railroad, and it is a deeply cynical ploy by the Government to acquire shareholder assets on the cheap.

The conduct of Transport Ministers on the disgraceful e-mail and the misinformation on Railtrack have starkly highlighted how very much we all need to change the way in which we do things. We have to be scrupulously honest in our use of statistics; we must use facts and figures with integrity. We should not pick a date to demonstrate a point when a date two months earlier would demonstrate the opposite of that point. How often have all hon. Members used that trick? It is wrong and it lacks integrity.

In the past few years, the Red Book, for example, has become an instrument of Government propaganda rather than an objective collection of economic facts and figures. Recategorising expenditure on family credit benefit as a reduction in tax revenues simply because it will be paid through the payroll is simply dishonest. It is simply dishonest also to include, in a table summarising the Budget's tax measures, public expenditure on the provision of the winter fuel allowance, which costs £640 million, as a tax cut.

The media can also take their share the blame. They report only the sensational, personality politics, splits and big events. Debates in the House on proposed legislation that affects thousands of people rarely get a mention even in the broadsheets. Such legislation is dull but important, whereas the press want excitement even if it is unimportant.

For anyone with a really serious interest in politics, it is almost impossible to discover from the media what is going on in the House of Commons. It is no wonder that people do not take politics seriously. Moreover, as a consequence, hon. Members tend not to take politics and Parliament seriously. We tend to measure our own and one another's achievements in newspaper column inches and air time, not in the quality of the argument that has been made. There is a tendency to use exaggerated language to attract media attention, all of which is off-putting to the public.

There is an enormous amount at stake. Turnout in elections is at an all-time low, with only 59 per cent. of the electorate voting in the most recent general election. More alarmingly, only 39 per cent. of 18 to 24-year-olds turned out in that election. There is among the public a pressure for decision making to be taken out of the hands of elected politicians and put into the hands of unelected officials. Interest rates set by the Monetary Policy Committee and the Bank of England, more discretion for judges, numerous new and increasingly powerful commissions, and the increasing prominence of experts: down that road lies the decline of democratic government.

Experts are not the answer. They do not always get it right. Sometimes they cannot tell the difference between a cow's brain and a sheep's brain. Experts do not always take into account the wider philosophical issues, and they rarely take into account how decisions in one sphere can affect activities in another. Experts should give advice, but decisions should be taken by Ministers who are accountable to Parliament at the Dispatch Box and scrutinised by powerful Select Committees. Increasingly,

because of the way in which politics is conducted, public opinion wants the opposite—for experts and non-elected people to take those important decisions.

We need an end to the ranting at Prime Minister's questions. The Prime Minister's exaggerated attacks on Conservative Members and Conservative Members' attacks on Labour should be replaced by a calm and forensic questioning of policy. We saw the beginning of such an approach in questions during the current war, and I hope that that approach will continue when the hostilities have ended. The division of opinion between the two parties today is too narrow to warrant that type of exaggerated language.

When the Government have it right, the Opposition have to acknowledge it. The Opposition have also to explain why the Government have it right and actually vote for the relevant measures in the Lobby. Conservative Members should also oppose the Government when they have it wrong, even if doing so will make them unpopular.

A concept of new politics is developing. It is refreshing, and those who practice it will have the support of the public. Those who continue the old approach will expose themselves as out of touch. In the most recent recall of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) praised the Prime Minister's conduct in the war against terrorism. However, his comments were greeted with murmurs of derision from some Labour Members who failed to comprehend that a Conservative Member could voice support for a Labour Prime Minister. Their response marked them out as people who simply do not understand what the public want from their Members of Parliament. It marked them out as practitioners of old politics and as people who put their party before their country.

Politics is about doing good. If we want to restore people's faith in politics, in politicians and in democracy, we all need to change the way in which we do our business.

6.57 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): By contrast with the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), I believe that people are motivated to vote and have a keen interest in politics and politicians when they feel that politicians are expressing their views and when the Government and the Opposition are presenting the types of policy that they want.

I realise that quality of life issues are much more basic than some of the high-minded issues that we have been debating today, but people in my constituency, I dare say like those in every other hon. Member's constituency, are concerned about precisely those issues—such as the frequency with which their streets are swept and their rubbish is collected; whether they can walk their kids to school or go out for a drink without being threatened by someone; the number of abandoned cars in the street and the number of cars for sale on the highway; and the graffiti that disfigures buildings and makes their local environment ugly and threatening. I challenge anyone to deny that every hon. Member has had more letters about those issues than they have ever had about Jo Moore.

I therefore warmly welcome the lead that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, his ministerial colleagues and his Department and civil servants have taken in tackling those menaces. I welcome also the interest shown by the Home Secretary and others in getting to grips with antisocial behaviour and environmental crime. We ignore those issues at our peril.

I have never ceased to be surprised by the way in which Conservative Members have allowed themselves to become entangled in the types of issue that do not have much impact on the lives of most people—so much so that they managed to spend four years increasingly losing touch with people's real concerns, and another four weeks, last May and June, deservedly losing people's votes. This debate is just another example of Conservative Members withdrawing from reality.

The people we represent, whatever our party, have a rightful expectation that we are here to serve them and to debate the issues that really matter to them. On Opposition days like this one, they would be disappointed. I see myself as the servant of Mitcham and Morden, and the majority of the work that I do as its Member of Parliament is devoted to helping the people who come to see me or write to me. I appreciate that that is my choice and I do not imagine myself as having a great parliamentary career—

Hon. Members: "Hear, hear".

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): At least my hon. Friend will not have a career in opposition for 20 years like the Tories.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Siobhain McDonagh: I make no apology for concentrating on local issues. As we all know, all issues are local issues. The Secretary of State visited Pollards Hill in my constituency one morning in August to launch the Government's neighbourhood wardens scheme, of which we have three. They provide much support by maintaining a responsible civilian presence on the streets, giving young people a model of good citizenship, and helping to address the quality of life issues that people have been concerned about for decades. My right hon. Friend spent time with local residents, who were thrilled to welcome him, and explained to him the problems that they face in trying to keep their community together.

One of the key things that I did during the recess was to find out whether the issues that dominate in those areas of my constituency that have most need, most crime and most deprivation are replicated in others that are more wealthy. I undertook a survey in Longthornton ward, which anyone would recognise as south London suburbia, to find out the concerns of the local people. I had almost 300 replies. People referred to crime and the fear of it, youth nuisance, race relations, loud music blaring from houses and cars, speeding vehicles and traffic congestion, work lorries parked outside residences overnight, abandoned cars, the sale of cars from front gardens and the public highway, fly tipping in roads and back alleys, recycling facilities and recreational facilities. None of those issues is the stuff of newspaper front pages, but all are certainly at the forefront of our constituents' minds.

When asked what sort of facilities they would like to see improved in their area, people came up with a range of ideas. They included more police on the streets,

[Siobhain McDonagh]

more facilities for bored teenagers and more community facilities for families and pensioners. People want better roads, better drains, better street lighting and cleansing.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): To which amendment is the hon. Lady speaking?

Siobhain McDonagh: I am addressing myself directly to the Prime Minister's amendment and the issue of urban regeneration. It would be a good idea if the hon. Gentleman did the same.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): In the survey that my hon. Friend conducted in her constituency, which was a worthwhile venture, how many of her constituents told her that spin was the single contributory factor to the degradation of their daily lives?

Siobhain McDonagh: None.

Peter Bradley: What a surprise.

Siobhain McDonagh: Much of Mitcham and Morden was laid out in the 1920s and 1930s, and could be described as classic suburbia. However, for too many years the quality of people's lives in neighbourhoods such as Lavender, Phipps Bridge and Figges Marsh in Mitcham and Morden has been challenged by social problems, often manifested in graffiti, vandalism and other forms of antisocial behaviour.

That is why I support the neighbourhood warden scheme. It was created to help to lift up such areas, and so far, in my view, it has worked. It has given a fresh focus to the desire that my constituents have expressed to see cleaner, safer, better neighbourhoods. I understand that the result of bids for the next stage of the neighbourhood warden scheme will be announced tomorrow, and I know that Merton has put in an ambitious bid, which would add five more wardens to the existing three, and would create a graffiti removal squad of four. I hope that Ministers will look favourably on the hard work that has been done by Merton council in seeking match funding with the public, private and voluntary sectors to enable it to make its bid and to bolster the success of the warden scheme.

I do not know where Conservative or Liberal Democrat Members were last night during the very important Adjournment debate on abandoned cars. Perhaps none of them were present because they do not share my concern about quality of life issues. The neighbourhood warden scheme and other initiatives advanced by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are proof of the Government's commitment to improving people's quality of life alongside public services.

I welcome the imminent publication by the Secretary of State of a consultation document on unlicensed and abandoned cars. I understand that the document will propose a move towards continuous registration during a vehicle's lifetime. That will help to speed up the process of establishing ownership and will enable local authorities to take charge of abandoned cars and arrange for their disposal much more quickly. It will also enable the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the police to catch up with road tax dodgers much more effectively. I welcome such developments, which I doubt would ever have happened under the Conservative party.

I strongly urge the Government to continue to be bothered about those issues because they are what ordinary people are bothered about.

7.5 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): There have been some remarkably good speeches in this debate. I particularly enjoyed and agreed with almost all of the speech of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), and the second half of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), which is all I heard. I strongly agree with him about the need for more intelligent, mature politics, and less yah-boo, which has done so much to bring politics into disrepute in this country.

Mr. Salter: I, too, am a great fan of the speech by the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb). If we need more consensus and more pluralism in politics, will the hon. Gentleman explain why his party has just elected the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) as its leader?

Mr. Tyrie: I shall let that comment pass. The hon. Gentleman is taking a leaf out of the book that my hon. Friend said we should throw away.

I was also impressed by the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), which offered a devastating analysis of the Railtrack decision. I have suggested to him that he try and get it into print, because unfortunately, partly for the reasons to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton alluded, many people will never find out about that speech. The best place that my right hon. Friend can put what he said is in a newspaper, if he wants it to be more widely noticed.

Unlike many hon. Members who have spoken, I want to address the main motion, which is about advisers, and the conduct of one adviser in particular. I shall then draw some general conclusions from that. The memo that Ms Moore put out was foolish and tactless, but it is in the same category as the behaviour of a couple of Whips who get together about five minutes after they have heard of the death of one of their colleagues and talk about what majority he had and what the by-election will be like. We all know that such tactless and tasteless exchanges take place. The difference in Ms Moore's case was that it was recorded in an e-mail and circulated at a time of great international concern.

My view is that Ms Moore probably should not go for having written that memo, because in itself it is not a hanging offence. The problem for her is much deeper than that: so much else has come to light about her behaviour in the Department that is unacceptable. It is beyond dispute—although the Secretary of State tried to dispute it, but less than half dealt with the points in the press—that over a sustained period Ms Moore sought to discredit Bob Kiley and to rubbish him as best she could. She also tried to get the chief press officer at the Department to engage in similar activities. He rightly turned down that request, because if he had done otherwise he would have

breached the rules in the guidance given to him as a civil servant, which requires that in his contact with the press he should avoid anything that is tendentious or polemical.

In trying to get the press officer, Mr. Evans, to breach his guidance, Jo Moore broke her own guidance in several clear and important ways. I shall read out examples. The guidance makes it clear that advisers should not put civil servants in an embarrassing position or one that prejudices the impartiality of the civil service. The code states that they

"should act in a way which upholds the political impartiality of civil servants and does not conflict with the Civil Service Code."

Jo Moore's actions with regard to Kiley were not consistent with that.

Secondly, Ms Moore broke another equally important part of the code, which states:

"Special Advisers . . . must observe discretion and express comment with moderation, avoiding personal attacks".

It is beyond dispute that she engaged in personal attacks and that that happened over a sustained period. No sudden rush of blood to the head led to those serious mistakes, for which she should have resigned. It is a tragedy for her and probably for her boss that they did not separate quickly.

Even if Jo Moore had resigned, why all the brouhaha about, as someone put it, one relatively minor adviser? I understand that she is a press, not a policy adviser. She certainly does not appear to have given good advice on Railtrack if she was being paid as a policy adviser. The issue has been magnified partly because of the press feeding frenzy that is part of the response to the tragedy on 11 September. However, Jo Moore has become the subject of such attention mainly because she symbolises so much that is wrong with the way in which new Labour goes about its business in government.

Advisers' activities get up the noses of all hon. Members, including Labour Members, many of whom have spoken up. Many Ministers dislike the behaviour of special advisers. Even worse, all hon. Members know that Jo Moore's role model is Alastair Campbell, who has been doing such dirty work for years. He has initiated attacks on Opposition parties in contravention of the special advisers' code, smeared individuals—there are numerous reports of that—and breached the rules that limit partisan activity. He has done that at taxpayers' expense and in breach of his contract. The Prime Minister has done nothing about it; indeed, he has praised Alastair Campbell at the Dispatch Box for engaging in such activities.

Under Labour, advisers play a key role in the new style of government that they have wrought in the past four years. It is much more centred around 10 Downing street and far more presidential, with far fewer devolved decisions, even to Cabinet Committees. No. 10 is run by advisers. The organisation chart that I eventually managed to get out of the Cabinet Secretary after a year and a half of pressing shows that all the lines of accountability in 10 Downing street run not to a civil servant but to Jonathan Powell, a special adviser. The other most powerful person in No. 10 is, of course, Alastair Campbell. Both were brought in by the Prime Minister.

The traditional lines of accountability and information flow in No. 10 have been changed, and civil servants have been replaced by advisers. Throughout Whitehall, advisers are more numerous, often more influential and powerful, and able to intervene more directly in the conduct of Government than ever before in peacetime.

Mr. Siôn Simon (Birmingham, Erdington): Is it always wrong to change the traditional lines?

Mr. Tyrie: That is a fair question. My main objection to Labour's actions is that the Prime Minister and the Government have tried to pretend that nothing has changed and that everything is exactly the same as before. Time and again, they have sent the Cabinet Secretary to Select Committees. I attended a Select Committee meeting where that happened. He had been briefed to say that no real change had occurred, that there were a few more advisers and a slightly stronger centre, but nothing to worry about.

If the Prime Minister had said in his manifesto that he disagreed with the traditional style of Cabinet Government, that he supported a more presidential style to reflect the modern age, that he would appoint 80 advisers, triple the number of advisers in No. 10 Downing street and make the whole No. 10 apparatus answerable to outsiders that he had appointed, I would have disagreed with him, but taken the proposal as a respectable experiment and been prepared to give it a try. However, he did not do that.

The Prime Minister has taken huge amounts of power, which were hitherto spread much more widely around Whitehall, and he has tried to do it by stealth.

Peter Bradley: I respect many of the hon. Gentleman's opinions. I formed that view of him when we served on the Select Committee on Public Administration. However, he has made a serious allegation against the Cabinet Secretary. Does he suggest that, when the Cabinet Secretary gave evidence to that Select Committee or others, he purposely misled members? If so, can he produce any evidence?

Mr. Tyrie: That was a hollow intervention. If we examine the Select Committee transcripts, it is clear that the poor Cabinet Secretary was in a terrible state when he was asked direct questions about where power lay in No. 10 after 1997. The former Cabinet Secretary tried to conceal the fact that all lines of accountability ran to Jonathan Powell. It was squeezed out of him with difficulty that Jonathan Powell now sits at the desk of the former principal private secretary, and is the gatekeeper to the Prime Minister. Under all previous Administrations, the principal private secretary, not a chief of staff from outside, fulfilled that role.

The transcripts contain many other examples and hon. Members who read them would get the same impression as I did of a Cabinet Secretary who was somewhat embarrassed by the need to defend what he almost certainly perceived as unacceptable, or at least by a new style of government that he was not permitted to describe as openly as he would like.

The effects of the change in the style of government are profound. I would object less if the change had been effected openly, but it has not. The changes and the introduction of advisers on such a scale have meant the erosion of the traditional check of an impartial civil service on Ministers' overweening power in a system that

[Mr. Tyrie]

amounts to elective dictatorship in some people's opinion. The civil service can no longer act as a check. Cabinet government and Cabinet Committee government is dead. The Thatcher era was run on the basis of Cabinet Committees. *[Interruption.]* Those who disagree with that should read the memoirs. No memoir by a former Minister from that time disputes that the Thatcher era was run by Cabinet Committees.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I understand that the Cabinet did not meet for almost two weeks after 11 September. If we consider that and the length of time it took to establish a war Cabinet, it shows that Cabinet government as my hon. Friend understands it has changed unbelievably in this country.

Mr. Tyrie: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. Cabinet government has been dead for a long time but some dignity remained in the system. Nowadays, as my hon. Friend points out, the Cabinet does not even bother to meet.

I have mentioned the removal of the traditional check that an impartial civil service provides and the end of Cabinet Committee government. However, there is another indirect but pernicious effect: when Parliament cross-examines Ministers, it is often not cross-examining the people who have made the decisions and have the power. It is very senior advisers at No. 10 and No. 11 who should be brought before Select Committees, but they rarely appear. Those are the people who have so much of the power in this country, and in an American committee system they would appear before committees.

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Gentleman is making a characteristically important and thoughtful speech, but there was a man called Charles Powell—and who was sent to the Select Committee considering Westland? I think it was Sir Robert Armstrong.

Mr. Tyrie: I entirely agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman is making, but the big difference is that Charles Powell was a civil servant and not a special adviser. Indeed, several senior civil servants objected to his having stayed longer than three years. There are precedents, but he stayed for five years, which caused some tension. He was a civil servant, however, as was Bernard Ingham. Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell are not; they are special advisers.

The hon. Gentleman himself, in his speech, seemed to criticise the way in which advisers have carried on. But I suspect that many Labour Members, when criticising special advisers, often privately—incidentally, I think that their private briefings to the press have contributed to the press activity that we have seen over the Jo Moore case—are using a code of their own. They are criticising presidential government. They are criticising the fact that even Cabinet Committees do not seem to matter any more. And they are criticising the demise of Cabinet accountability to Parliament, something to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Front Benchers do not like it either. They are assassinated by innuendo; they find themselves being taken out by whispering campaigns. A number of those who have been so taken out in the past have mentioned it to me privately, although I shall not embarrass them by revealing their identity here. Others have talked to the press, and have complained publicly.

What is to be done about all this? Only the Prime Minister can reform the culture of media manipulation that is to some degree corroding, and is certainly deleterious to, the credibility of British politics at present. In the meantime, however, I think that a few practical things can be done to limit the damage being done by the adviser system as it currently works.

First, permanent secretaries should be given power to enforce the contracts that special advisers sign with a Department. They do not have that power now. The Secretary of State said that he had asked the permanent secretary to discipline Jo Moore, but the truth is—the Minister is not listening—that he has not the power to sack Jo Moore. He has not the power that he would have over every other civil servant in his Department. Richard Mottram could not act, and he should be given the necessary power.

There is another—related—change that I would make: the civil service should be put on a statutory basis. We cannot continue as we are, with the civil service nominally answering to the Crown but in fact always highly dependent, in every way, on the Executive. There should be a civil service Act, which, ultimately, would make special advisers as well as civil servants directly accountable to Parliament rather than the Crown.

Thirdly, I would give the Cabinet Secretary, acting on the advice of permanent secretaries, power and responsibility to establish whether special advisers are really doing nothing more than party-political work, and have become no more than party-political hacks. When it is concluded that that is what advisers have become, they should cease to be civil servants, and their salary should be paid in full from party funds. There is widespread concern that what we have now is a huge cohort of Labour special advisers who are paid by the taxpayer to do highly party-political work. That is a form of tax subsidy to the governing party.

I submitted the first two recommendations two and a half years ago, in both oral and written evidence, to the Neill Committee on Standards in Public Life. I am pleased to say that they were accepted and appeared in the report, but so far the Government have failed to act on it. I believe that the third recommendation is essential to the restoration of public confidence.

I ask those on my own Front Bench to make one pledge. I hope I shall hear that when we come to power we will sharply reduce the number of special advisers, as part of wider reforms to restore some credibility to parliamentary democracy.

7.25 pm

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I shall not detain the House for long, as I wish to say only a few words. I am a quiet, shy, retiring sort.

I think that the key issue in all this is public perception and public trust. I want to make it absolutely clear that I support the Government's amendment—*[Interruption.]* I ask Members to be patient, and to wait for what I shall say later.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), who is not present now, for

their deep, thoughtful, serious speeches, which all Members should read at their leisure. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), who is also not present but who spoke passionately, although I did not agree with all that he said. And I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), whose very surgical speech highlighted key points.

I think that the conduct of the special adviser to the Secretary of State has been appalling. We are supposed to be standing shoulder to shoulder with the USA—so we are told by certain quarters—yet following those terrible atrocities, that infamous memo was sent out. As other Members have said, there can be no doubt that if a Minister had sent an e-mail saying that 11 September had been a very good day, he or she would have been sacked on the spot. It seems that special advisers have more protection than Ministers in terms of accountability to the public.

It must be said that the shadowy figures who lurk in the depths of ministerial offices spreading their views are not held to account, but I am astonished that the person involved in this particular case has not already gone. My reason is simple: resigning would have been the most decent and honourable thing to do. I hope the Minister who winds up will tell us whether that person offered her resignation, and, if she did, who is protecting her by refusing it. There has been no apology, apart from half an apology after several days, and the Government appear still to be dragged through the mire weeks after the event. To be honest, I think that they should put her out of her misery, and that we should spare them yet more embarrassment.

What has been done undermines the great achievements that this Labour Government could boast about. It is time that we stopped the rot. I must tell the Secretary of State that he should do the decent thing, even if she will not.

The hon. Member for Chichester mentioned the model contract promulgated on 19 May 1997, shortly after Labour's election, by the Prime Minister. Section (viii) states that special advisers

"must observe discretion and express comments with moderation"

There can be no doubt that, when that e-mail was sent, moderation was not used and discretion was not observed.

A written constitution is long overdue. We need to reinvigorate our failing democracy. As has been said, when nearly half the electorate do not vote in general elections, two thirds do not vote in local elections and three quarters do not even bother to vote in European elections, there is a fundamental problem in our democracy. There are those who say, rightly, that we must concentrate on public services; but when the values that are supposed to underpin a Government are completely undermined—and the e-mail is just one symptom of that—those people should not expect their people to come out and vote for them, because they will not expect to believe the promises made at election time.

The Government have an obsession. That was true of other Governments, but this Government over-egg the pudding, triple count the figures, oversell the good news and bury the bad. That needs to end, and end now. If the Prime Minister were here—he is not, and I understand that he is on important business elsewhere—I would say, "Relax. Chill out. What on earth are you afraid of? You can convince the people without the spin. You have a good story to tell, so tell it as it is."

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is difficult for Members to send out a message about the importance of the Chamber when the Prime Minister is here so little and plays so much less of a role in the proceedings of the House than did all his predecessors?

Mr. Marsden: With respect, tonight the Prime Minister has a pretty good excuse. I hope that this will be an historic night on which the IRA starts to decommission its weapons and, perhaps, lasting peace is brought to Northern Ireland. On the wider point, I totally agree. The Prime Minister does not vote very often and is not seen here very often, which is a great worry for parliamentary democracy. *[Interruption.]* I shall give way to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport if he wants to comment. No? He remains seated and simply mutters under his breath.

Mr. Francois: The hon. Gentleman is clearly being courageous tonight, although, if he does not mind my saying so, if this is a speech for the Government amendment, I should love to hear his speech against. Does he think it fair to say that it would have been honourable—I use that word in its literal context—for Jo Moore to resign, considering what she did?

Mr. Marsden: Yes. The Government should stop defending the indefensible and simply sack the special adviser.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Does my hon. Friend agree that Jo Moore has a contract? No one has sought to defend what she did or said, but they seek to comply with the law for which he and I voted some short while ago, which gives rights to contract workers.

Mr. Marsden: Perhaps my hon. Friend did not hear me earlier. I simply refer him to the model contract. We are not privy to the specific contract, but if it follows what the model contract says, Jo Moore

"must observe discretion and express comment with moderation".

To my mind, regardless of whether she should have done the honourable thing herself, the Secretary of State should have ensured that she went on those grounds.

The Conservatives are being absent-minded over their history in terms of spinning a good yarn and sleaze over the years. That is appalling, but I shall vote against the Government on the substantive motion. I say, in the name of God, this special adviser should go for the sake of parliamentary democracy.

We need to renew the tarnished image of this Government and this Parliament, because, due to the obsession with control and spin, we need to rebuild the British public's faith in their politicians and political parties, which is dwindling away. The public do not understand why this individual remains in her job and the sullying, drip-drip effect tarnishes us all.

7.33 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): First, I pay tribute to the brave speech of the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden). It takes courage to speak as he did from the Labour Benches.

I spent the past eight years working as a specialist employment lawyer, giving advice to organisations large and small about a range of employment law issues. I should preface my remarks by saying that it cannot be for the House to decide that a public servant should be dismissed. No public servant and no employee, however odious the alleged remarks, should be tried and convicted in his or her absence. Proper process is important, which is why our call for an investigation of the range of issues raised in the debate is the right way forward.

As a newly elected Member, I have the advantage of recent experience of the real world outside and I share the view of the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) that there is a deep despair over the conduct of politics and the manipulation of the media. It is all very well to hear that residents in Mitcham and Morden do not state in surveys that those are their main concerns, but that is not to say that they should not be debated in the House.

Despite the fact that I do not believe it right to try and convict an employee in her absence, the issues that have been raised are important matters of debate. Jo Moore's actions on 11 September could amount to gross misconduct. I was interested to hear the contributions from various Members who speculated about how an employment tribunal might consider the matter, but in two respects her conduct may have reached a level of gravity amounting to gross misconduct.

First, consider the sheer callousness of the comments made in the aftermath of the atrocities of 11 September. It beggars belief that someone could have such a mindset as even to think of so exploiting the horrors of 11 September. In many respects even more serious is the fact that Jo Moore's e-mail contained not just the private thoughts of a somewhat warped mind, but, effectively, an instruction, or at the very least powerful advice, from someone close to the Secretary of State addressed to an impartial senior civil servant, thereby putting him and anyone else who received the e-mail in an extremely difficult position.

I have little doubt that Jo Moore's sending of that e-mail amounts to a clear breach of the code of conduct for special advisers, in particular paragraph 5, which states:

"Special Advisers should conduct themselves with integrity".

Could anyone describe her e-mail that day as an act of integrity? The problem is that we are told that formal disciplinary procedures have already been pursued, although precisely what action has been taken is left in considerable doubt.

Clearly, from what the Government tell us, some action less severe than dismissal has been imposed, so to dismiss Jo Moore now on the narrow basis of the motion would amount to unfair dismissal. Proper procedures, it appears, have already been followed. Again, I argue for a wider investigation of all Jo Moore's actions in the Department, in particular the allegations regarding the suggestion that she instigated a smear campaign against Bob Kiley and in so doing asked a junior civil servant to act in a way that would have breached the civil service code.

The suggestion is that, because Alun Evans took up the civil servant's concerns, he paid the price for seeking to uphold the highest standards of conduct and was transferred to another Department. Those are serious allegations.

Mr. Spellar: I fully realise that the hon. Gentleman prepared his speech before he heard the Secretary of State's comments, but my right hon. Friend clearly outlined the chronology, which absolutely contradicts the hon. Gentleman's version of events.

Norman Lamb: I reject that. I heard the Secretary of State's defence of the situation, but the full facts have simply not yet come out in the open. That is why an investigation is so important. I would like to know precisely what sequence of events led to the disappearance of Alun Evans from the Department, and not merely the gloss given today by the Secretary of State. Did Alun Evans at any time raise concerns about the propriety of the information put out to attack Bob Kiley, either by the Secretary of State or by anyone else in the Department? We must know the answer to that question. The issues need properly to be investigated.

I am led to believe that during Jo Moore's absence from work, two firms have been brought in as advisers to the Secretary of State. I understand that Brunswick, where the wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer will soon be working, and Finsbury, where a former Labour adviser, Karl Milner, is said to be handling the Government's accounts, may be involved. Questions must be asked. Has either firm been retained? Which tasks are they performing? Have the rules governing the employment of PR consultants been followed? Why should the taxpayer fund three apparently parallel operations? We have a departmental press office, a troop of special advisers—there were three in the Department at the last count—and one or more PR agencies. Those questions need to be answered.

It seems that the Government have a clear choice. Either they take no action and reject the calls for an investigation—

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Whom would the investigation that the Liberals propose comprise? What would it determine other than disciplinary action, which has already been conducted by the Government?

Norman Lamb: The investigation needs to be conducted by the Department, but there are issues that go wider than those in respect of which Jo Moore has so far been disciplined. If the Government take no action, they send out a message to all other special advisers that such conduct is acceptable. More worryingly, that leaves other civil servants in the invidious position of fearing the consequences of standing up to the unacceptable demands of spin doctors. Alternatively, the Government could agree to an investigation to get to the bottom of these murky waters. Simply to refuse an investigation on the basis that no formal complaint has been made by a civil servant is unacceptable. It would require an act of professional suicide for a civil servant to raise his or her head above the parapet.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Given the gravity of the charges that have been made, and the

precise point that my hon. Friend is making about it being difficult for a junior civil servant to blow the whistle in such circumstances, is it not incumbent on the head of the home civil service to launch his own investigation into these circumstances? Should he not announce that today?

Norman Lamb: That is an appropriate suggestion. We are debating the rights and protection of civil servants. The Secretary of State should confirm tonight that there will be a proper investigation. In that way, the Government could demonstrate that they are making a break from the past and re-establishing the proper standards of conduct among special advisers in the civil service in general.

7.43 pm

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I am not sure whether the Government Whips will find my decidedly unspun contribution helpful. Frankly, that is not the issue. The Opposition have called for the debate to talk about spin in general, and about one person in particular, Jo Moore, the special adviser to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and the author of a disgraceful and infamous e-mail.

I do not know Jo Moore personally, although I know a number of people who have worked for her. They all bear witness to her loyalty and professionalism, as well as her qualities as a supportive and sympathetic manager. The crass, stupid and ill-judged e-mail, which was sent while the rest of the world watched in horror the television pictures of the carnage that the World Trade Centre had become, displayed precious few of those qualities. The revulsion that she has caused is genuine and cannot be lightly dismissed.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is right to observe that one mistake in an otherwise impressive work record does not justify the ending of Jo Moore's career. He is correct that due process was followed in the Department and that a formal reprimand was issued by the permanent secretary in accordance with published civil service procedures. However, that cannot be the entire story, not now and not ever. On 11 September 2001, the world changed for ever. It was the day on which we all had to make some dramatic decisions. The brave New York firefighters had to decide how often they would go back into a burning building, knowing full well that their chances of coming out alive were diminishing by the second. There were people trapped inside the twin towers who found temporary respite in the floors above the blazing inferno. Their decision was whether to jump to certain death or be burned alive.

It was decision time for those of us who have spent our political lives campaigning against the arms race and opposing the great majority of American foreign policy from Vietnam to Cuba, and from Nicaragua to Chile. It was time for us to put our reservations to one side, and in some instances our prejudices, and to give full and unqualified support to a traumatised American public.

Like others, I am proud to represent a multi-cultural constituency. It was time for me to visit mosques and community centres to reassure my law-abiding Muslim constituents of our solidarity against those who will attempt to make them scapegoats for the dreadful atrocities that occurred on 11 September. I include the former leader of the Conservative party.

It is decision time also for Jo Moore. As was famously said about another very special adviser, when an adviser becomes the story, his or her position becomes untenable. In my view, Jo Moore's position is no longer tenable. The decision is hers, but it is time for her to do the honourable thing and reconsider her position.

We should consider the role of special advisers, their background, their function and the controls upon them. They were officially recognised and set up by the 1970 to 1974 Heath Government. It seemed that they were a Conservative creation, but they existed well before that, back to the time of Lloyd George. As I said in an intervention, their function is set out in the model contract, which appears in House of Commons research paper 00/42.

The Government deserve some credit for introducing further controls on the activities of special advisers. They implemented the recommendations of the Neill committee to establish a code of conduct for special advisers. Distinguished and senior civil servants have said that there are no problems with special advisers per se, unless they cross the all-important dividing line between what is laid down in the code of conduct and their own political ambitions and priorities.

What greater example of such ambition can there be than using the position of special adviser as a stepping stone to becoming a Member? Before the Deputy Chief Whip becomes too excited, that happens on both sides of the House. I have done some research. I recommend that Members study a list that has been compiled by the Library. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) was a former special adviser. He is now an Opposition Front Bencher. I wonder whether he was the special adviser who crafted the speech for Jonathan Aitken, who was banged up for perjury, about the simple sword of truth.

The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) was a special adviser, and the list goes on. The right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) is sadly not in his place; he never is nowadays. He was a special adviser. I do not think that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was a special adviser, but he was paid by the public purse to do the bidding of Baroness Thatcher.

Opposition Members are obsessed with the concept of special advisers, but of the 24 Members who were once special advisers, 18 of them are Conservatives. What does that show us? It is clear that the Conservative party, for all its cant and hypocrisy is happy to use publicly funded special advisers as a recruitment agency for the parliamentary Conservative party.

Mr. Don Foster: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about the total number of hon. Members who held such positions. However, it is sad that his list failed to mention the current Foreign Secretary, who was also a rather infamous special adviser and one of the first to be brought to book because of the way in which he was behaving. Has the hon. Gentleman forgotten that case?

Mr. Salter: Far from it. I recommended that hon. Members examine the list in the Library, which includes the Member to whom the hon. Gentleman referred and many others, some on our side of the House. I was suggesting that the proportion of Conservatives on the list was what they might find somewhat embarrassing.

Peter Bradley: In view of what we have heard from Conservative Members this afternoon, when there are

[Peter Bradley]

issues of far greater moment happening in the world, does my hon. Friend agree that this is not so much a case of poachers turned gamekeeper, as poachers turned hypocrite?

Mr. Salter: My hon. Friend makes a point, and the subject of hypocrisy will feature later in my speech. If he will bear with me, I shall get on to that in some detail later. He also suggests that parliamentary time is at a premium and that it is inappropriate for us to have this debate. As I said earlier, there is real concern outside the House, and my hon. Friends should not dismiss it lightly. The Secretary of State has followed due process. It is for Jo Moore to decide whether her continued employment by our Government is a problem, and whether her position is tenable. I would suggest that it is not.

I think that this is the first Opposition day debate of this Session. The party that spawned spin doctors and special advisers has used valuable parliamentary time to expose its own weaknesses on this subject, and also to continue to whip up the media frenzy. This is a time when an historic agreement in Northern Ireland is possibly within our grasp after more than 30 years and a time when terrible incidents are taking place as the middle east peace process deteriorates. Frankly, if I were them, I would concentrate on the potential black hole in our public finances, rather than wasting time on this issue, but it is not for me to tell them how to be a decent Opposition.

Chris Grayling: I remind the hon. Gentleman that this is the second Opposition day of this Session. On the first, we chose to debate the key issues of the future of our countryside and education system. The reason for our holding this debate today is that the Government have offered no other opportunity to the House to debate what has become a matter of national interest and, indeed, of importance to the Government.

Mr. Salter: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that that other Opposition day cannot have had much of an impact, because it certainly passed me and my constituents by.

It is worth looking at some of the facts that the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) attempted to highlight during the opening exchanges. I am at a loss to understand why a special adviser—or, indeed, anyone—thought that councillors' expenses were a problem that needed to be buried. I will take issue with any Minister who thinks that having properly remunerated councillors is something to be ashamed of. I like to think that there is nobody of that ilk, certainly on the new ministerial team. We have had bumbling amateurism for far too long in town halls the length and breadth of this land. I praise the Government for seeking to improve standards in local government and in our town halls. The question, therefore, is why any special adviser thinks that that is a subject to be buried, when I suggest that it is one to be applauded.

Mr. Don Foster: I sought to point out earlier that the reason the Government were interested in the matter not receiving much public attention was simple. The document published on 12 September contained a plan to reverse a commitment that they had given to ensure that all councillors, rather than just a few, would be eligible for pensions.

Mr. Salter: The hon. Gentleman did not listen closely to the Secretary of State, who made it clear that the document was cleared before 11 September. There is no indication at all of a deliberate attempt to bury this or anything else that has happened subsequent to 11 September.

I am also at a loss to understand why the Conservatives, stuck as they are in a bizarre 1980s time warp, seem to think that the recent decision by the Secretary of State on Railtrack is an embarrassment for the Government or the Labour party. I have news for Conservative Members: the decision was applauded in my constituency and on the Labour Benches. I hope that there are one or two more such decisions in the offing, frankly.

The Secretary of State comprehensively refuted the wholly spurious allegations spun into this debate by the Opposition. Much of this Opposition day debate is bereft of facts and brims with hypocrisy. As my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) said, hypocrisy is at the heart of the Conservative approach to the issue. It is not a term that I use lightly, but it is wholly justified when the record of Conservative Members is put under the microscope.

The obsession with spin doctors, special advisers and news management that so excites Tory Front Benchers may not seem quite so important when they are reminded of their own record. I do not often read *The Guardian*. However, I was privileged to spend 50p on it on the day that it had a letter, a couple of days after the famous e-mail incident received publicity. It was from

"an ex-employee of the Government information service, specifically the press office of a Whitehall . . . department"

and states:

"this kind of news manipulation was standard practice. An example of this would be on the day of the appalling Dunblane shootings, my colleagues and I were instructed by our chief press officer to release any 'bad' news stories for the very reason that they would be overlooked or 'buried' in the next day's coverage of events. I would like to point out that the Dunblane tragedy occurred during the last Conservative administration."

If that does not demonstrate breathtaking hypocrisy, I would like to know what does.

When it comes to news management, it is also worth looking at the record of the Government Whips under the Conservative Administration. Helpfully, one of their former colleagues, one Gyles Brandreth—a name that I have trouble pronouncing—the former Member for Chester, has published his diaries. They are entitled "Breaking the Code", which is apt. An entry headed 20 May states:

"The end of the Maastricht road is nigh . . . Norman"—

Lamont—

"did well. He battled through the mayhem and came out on top. The Labour Party abstained so, inevitably, we won the vote, but it was a hollow victory. At least fifty of our side either voted against or abstained. It's taken almost a year to secure this Third Reading, hundreds of hours of debate, dozens of futile divisions, endless late nights, and, beyond these walls, no one seems to have much of an idea about what any of it's about!"

He goes on to talk about the celebrations taking place, and says:

"I said to David Davis of the SS"—

I assume that that was a regiment in the last war—

"'I'm not sure that we should be celebrating yet. The headlines aren't going to say "Maastricht Bill Achieved", they're going to trumpet "Tories Biggest Ever Revolt".'

"I think not", said Davis with a sly grin.

'Why not?'

'Why not? Because the Queen Mother has just been rushed to hospital. Haven't you heard? It's touch and go. We're not sure if she'll last the night.' Woifish leer followed by conspiratorial chuckle."

News management is nothing new.

What hypocrites the Conservatives have been. Was the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) demoted? Was he reprimanded? No, he was promoted. He is a member of the shadow Cabinet and the new chairman of the Conservative party.

Chris Grayling: There is a fundamental difference between wilful news management on a day of international tragedy and coincidence, which the circumstance that the hon. Gentleman has just described clearly was.

Mr. Salter: The hon. Gentleman might say that, but the press would not.

With regard to the media, this has been a gentle wicket for the Opposition. They have had a willing media and the issue has been blown out of all proportion. However, not all the media have slavishly danced to the same tune. Alone is the Reading *Evening Post*—a publication that I commend to my hon. Friends and one that I know the Deputy Chief Whip has watched with interest. After the Jo Moore affair, its opinion column, which appeared in the national papers, said:

"If the outside world knew how hard-nosed journalists can appear when they are doing their job they probably wouldn't pick up a paper again.

If they knew some of the conversations doctors had when operating on patients, they would be appalled.

And, of course, there is outrage this morning over the e-mail sent by a "spin doctor" on the day of the World Trade Center atrocity, advising government departments to put out all their embarrassing news because the papers would be full of the biggest story for decades.

But Jo Moore, special advisor to . . . Stephen Byers, was reacting spontaneously. It's her job to know the news agenda.

Just as it's the job of reporters to become adrenalin-charged when a big story breaks, even if it would seem insensitive when hundreds of people have been killed.

The insensitivity comes about in the leaking of an internal memo that was never meant for the public domain precisely because it would be potentially upsetting to people.

The person who leaked it is the one guilty of insensitivity and should be the one to walk.

We are at war against terrorism, the world teeters on a window ledge of danger and uncertainty.

It really is time to get a sense of proportion."

I advise hon. Members to read the *Evening Post* more often. So we have seen double standards in certain sections of the press, just as we have seen them in sections of the Conservative party.

While I have the ear of the Minister, and a wide-ranging amendment has been moved, I should like to lay out my shopping list for Reading, as one is not often called to speak in the Chamber, and I hope that he will note it down. We require an expansion of our boundaries and the granting of city status and—please, Minister—can we have an integrated transport strategy?

To sum up, I suggest that the motive behind the debate is pure mischief making. Opposition Members do not want Jo Moore to resign because they want this argument, this distraction from what is going on in Afghanistan and Northern Ireland to rumble on, and I find it sad that some Labour Members have chosen to dance to their tune. It is all very well for Opposition Members to praise a Labour Member for making a brave speech but he was one of the most supine members of the 1997 intake. What sticks in the throat of many Labour Members are the born-again revolutionaries who have suddenly worked out that they have no political future and embraced a left-wing ideology that they know precious little about. I tell the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden), who is sadly no longer in his place, to enjoy his 15 minutes of fame because it will not last. When the parliamentary Labour party stood firm against the fuel protesters and the subsidised farmers, he was the only Member who broke ranks.

We will survive this problem. I hope that Jo Moore will do the decent thing and that the Government will continue to take even more privatised services back into public ownership. I end by saying, "You've made a great start, lads. Keep up the good work."

8.3 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): It is a privilege to follow the honourable comrade for Reading, West (Mr. Salter).

The conduct of Ministers in the DTLR is of particular importance to my constituents. Many of them commute to London by rail, often to work in the City; some continue their journeys across London using the underground. Tomorrow morning, I will meet Mr. Theo Steel, the deputy managing director of First Great Eastern Railways, to discuss the implications for service levels on the First Great Eastern line into Liverpool street station of Railtrack being forced into administration by DTLR Ministers.

For a Government committed to raising large sums from the markets to finance the reform of public services, the events of the past fortnight could be described, even charitably, as distinctly sub-optimal. The private finance initiative is a key plank in the Government's strategy for public service reform. Across the public services, from health care through education and transport, the Government' s declared strategy is to use private finance to supplement public investment, particularly in infrastructure projects. That point has been made repeatedly—indeed, ad nauseam—by the Prime Minister at Question Time, even in the few months during which I have been a Member of Parliament, but a credible strategy of public service reform, based on much greater use of private capital, cannot be executed if private capital is then slapped in the face by Ministers.

The reliance on private finance is particularly acute in transport policy. Raising private match funding is an absolutely fundamental part of the Government's much-vaunted 10-year transport plan. In essence, the Government will stump up some £30 billion for future investment if the City and other investors provide the other £34 billion. But who now will rationally trust the

[Mr. Mark Francois]

Government to keep their part of the bargain? Mr. Charles Saunders, head of international equities for the State of Wisconsin pension fund—one of the largest pension funds in the world, which invests mainly on behalf of public sector workers from that state—was quoted in *The Sunday Telegraph*, as opposed to the Reading *Evening Post*, on 21 October, as saying:

"I will have to look again at any investment in the UK which has a significant Government involvement."

The journalist who wrote the associated piece, Mr. Neil Bennett, elaborated on that reaction, saying:

"The fund owns 8.7 million Railtrack shares and, boy, is Saunders angry. He is scathing that the Government could go to court and declare Railtrack bankrupt without allowing the shareholders to represent themselves. 'Not very principled' is about the politest thing he will say about Byers."

Many other major investors at home and abroad on whose money the Government were relying to bring their plan to fruition will have noted Ministers' actions and been very disturbed by them. That is a very important medium-term consequence of what has happened.

Ministerial conduct is also critical to the future of the tube. London's tube is already in trouble and is deteriorating further, along with the morale of its staff. Its track is old; its signalling system is highly unreliable; and its trains are failing more often. Everyone agrees that the system desperately needs investment, but it will not be forthcoming while the dialogue of the deaf continues between the DTLR and Treasury Ministers on one hand and Mayor Ken Livingstone on the other about the Government's ill-judged PPP proposals.

The House should recall that Ministers welcomed the arrival of Mr. Bob Kiley to help Mr. Livingstone run the tube, but when he tried to do exactly that, they savagely undermined him via off-the-record briefings, some of which, we believe, were delivered in person by Jo Moore. The saviour of London's tube was transformed into a victim and assassinated in the media for the heinous crime of being loyal to his own boss. London simply cannot go on like this.

Given that in four years Ministers could bring no credible modernisation plan to fruition—and they still have not—how do they think they will persuade the private sector to invest in the crumbling infrastructure now? An overarching issue is that the tube is crying out for investment, which it is even less likely to receive thanks to the actions of Ministers at the DTLR. If I were a London Member of Parliament of any party, I would now be very seriously concerned about the implications of the Railtrack fiasco for the future of London's tube service.

The actions of DTLR Ministers have also been very bad news for Railtrack employees and shareholders. It should be noted that those two categories are in effect often one and the same. The Government tend to think of "shareholders" as a pejorative term, often thinking of them as fat-cats or extremely rich people. However, the reality is that most shareholders—of whom there are now several million in this country, thanks largely to the Conservative party—have much more modest holdings, often of a few thousand pounds or so, in individual shares or as part of a pension plan. They are among the people who are losing out from what has happened to Railtrack. In addition, a large number of Railtrack employees were encouraged to buy shares in the company for which they worked. More than 80 per cent. of company employees are shareholders to a greater or lesser degree.

It is official Government policy to encourage employees to invest in the companies for which they work; they actually provide tax incentives to encourage that. Who thought about that when Ministers decided to bust the firm? Moreover, as *The Times* reported on 20 October:

"Mr Byers is also under pressure from thousands of council workers in his constituency of North Tyneside, where the local authority pension fund has lost millions of pounds invested in Railtrack."

Ministers at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have not served the public well, whether they are my constituents in Rayleigh or the wider electorate. Responsibility for that fiasco lies with Ministers at the Department. If anyone has any career-related suggestions for the Secretary of State as a result, they can now e-mail them to him at his new brand new private e-mail address which, I am told, is "Stephen@bay.no-org at all/backslashed by Gordon. com."

In July, the House united to defend the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), the Transport Sub-Committee Chairman, against over-mighty Ministers. In essence, Members of Parliament stood up that night to be counted. This is another occasion on which they should stand up and show Ministers that they cannot treat with contempt people who are democratically elected to Parliament on their constituents' behalf—or, indeed, those constituents themselves.

8.12 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Like every Labour Member and, indeed, like members of other parties, I condemn Jo Moore's actions and e-mail, by which I was deeply shocked. I will go further; although she is certainly not the issue that my constituents are raising at my surgeries, I accept that there are important issues about the role of advisers and politicians, as well as their relationship with Parliament and the media, which are worthy of serious debate. However, the very fact that an error may have been made which our constituents are not raising on a daily basis emphasises that it is our role as Members of Parliament to pay attention to the health of our parliamentary system.

Although some Conservative Members, including the hon. Members for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) and for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie), sought to make thoughtful contributions, it must be said that the Conservative motion is not worded in such a way as to contribute to a serious debate. Moreover, it cannot be said that the way in which the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) opened on behalf of the Opposition contributed to such a serious debate. What we got instead was an attempt to whip up a simulated, media-centred frenzy and the type of yah-boo politics that the hon. Member for Chichester later deplored. Those who were angered by Jo Moore's e-mail, as I was, will be utterly disgusted and sickened by the cynical way in which, as a result of her very first words this afternoon, the hon. Member for Maidenhead tried to capitalise on the public sympathy and feelings arising from the horrible events of 11 September.

Nevertheless, we are debating the conduct of Ministers at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. If we are going to discuss the conduct of Ministers and conduct worthy of condemnation, let us talk about ministerial behaviour that is truly deserving of condemnation. I am talking, of course, about the behaviour of Ministers who, from 1993 to 1997, left us with the botched privatisation with which the Labour Government have had to deal ever since. A lot could be said about that botched privatisation, but I shall refer to just two examples, which have continuing political relevance. The first is the scandal of the sell-off of the rolling stock leasing companies, in which, I remind hon. Members, the privatised companies were sold off for £1.8 billion and, a few months later, were sold on for £2.7 billion—a cool £900 million profit for doing nothing much at all.

That sell-off is one for which Opposition Members, or at least their predecessors, must take full political responsibility. It is instructive to read the conclusion of the Public Accounts Committee when it investigated the sell-off. The summary in its 65th report points out that the members of the committee asked civil servants in the relevant Department for the reason for the timing of the sale of the rolling stock leasing companies. Paragraph 23 states:

"They told us that Ministers decided in mid-1994 to change the order of rail privatisation because franchising was moving slowly."

The civil servants said that that was because

"A different sequence would have put wider policy objectives at risk, particularly the achievements of the whole of rail privatisation before the General Election and the benefits that Ministers associated with this."

In other words, because those Ministers were scared of losing the 1997 election, they pushed through a botched privatisation, which cost the taxpayer £1.5 billion to £2.4 billion. That is a genuine scandal; it affects the real world, as opposed to any scandals arising from spin which, important though they are, are issues in the beltway—a word used earlier—of our political system.

The second example concerning the privatisation of Railtrack to which I want to refer is the monumental failure of the company itself, for which Opposition Members must take direct responsibility, because the privatised Railtrack was created by the Conservative Government; it was a creation driven by political dogma. On top of the defects with which the company was saddled at the start for political reasons, it managed to add a woeful failure to manage its own business and an inability to make decisions. Those failures in turn prevented others from making decisions.

Members have spoken about major schemes that have had problems as a result of Railtrack's failures, particularly difficulties arising on the west coast main line. My experience of Railtrack is more local, but it concerns similar failures and delay. Next year, passenger trains and stations will return to a line in south-east Edinburgh from which they have been absent for decades. However, they should have been running last autumn—a year and a half before they are due to return. That delay is the result of difficulties arising from Railtrack and its decision making. In Edinburgh, we are still waiting for a decision about the future of Waverley station in the centre of our city, which is important for east coast mainline services, services from elsewhere in Scotland and the transport infrastructure of my city. Because of its location, the station is also important in several key decisions on planning and urban development in the city of Edinburgh. However, Railtrack's decision making seems to have dragged on and on; other schemes in Scotland have suffered similarly as, I know, is the case with schemes throughout the country. I therefore welcome the Secretary of State's proposal to replace Railtrack with a not-for-profit company. He and his predecessors have tried to work with the structure that they inherited and were right to say "No more" when asked for yet another blank cheque by Railtrack.

I want to take this opportunity to urge my right hon. Friend to move ahead as quickly as possible with the establishment of a new company, because, as he is well aware, if administration continues for more than six to nine months, difficulties for investment will begin to arise. Railtrack delayed some decisions for too long. My right hon. Friend knows that I am particularly keen that the decision on Waverley station be taken as soon as possible.

I also urge my right hon. Friend to think carefully—I am sure that he will—before adopting the vertical integration model for the railways which I know is being pressed on him by a number of train operating companies and industry experts. Such a model is almost certainly appropriate in certain circumstances, but adopting it runs the risk of replacing one type of conflict between different parts of the railway with another, especially between train operating companies that have a regional focus and those operating longer-distance services and freight companies. Indeed, I was interested to note that the Rail Freight Group today circulated a briefing to many Members making that very point.

In putting their arguments in this debate, the Conservatives have tried to take the very same advantage of the tragic events of 11 September as they have—perhaps rightly—accused Jo Moore of doing. The difference is that Jo Moore's proposals were not acted on. The Conservatives have tried to take advantage of 11 September for their own narrow political gain, and I hope that when they reflect on the matter, they will realise what a great mistake such an approach has been.

8.21 pm

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this debate, not least so that I can add my voice to those who have condemned the disgraceful actions of the Secretary of State's special adviser, Jo Moore, in sending her now infamous e-mail on 11 September. As one of the newest Members of the House, I am particularly pleased to find myself able to concur wholeheartedly with the highly articulate sentiments of the Father of the House, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

I say to Labour Members who have tried to make out that this debate is merely about a disgraced official at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions that it is nothing of the sort. It is about ethics, trust and issues that go to the very heart of the governance of this country.

Most people to whom I have spoken in my constituency are not angry or even very surprised at Ms Moore's e-mail. They simply shake their heads in sad resignation at the fact that such appalling behaviour should go on at the very highest level of government. Ms Moore's

[Mr. Gregory Barker]

extraordinarily cynical and shameful comments do not tarnish the reputation just of Ms Moore or even the Secretary of State. They undermine all of us on both sides of the House who are trying hard to win back the electorate's trust. That trust is vested not exclusively in any one party, but in all who try to serve as politicians.

Unless the Government act decisively to break with Ms Moore and all her kind, they will send the most terrible signal to the electorate that the careers of professional, political spin doctors are far more important to them than public confidence in the British political system. However, the latest actions of Ms Moore merely highlight an endemic problem that plagues this Administration: total obedience to special advisers, spin doctors and opinion pollsters.

The culture of spin in the previous Parliament seemed to know no bounds. Yet in opposition, the Labour party was critical of any increases in the number of special advisers. Back in 1995, when the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, increased the number of special advisers in the then Scottish Office from one to two, George Robertson, then a leading member of the shadow Cabinet, commented:

"this is no longer a Government, it is purely a propaganda machine. The Tories are drafting in more 'civil servants', not to do the work of the Government, but to do their political dirty work for them."

So, how have this Government's deeds matched their high-minded words in opposition? Have they reduced the number of special advisers whom they attacked? No, they have more than doubled the number—there is now an army of special advisers—from 38 in 1997 to 81 so far this Parliament.

Mr. Simon: Will the hon. Gentleman run through the mathematics, because I am puzzled? He says that the number of advisers has more than doubled. What happened in the Scottish Office in 1995?

Mr. Barker: The number went from one to two.

Mr. Simon: So it doubled.

Mr. Barker: If the hon. Gentleman listened carefully, he would realise that I am attacking the hypocrisy of the Labour party, which is pious and prim in opposition and totally remorseless and unrepentant in government.

I do not say that special advisers do not have any role in the Government. They are able to aid their Ministers on matters where it would be inappropriate for career civil servants to become involved or to give expert advice. However, their code of conduct is crystal clear. It states that special advisers should

"conduct themselves with integrity and honesty. They should not deceive or knowingly mislead Parliament or the public."

They

"must not take public part in political controversy, whether in speeches or letters to the Press, or in books, articles or leaflets; must observe discretion and express comment with moderation, avoiding personal attacks; and would not normally speak in public for their Minister or the Department."

When that code is not adhered to, the position of the special adviser is simply not tenable.

Was Ms Moore acting with integrity when she sent that e-mail on 11 September? Was she acting with honesty when she misled a journalist from *The Sunday Times* over plans to take Railtrack into administration? Was she not making a personal attack when she tried to persuade a junior civil servant to do the dirty on Bob Kiley to selected journalists? Has she not taken a very public part in a political controversy, culminating with a personal television exclusive for Sky news? I suggest that the count is guilty, guilty, guilty, and that Ms Moore should go.

The Secretary of State did not sack his special adviser because, we are told, the matter was "one isolated incident". The Prime Minister called the e-mail "horrible", but defended the decision that to sack someone and end their career was too heavy a penalty. Are those the standards of behaviour that the Prime Minister had in mind when he spoke at the outset of his Administration of his new Government being whiter than white? If widespread condemnation from all parties, the media, the public at large and the families of people involved in the tragedy is not a reason to end a discredited career, I do not know what is. It is important to remember that Ms Moore is not a career civil servant. She is not a graduate who has come through the apolitical civil service. She went into a political appointment knowing it carried the risks and uncertainties of any political post. She is certainly no deserving case for pity.

We are well aware that Ms Moore is not alone in the world of Labour party spin. She is, after all, playing a game of follow-my-leader. Just last week, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs sneaked out unfavourable news in the dead of night and a special adviser in another place tried to change *Hansard* to save the face of the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Those incidents are bad news: they are bad for the Government, bad for Parliament and bad for democracy. It is no wonder that public confidence in politicians is ebbing, as many hon. Members on both sides of the House have commented.

Confidence in the Government's handling of the crisis in the railways is at rock bottom. My constituents are desperately worried by the collapse of Railtrack. They see little prospect of much needed improvement to both Bexhill and Cooden Beach stations. My constituents who travel by rail have to contend with damp, broken glass, peeling paint, decrepit infrastructure and unfinished repairs. Yet people in Bexhill still have no clear idea from today's debate, or anything that the Secretary of State has said today, of when we will get the station that we deserve. They rightly look to the Secretary of State to marshal his energies to hold together the fabric of our local railway stations, not the careers of disgraced political advisers.

As a new Member of Parliament—and contrary to the view of many in the country—I have been truly impressed by the way in which so many hon. Members do their utmost for their constituents. They work incredibly hard, with the best of motives, to try to make a difference. However, the respect that they should enjoy from the public for that work is hard to gain and very easy to lose. The spin and smirks of Ms Moore and the Secretary of State's refusal to dispense with her is another hammer blow to the electorate's confidence in politics and politicians. Her continuation in office should concern all hon. Members who seek to bolster public confidence in elected politicians and parliamentary Government.

All hon. Members should be worried—as indeed many of us who have contributed to the debate are—by the appallingly low turnout at the last general election. We must be concerned about ever-increasing voter cynicism and apathy. For anyone who hopes to reverse that trend, the proliferation of spin doctors, misinformation, leaks, cover-ups, selective briefings and obstinate refusals to remove the worst offenders makes it more difficult to restore public confidence and simply fuels the fire of public contempt. No single act will stanch public contempt for the political establishment and no individual can shoulder all the blame for voter disillusionment with politicians, but by breaking with Ms Moore the Government could send a clear signal to the country that we, their elected representatives, are at last starting to get the message.

8.33 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I have listened to the entirety of the debate and have to say, "Dearie, dearie me." I was offered two tickets to the Strangers Gallery and, thankfully, chose not to invite constituents down for the day to listen to Parliament at its finest.

This is a full day's debate on spin doctors. My barometer of public opinion is taken over a £1.20 pint at Manton miners welfare club on Sunday evening, along with 1,000 other people. There may be other barometers of public opinion, but none is as fine as Manton miners welfare club and the 1,000 who throng there on a Sunday night. If hon. Members knew the good people of Manton, they would realise that they do not shy away from giving me their views on the world, the issues of the day and their priorities. They do so in large numbers and the most forthright of terms. They have not yet heard of Ms Jo Moore. They have heard of Demi Moore, Bobby Moore, Roger Moore, Ilkley moor and Markham Moor. Some of them have even heard of Ian Storey-Moore. But I have not met one who has heard of Ms Jo Moore. Perhaps I live in different circles from those who claim that there is a groundswell of public opinion commenting on her.

I have gone further. I have met more than 100 constituents in different parts of my constituency this weekend—that included three public meetings. What are their major concerns? They have many and they have been clear in articulating them. Have spin doctors been mentioned once, formally, or informally? No, not once.

I thought that, perhaps, I was only seeing part of the picture so I checked my post bag. It was not the record post bag—I have been a Member of Parliament only since 7 June—but the second largest, with more than 300 letters, not one of which concerned Ms Moore or spin doctors. There were many letters on other issues. As the Minister for Transport is present I must mention that there were a number in support of the establishment of Finningley airport—they were all 100 per cent. in favour.

While I was consulting my constituents in advance of this debate I saw a little grey mouse at my home in the constituency, scuttling between cupboards and washing machine. My newly arrived papers outlining this week's debates lay on the table. Far be it for me to compare today's debate and the irritating little grey mouse, but somehow that comparison stuck with me. In my mind's eye I can see it scurrying from kitchen to pantry seeking the crumbs of inspiration. A once great British institution seeks similar solace. Where once it was led by a grey man, it is now led by a grey mouse. Given the early opportunity of an Opposition debate—a full day—who but a grey mouse would have hidden from the major issues of our time?

Let me help those on the Opposition Benches and suggest some issues of the day. I have constituents who are serving Queen and country. That would be an issue worthy of debate today. I have a private finance initiative bid for nine new secondary schools, which would be a worthy subject. I have slum housing that is awaiting the creation of a special purpose vehicle to allow it to be regenerated. We should be debating economic and social regeneration and decent warm houses in safe strong communities with the Secretary of State and his Ministers today.

What about regional economic developments, such as Manton pit site, which has been awaiting redevelopment for more than 10 years? That is worthy of debate with Ministers today. What of the A1, with its multitude of dangerous and inefficient roundabouts? That is what my constituents would have wanted us to debate and not the frith and froth of spin doctors. In Bassetlaw, when we talk about spin we talk about Wilfred Rhodes, Jim Laker and Sir Garfield Sobers. The world does not end in the suburban gardens of the chattering classes of London.

Nottinghamshire has one long-standing Tory Member of Parliament. Tories in my patch lament the missed opportunity when their party rejected the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) as leader. Today, when they look at the Opposition Front Bench, they must be scratching their heads in bewilderment.

In the past two weeks, we have heard the little grey mouse trying to roar. This is not the mouse that roared; this is the mouse that squeaked. The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has been pursued by Opposition Members, who are all sporting an expression as though he has just announced that hell has been abolished and sin is permissible.

Most Labour Members are not fooled, however. Let us be clear about what is going on. It is a witch hunt. Why have the Opposition been screaming like Furies for the Secretary of State to be burned at the stake? The answer is that they want to be absolved from blame for their failure with Railtrack. That blame can be laid, falsely, at the feet of this Government, but to do so is another attempt to mislead the British people.

The little grey mouse is seeking a way out. In the past week, the Tories have started preening themselves as the champions of the poor and dispossessed. There is no escape for the little grey mouse. All the holes have been sealed. Much to the disappointment of the Opposition, we are left with only the truth.

On 25 June 1997, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said that Railtrack's only solution lay in privatisation. He taunted the newly elected Labour Government's doubts and reservations with regard to the privatisation of Railtrack. That is the truth, and today we stand vindicated. The privatisation of the railways in general, and of Railtrack in particular, is widely held by voters as one of the most shoddy and shameful policies ever thrust through the House. Even George and Lenny from John Steinbeck's famous novel "Of Mice and Men" would have struggled to come up with a less coherent plan.

[John Mann]

The previous Administration sold the public the dream of privatisation of Railtrack as a way to run the service more efficiently and effectively, and more safely. That was not true, and did not happen. Railtrack is bust simply because the Government and the Secretary of State cannot continue to throw money at a company that is so flawed.

On 24 November 1994, the then Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), claimed that

"privatisation offers the best future for Railtrack",

and said that it would serve by

"delivering efficient track maintenance and encouraging investment in the upgrading of railway lines."—[*Official Report*, 24 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 729.]

What did we get? An organisation that combined the worst aspects of private and public companies, which could pay vast sums of money to shareholders because it cut down on track maintenance and staff. It was an organisation that required vast amounts of public money to continue to operate. I use the word "operate" in the broadest possible sense.

We got a company that grew ever more complex as more people were taken on as managers. Engineers with experience of the railways were not taken on. The new managers sought to create even more complex management structures. In short, we got a shambles.

That was the "best future for Railtrack". It was nothing more than smoke and mirrors, or castles and kingdoms in the air. Today, we should be debating the real issues. We should be dealing with politics, not politicking. Therefore, I say "Well done!" to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for reigniting the £30-million project to replace and renovate slum housing in the Meden valley, and for its role in creating coherence in regional economic intervention through the regional development agencies. I applaud too the Department's willingness to consider an extended and expanded regional airport network.

We should debate the real issues, those international, national and local matters that are important to voters. In my area, when will Finningley airport be opened? Will the A1M be expanded southward through Nottinghamshire, and will our model of housing regeneration be rolled out in other areas?

It is said that a week is a long time in politics. Housing regeneration on the Royal estate in Warsop was first consulted on by the Heath Government of 1972. In life, 29 years is a long time. Thank goodness the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is prepared to act, at last.

Good governance is about the people's priorities. Today, in this debate, we have witnessed the politicians' priorities, and Parliament is the weaker for it.

8.44 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I am very grateful to be called, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb). He has thrown down a challenge to all Members to approach politics with a real sense of integrity and honesty. I was moved by his speech, and I hope that other Members will reflect on what he said.

I am grateful for the opportunity to look at the work of this important Department and its Ministers and advisers. That work needs to be clear, open, accessible and concentrated on the areas of greatest need. I want to raise four issues of substance affecting my constituency on which the Department's work, sadly, does not meet those criteria.

The first issue is the Government's proposed 33 per cent. cut in the civil defence grant. I understand that there is a legal challenge to that measure by the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority. If the cut is made, my county will lose one emergency planning officer and one emergency planning assistant. Their services will be denied not only to the county council but to Bedfordshire's three district and borough councils. It is the opinion of senior figures in the county council that its operational response to any emergency will be compromised if the cut is made. In an incident, it is normal to have three eight-hour emergency shifts, and if the cut is made, only two of those shifts will have specialist emergency planning input. At this time of heightened tension, it is highly irresponsible of the Department to press ahead with that proposal.

The second issue is DTLR Ministers' unwillingness to leave their Whitehall bunkers and go out and see some of the problems that the Department is supposed to be addressing. I asked in a written question for a Minister to come to the Dunstable and Houghton Regis conurbation, which has a population of 50,000, to see the appalling traffic congestion that my constituents face daily. The reply was that no Minister was prepared to come to my constituency, and the buck had been passed to a multi-modal study. I echo my distinguished predecessor, Sir David Madel, who called throughout the previous Parliament for a Minister to come and see the unbelievable traffic congestion against which my constituents battle. That area has lost 1,500 jobs in the past year—as many as went at Vauxhall, where special assistance was given. In Dunstable, a quarter of the shops are empty because of the traffic congestion in the town. Yet no Minister will come to see the problem for himself.

Thirdly, I ask Ministers to take seriously the seemingly complete opposition to Translink, the guided busway scheme that the Government propose to install between Luton and Dunstable. In my time as a Member of Parliament, not a single person has said to me that they are in favour of it. As far as I am aware, no one, at any public meeting, has spoken in its favour. I understand that local parties, including even the Dunstable Labour party, have said that they are against the scheme. I am not sure about the policy of the Liberal Democrats, but there is certainly a huge majority against Translink. Ministers propose to spend some £63 million on a scheme of highly questionable and highly marginal benefit to my constituency. Furthermore, Translink would remove the possibility of reintroducing rail to the area, be that heavy rail, light rail or tram.

Fourthly, if Ministers have £63 million to spare on a scheme that none of my constituents want, I respectfully request that they redirect at least some of that money towards the extremely hard-pressed Bedfordshire social services budget. There is a shortfall of about £3.5 million for the social services budget of Bedfordshire county council.

The new money announced by the Government recently was welcome, but I am sure that Ministers and all hon. Members appreciate that an increase of £223,500 a year will not go far towards a social services deficit of about £3.5 million. The county council has to undertake statutory duties and it has no discretion as to their fulfilment. Furthermore, the situation as regards social services is not helped by a reduction of about 49,700 in the number of care-home beds, as reported this year in the Laing and Buisson independent survey of the sector.

Those are four areas of substance and I ask Ministers to rethink their positions and to re-engage with those issues which are of vital concern not only to my constituency but to those of many hon. Members.

8.51 pm

Mr. Siôn Simon (Birmingham, Erdington): I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to make one point about spin. I want to make only one point because I remember reading that Lloyd George said that almost all speeches in almost all circumstances should contain only one point. I took that very much to heart, as I so rarely have more than one point to make.

Before I make that one point, I offer the—

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): That is two points.

Mr. Simon: As I said, I would normally make only one point, but this is a special extra point. My non-point, intermezzo point, is to offer the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) the opportunity to retract the erroneous and unpleasant allegation he made about a special adviser who attempted to have the House of Lords *Hansard* corrected. In fact, it was a civil servant, so I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to take this opportunity—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman does not want to speak.

Mr. Francois: We have been told ad nauseam this evening that special advisers are civil servants, so what is the difference?

Mr. Simon: If the hon. Gentleman does not know the difference between a special adviser and a civil servant, I shall certainly not—

Mr. Francois: The hon. Gentleman certainly does not know the difference.

Mr. Simon: I certainly do.

Mr. Barker: If the case was as described by the hon. Gentleman, I stand corrected, but the thrust of my argument stands absolutely.

Mr. Simon: I want to make my one point about spin because I like to think I know something about it. I have a fairly rounded view of spin. I was once a humble, junior spin doctor. Indeed, for a short while I even worked under none other than the now notorious Ms Moore, which experience enables me to confirm that she is a most unusually single-minded and unsentimental woman. I think that Ms Moore's own interests would have been better served had she chosen to apply to her own expendability the same sense of ruthless pragmatism for which she has been so much admired professionally by so many of us for so long.

Not only have I been a humble press officer, I have also been a newspaper columnist and from that position it behoves me to say something that has been completely missing from the debate. As a newspaper columnist I was certainly—as are all newspaper columnists—by far the most naked, mischievous and unaccountable type of spin doctor there is.

Mr. Barker: The hon. Gentleman may have been mischievous and naked, but he was not paid for by public funds.

Mr. Simon: The point is that the whole notion of spin over substance, which Opposition Members think this is about, is a completely incoherent concept. Spinning is no more than a derogatory term for the gentle and ancient art of communicating the substance. Twenty years ago, the Labour party was hopeless at spinning. Before the 1983 general election, our national executive committee met especially to reaffirm its confidence in its own leader. That was not clever presentation. We were not then the party of spin. It was the same general election in which we fought on what my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) notably called the longest suicide note in history. That reminds me of a letter in *The Times* a couple of weeks ago wondering whether the Conservatives' recent three-month leadership contest might not be the longest suicide vote in history.

The point is—[Hon. Members: "The point, the point."] Yes. The point is that the tables have been turned. Twenty years ago, we were hopeless at spin and not very clever at substance. Those were the glory days of spin for the Tories, with the Saatchi boys, Tim Bell and "Labour Isn't Working". Those people invented the modern theory and practice of spin. In those days, when the Tories were the sultans of spin, they were also not half bad at substance—they destroyed our manufacturing industry, put 5 million on the dole and gave us 15 per cent. interest rates and boom and bust. We all know the story. We might say that 5 million unemployed and the annihilation of the economy was not a very good thing—that it was a despicable business—but we could hardly say that it was insubstantial.

Communication is not the opposite of substance. Spin can exist only if one has something to communicate. The supposed accusation of so-called spin is incredibly patronising to the British people. They have voted for us in overwhelming numbers for the second time, while the Tory party is at its lowest ebb for 200 years. Perhaps it provides Conservative Members with some comfort in those cold, dark hours of the night to believe that that is all down to spin. Perhaps it makes them feel better about themselves to believe that the people are stupid and voted for us because they were tricked by the astonishing mind-controlling techniques of Alastair Campbell's evil spinocracy. If that is what they want to believe, it is fine by me—they can stay in opposition for even longer than we did—but the truth is that people are not fools, bamboozled by spin, as the Tories seem to be. The people, like the Labour Government, are obsessed with substance.

Conservative Members will start bellowing and complaining if I talk about the substance—the millions of jobs that we have created, the lowest interest rates

[Mr. Simon]

inflation and unemployment for generations, and the new schools and hospitals being built all over the country. *[Interruption.]* There we are; they do not want to hear it. They do not want to hear the substance because they are obsessed with spin. The fact is that we are rebuilding this country, which they almost destroyed. That is the substance. The spin lives only in once place. What we have heard from Conservative Members today has nothing to do with ordinary people's lives. It is nothing but spin.

8.59 pm

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): This has been a truly extraordinary debate. We have had surveys in Mitcham, the Bassetlaw £1.20 pint and the sleaze surrounding Wellington. It really has been quite a journey, and thankfully we are getting quite close to the end of today's debate. I am one of those who believes that the public will be genuinely mystified about why Conservative Members want to spend the best part of a day debating Government special advisers when there are so many worrying issues that the public want the House to address. One of those issues is the state of the railways, to which I shall address the bulk of my comments.

No one can condone what Ms Moore did, and I think that she should have resigned or been sacked for her repugnant remarks. The apologists among Labour Members who have tried to excuse her continuing employment with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have been less than convincing on the matter. They were presented with an excellent opportunity to draw a line under the Government's spin. They had an opportunity to try to re-engage the public in our democratic processes and institutions, but that is now an opportunity lost.

Nevertheless, to fill a day's debate on the subject, as Conservative Members have attempted to do, is a complete and utter waste of time. Surely the public want us to consider issues that are more important than the short-term employment concerns of a Government spin doctor. Surely the public want us to consider the state of the railways and offer solutions for a way forward. Other than the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), we have heard very little from Conservative Members on the issue of Railtrack. So far we have heard that Railtrack is in receivership and that it will be taken over by an as yet undefined and unspecified not-for-profit consortium, but detail has been short on the ground. However, given the state of the railways in this country, it is detail that we now require.

Conservative Members' major contribution to the current state of the railways has been the privatisation of Railtrack, which has now been shown to be an utter and complete dismal failure. However, their failure even partly to acknowledge their culpability in the overall failure of Railtrack privatisation has been well noted by the public, who I think have been following the debate with great interest.

Railtrack's failure may be even more significant for the Government. The failure might even be an important watermark in successive Governments' continuation of privatisation drives. If failure on that scale can happen on the railways, it can happen in any proposed privatised public service.

In fact, if the privatisation of public services was going to work, it should have worked on the railways, which are almost uniquely placed to be a success for the privatisation of public services. They rely and depend on a steady, loyal and—given the state of the railways—reasonably easily satisfied customer base. There is no competition; Railtrack effectively works as a private monopoly. Indeed, Railtrack will be shown to have been a complete and utter piece of cake when we start to consider the continued privatisation of schools and hospitals, which is part of the Government's programme. How many more times will we be back here to discuss another waste of taxpayers' money when yet another privatisation failure emerges?

The Railtrack privatisation has shown us that such privatisation is a relatively straightforward way of taking public money and transforming it into shares and inflated salaries for executives. Will the Government now take stock of their whole attitude towards the private financing of public services? Are they prepared to consider in full detail all the implications of this failed privatisation? I remember the restlessness and long faces among Labour Members towards the end of the previous Session, when the Prime Minister, in particular, was full of the privatisation zeal. In the light of the Railtrack debacle, I look forward to a much more cautious line on the privatisation of public services coming out of No. 10 Downing street.

Perhaps Conservative Members are reluctant properly to discuss the railways because it was Conservative Members who privatised the railways and created the failure that is Railtrack. It is they who are the most culpable in this whole affair. The problem with Railtrack is the very nature of privatisation. It was Conservative dogma that led to the privatisation of Railtrack, and it was the failure of that privatisation that took Railtrack into administration.

It is the contradiction at the heart of the privatisation of public services that was Railtrack's major downfall. One sign of Railtrack's conflicting priorities is the fact that while it faced a deficit of £700 million in November, it was still prepared to pay out £88 million to shareholders at the beginning of October. That is the reality of privatisation—shareholders must come first. However, those shareholders had a choice; they could choose to invest in those companies. Railtrack's customers do not have a choice, so they have to put up with a substandard, second-rate service. It should now be the industry and not individual companies or shareholders that come first.

I want to spend a little time specifically on the Scottish situation. The logical step now for Scotland would be to take full control over the rail network. Transport is already a devolved matter for the Scottish Parliament, but when it comes to the rail network it is a completely different story. The Scottish Parliament will finance and administer the next ScotRail franchise, but strategic control over the development of the rail network still rests with the Strategic Rail Authority in London. Most importantly, Ministers in the Scottish Parliament will not be able to direct the SRA to pursue specific investments in Scotland, which means that decisions, such as offering GNER a two-year extension to its current contract, are outwith their control, as is the forward planning required to improve the network, especially as it takes four years to improve and receive new rolling stock. Such decisions infuriate the Scottish rail travelling public and frustration

and anger build up, especially among passengers on the disgraceful east coast line between Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

The Scottish Parliament is only able to advise, and that is not good enough. It needs the power to decide how best to improve the transport network in Scotland, including the rail network. Railtrack's collapse should be the catalyst for the Government to re-examine how the Scottish and Welsh railways should best be run.

The demise of Railtrack presents an opportunity to restructure Scotland's rail infrastructure. We need a distinctly Scottish approach and a Scottish solution to the problems of Scottish railways. A Scottish public rail investment trust—or, forgive me, Sprint—would seem to be the solution. Sprint could take control of the rail infrastructure and develop co-operation between the rail industry partners in Scotland. Operating outside the public sector on a not-for-profit basis—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind the hon. Member that the motions under discussion do not refer to Scottish railways.

Pete Wishart: The point I am trying to make is that the demise of Railtrack is an important issue in Scotland, and I am suggesting a way forward for my constituency. To be fair, Scotland has a relatively simple rail industry. We have one Railtrack zone and one engineering company. They could be brought together under the control of one organisation. If authority were given to the Scottish Parliament to make those decisions, we could improve the rail service in Scotland.

We all deserve a better rail service throughout the United Kingdom, especially in Scotland. I hope that lessons from the failed Railtrack exercise will inform the way forward. In Scotland, the demise of Railtrack gives us an opportunity to further this distinctly Scottish approach and make the railways work for the people and not for profit.

9.7 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the liberty taken by the Government, even in the light of the cross-party support, to release unpalatable news to the media. The sad fact remains that while all this is going on, British soldiers, especially my constituents, are risking their lives. They are fighting to make people who work in offices safe. They are fighting for freedom, democracy and the democratic way in which we choose to live our lives, whether we be Christian or Muslim. Sadly, Jo Moore sees them as no more than a shield behind which to slip through councillors' allowances or, more suspiciously, the renationalisation of Railtrack.

I am amazed that the Government, who have chosen to raise Britain's profile in the world as America's leading ally, should allow such a sinister reason for doing that. This is the same Government who were poised to slaughter the entire sheep flock, before the investigation showed that the wrong brains were being tested. Surely the same standards should apply in the case we are debating. If political advisers are appointed for their brains, perhaps we are using the wrong ones.

The lack of an apology, and the television performance that Jo Moore gave, showed enormous disrespect to our soldiers, our councillors and Railtrack's shareholders, and to the families of those who died.

Mr. John Smith: Does not the hon. Gentleman think that the greatest disrespect to our soldiers, who may well be going into Afghanistan, is the sickening spectacle of the Opposition wasting six and a half hours of parliamentary time discussing this nonsense, and not discussing the brave efforts of those soldiers?

Mr. Wiggin: Perhaps the Government should have considered that before they renationalised Railtrack. Would the hon. Gentleman genuinely want to be a hero so that his party could slip out bad news behind his courageous acts? Perhaps police numbers are so low—back to 1997 levels—because of the Government's behaviour. It is hardly encouraging for new recruits to believe that their acts of heroism will be used merely as a cover for more Government bad news. Railtrack's 300,000 voters or shareholders cannot be surprised by the Government's behaviour after they constantly undermined the company and moved the goalposts. The Government effectively ruined it months before news of their shameful behaviour was released stealthily.

Transport is not a Government strength. Anyone who has been parked on the M4 on a Friday or Sunday evening cannot help but wonder at the environmental and practical wisdom of a bus lane that leads people away from the airport instead of helping them to arrive in time to catch their aeroplanes. Lowering the speed limit simply allows traffic jams to stall vehicles, but the environmental cost of stationary traffic goes against anything that the Government promised, and not for the first time.

In my constituency, the A49 forms the north-south spine and is a narrow road on which several lives have been lost. We also suffer the effect of huge lorries that wind their way down roads that were built hundreds or even thousands of years ago. Lorries that drive through Pembridge, Eardisley and Lyonshall make life miserable for residents. Money for bypasses or simply better roads that drivers would prefer is not available, despite the increase in transport budgets.

The traffic problem in Hereford city is a national joke. The Liberal Democrat-controlled council is responsible for the appalling traffic jams. Without better roads, the pollution will be as bad in that beautiful city as it is in London. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, the Liberal Democrats have changed the one-way system several times.

The bridges over the River Wye constitute another crisis for my constituents. The capacity of Bridge Sollers bridge has been reduced from 10 tonnes to three tonnes. That forces agricultural traffic into Hereford city. Plans have been mooted for another Wye crossing, which cannot come soon enough. I hope that the Government will support that proposal.

I can often be seen disguised in my crash helmet because I regularly ride here on a motor bike. The Government are not doing nearly enough to encourage the use of motor cycles. We should immediately allow them to use bus lanes; in fact they already do that.

Pete Wishart: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If my discussion of the Scottish railways was out of order, why do not the same rules apply to the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin)?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will recall that I gave him some latitude to discuss that topic. I am therefore affording the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) the same latitude.

Mr. Wiggin: Anti-car appears to equal anti-engine philosophy, which is creeping into planning. I believe that that is in the Department's remit.

Motor cycles are at great risk of theft, and insurance is correspondingly high. That happens because it is not possible to anchor a motor cycle adequately. The huge risk that road users take must be balanced with some sort of encouragement. That leads me to the Westminster version of the West Lothian question: will Members of Parliament or motor cyclists have to pay to enter the congestion zone? I hope that that will be made clear.

In my local regional area, Advantage West Midlands considered future transport strategies. It focused mainly on Birmingham and issued platitudes such as, "Being at the centre of the UK's public transport network does not always feel like an advantage." There is no advantage to the position in the west midlands. Travelling to my constituency by train takes longer than driving, and that includes the pleasure of sitting on the Fulham Palace road.

Specific projects include getting the Eurostar to run to the west midlands and Birmingham airport. Advantage West Midlands briefly touched on increasing public transport uptakes in rural areas. What a shame that it did not tackle the major problem of where the M5 meets the M6—12 lanes become six there. We want not active traffic management, but better roads with more lanes and possibly higher speed limits.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): As the hon. Gentleman's neighbour, may I ask him whether he is proposing to turn the A49 into a dual carriageway?

Mr. Wiggin: Given the number of lives lost in certain areas, I think there is a good argument for dualling parts of the A49. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree that anything that would bring prosperity into the region would be popular.

More money is also required for the dial-a-ride heroes, those who will collect people if they are disabled and take them wherever they need to be. They have a serious problem—money is available only to new schemes. Any scheme that has been running for more than three years is likely to lose its funding.

As for the rail freight investment of more than £1,000 million, I wonder who will now invest in any sort of rail. Railtrack has changed its management structure. It changed its principles—it issued a new statement of principle—but perhaps that was just an effort to appease the Government. I do not think that anyone had a chance at Railtrack, given the way in which it was undermined. The constant harping from the extreme left, to the effect that the railways should be renationalised, may have done us a favour: perhaps there would have been more than 300,000 victims had their voices not been heard. It could so easily have been a larger number. This has, however, hit all of us who hope to retire one day on our pensions.

The question is now the same for the NHS and for the welfare state. Not only have the Government thought the unthinkable, they have now done the unspeakable. We must wait and see whether they deliver. As a rail user, I must say that my mind is not closed to improvement, nor am I so dogmatic that I cannot kindle a glimmer of hope for a better rail service in the future. I am acutely aware, however, that the bill will be picked up by the taxpayer. The main thrust of the Government's argument for the necessity to stop Railtrack was ever-increasing debt. Why will a non-profit-making company be any different? Will the money still not be needed?

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that trading while insolvent is still a criminal offence under the Companies Acts? That is precisely what Railtrack was doing.

Mr. Wiggin: Railtrack was expecting more money from the Government, on which the Government reneged.

Chris Grayling: I found one aspect of arguments advanced by Members on both sides of the House today slightly confusing. If the model adopted by the last Conservative Government for privatising the railways was so fundamentally flawed, why—given the opportunities for restructuring presented by the franchising round and by the situation at Railtrack—have the Government chosen to adopt exactly the same model, but without the Railtrack shareholders, for the future of our railways? Perhaps we got something more right than the Government sometimes suggest.

Mr. Wiggin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

The advantage to a non-profit-making company is supposed to be safety. That, if it were true, would be laudable, but airlines are private and work acceptably—and this is, after all, the Government who privatised air traffic control, or at least attempted to do so.

Mr. Don Foster: There is a considerable difference between the issue of safety in a competitive situation and the same issue in a monopoly. In a competitive situation, it is vital for airlines to ensure that safety is their number one priority. Were that not to be so, we would simply choose to travel on a different airline.

Mr. Wiggin: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's implication that monopolistic companies gamble with people's lives. However, it is extraordinary that the same model is to be used for the underground, and I think that some scrutiny should be given to the cavalier way in which Bob Kiley has been treated. I am curious about the appointment of Richard Bowker, who was formerly with Virgin Trains and is now to head Son of Railtrack, or whatever it is to be called. *[Interruption.]* Yes, he is.

Mr. Spellar: May I correct the hon. Gentleman? The rumours in the press link Mr. Bowker to the Strategic Rail Authority, not to the company limited by guarantee, which could succeed Railtrack, or to any other suggestion from the administrator.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful to the Minister. Will he confirm that Mr. Bowker is being paid £500,000? It seems to me to be a well-paid job and a fairly plump fee line.

If what the Minister says is the case, I am grateful for his intervention and not surprised that the rumours about Mr. Bowker's appointment are untrue. After all, with the Secretary of State's record on employment, I would be surprised if he were allowed to hire anybody.

9.20 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): We have heard of many instances of blurred lines of responsibility between civil servants and Ministers, which do nothing for democracy and everything for effect, and we have grown weary of this culture of spin. We need look no further than local government over the past two years.

Instead of the Government dealing with a few seriously failing councils with huge debts and collapsing public services, under the guise of modernisation all councils were obliged to undergo major change. Enormous costs were associated with that change, however, and those costs diverted funds from essential services run on budgets already stretched to the limit. Last year, the London borough of Havering, in which Upminster falls, experienced the third-highest council tax increase in the country. Another 20 per cent. increase is forecast this year. Councils could ill afford the costs of the change imposed on them.

The imposition of cabinet-style local government has made councils far less democratic, with power vested in small decision-making groups. The majority of councillors are now without a meaningful role outside their ward casework and scrutiny committees set up to examine policy retrospectively are, in the main, toothless tigers with minimal influence on the executive.

The old committee system might have grown cumbersome, but it could and should have been streamlined. At least under the old system all members were involved in the decision-making process and they could contribute their ideas before decisions were made.

Spin would have us believe that local government has been improved, but words such as "open government", "accountability" and "modernisation" simply disguise more and more regulation, loss of local control and centralisation of power. We have grown used to multiple counting in funding announcements such as those in respect of the Small Business Service, which were well documented by the Trade and Industry Committee.

The Government tell us what a good deal the public-private partnership will be for London Underground, but publication of a critical report on value for money by Deloitte and Touche was delayed by High Court injunction. Its inconvenient findings came to light only when the injunction preventing publication was overturned. That followed the shameful attempt to discredit Bob Kiley, a professional and experienced man of impeccable reputation, by special adviser Jo Moore.

Is it any wonder that the infamous e-mail was sent by Jo Moore when it was simply the culmination of the Government's culture of spin? When national attention was on the dreadful events in New York and Washington DC, one of the Government's 81 special advisers thought of a way to turn them to the Government's advantage. She gave a belated apology, the main thrust of which was regret that the Government had been embarrassed.

Tonight, the Government have the opportunity to redeem this sorry situation. I urge Labour Members to support the motion.

9.25 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): By any standards, this has been an excellent debate. Front-Bench speakers on both sides of the House have been challenged and there have been some brave non-partisan speeches. *[Interruption.]* I note that a number of those who are challenging the quality of the debate were not present for large chunks of it. Perhaps some of them were not present for what was certainly the highlight for me, when there was an extraordinarily vitriolic attack on the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) by the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter). The hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and for Shrewsbury and Atcham all said that the Opposition motion reflects a subject in which wide sections of the public in their constituencies and throughout the country take a great interest.

I shall explain why it was entirely appropriate for the debate to take place when undoubtedly grave and significant events are happening elsewhere. The Opposition have rightly given unswerving support to the actions of the coalition forces, and specifically to the political leadership that has been given by both President Bush and the Prime Minister on these matters. I take up immediately the challenge issued by my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) to praise the Government when they get things right—by saying that in the matters relating to the global crisis the Prime Minister's conduct of his office has been simply superb.

It is precisely because we have sought to present a united front with the Government on such vital matters that it would have been inappropriate for us to use today's Opposition day, as some Labour Members have suggested, to debate international policies with which we on the Conservative Opposition Benches have no fundamental quarrel.

Also, because the crisis is so grave and its consequences so worrying for so many in the United Kingdom and beyond it, the Government must demonstrate that now, more than ever, they are acting at all times in perfect good faith. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) said in a telling intervention, there is a particular need for us all to be able to trust the word, the judgment and the truthfulness of Ministers, and that is threatened by the culture of spin that is mentioned in the Opposition motion, and why the debate is not only appropriate now but essential.

The motion is not about—

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Collins: I will give way in a moment, but not now.

The motion is not about whether the Government should have any special advisers. Special advisers have served in Administrations formed by the past six Prime Ministers—three Labour and three Conservative—and they can perform a valuable and worthwhile role. That is something that the House might expect me to say because, in common with a number of Members on both sides of the House, I was a special adviser, as was the Foreign Secretary. *[Interruption.]* Those on the Government Front

[Mr. Collins]

Bench who are expressing outrage at the idea of a former special adviser ever serving in the House might like to point that out to the right hon. Gentleman.

Special advisers were in post when the previous, Conservative Government left office, and no doubt there will be special advisers when the Conservative party next returns to power. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) asked whether there will be fewer special advisers under the next Conservative Government. That was a specific policy on which we fought the last general election and, in common with all other policies, we are reviewing it. It seems that it is certainly a direction in which we would wish to proceed.

The issue is not whether we have special advisers, or how many we have, but how they do their job and whether it is acceptable for them to be in a position to give orders to career civil servants—an unprecedented innovation under the Labour Administration.

When I was a special adviser, the only civil servant who worked for me was a secretary—a typing secretary, not a permanent secretary. Under the present Government it is clear that many special advisers, including the now infamous Jo Moore, behave as if they have as much if not more power than Ministers who are accountable to the House. We know that this has been and is a matter of concern to both Back-Bench and Front-Bench Members on both sides of the House.

None of us is claiming to be perfect. All Governments in the past—no doubt this will apply in future—have from time to time sought to manage the news in their favour. The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) is quite right to say that all of us are capable of error, and no doubt all of us have said or done things that we regret. However, as Labour Members have said, it is precisely because the events of 11 September were so horrendous that Jo Moore's e-mail must be seen as much more than just an error of judgment. The Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, the Labour hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), has rightly said that Ms Moore's e-mail was

"incompatible with any idea of public service".

The Father of the House, the hon. Member for Linlithgow, in a deeply impressive speech, said that it was a moral lapse, and that if the Secretary of State could not see that Ms Moore had committed a sackable offence, the question would then arise about his own fitness to be a Secretary of State. The Secretary of State should dwell on the fact that that was said by someone on his own side.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have shown that there is almost a complete cross-party consensus that Jo Moore should go. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) called on her to resign or to be sacked. The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham said that, in the name of God, this special adviser must go. The hon. Member for Reading, West said that Jo Moore's position was no longer tenable. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) condemned her action, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon) called on her to reflect ruthlessly on her own expendability. That was not exactly a vote of confidence.

The *Independent on Sunday* stated last weekend that a member of the influential parliamentary committee of the parliamentary Labour party had told the paper that there was

"a majority view within the Parliamentary Labour Party that"—

Jo Moore—

"ought to go."

We have had some excellent speeches from my colleagues on the Conservative Benches. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) set out the detail of some very serious problems arising from the way in which the Government reach decisions on a range of matters. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) made a compelling case for questioning the Secretary of State's judgment on the rail industry, and described the damage that his decisions have done to the Government's standing with financial institutions at home and abroad.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton made a searching, challenging and, at times, moving speech in which he took no prisoners on any side and, I suspect, accordingly earned the respect of the whole House. He will be a very fine addition to the Public Accounts Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester—in my recollection he was a tremendous special adviser—was characteristically generous in his assessment of Ms Moore's e-mail, but rightly pointed to the other very damaging evidence of her behaviour that has since come to light. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) made a very impressive speech, rightly drawing attention to the difference between the Government's attitude now that they are in office and the attitude that they took in opposition when the Conservatives increased the number of special advisers at the Scottish Office by the grand total of one.

My hon. Friends the Members for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) raised important issues for their constituents in thoughtful speeches, and deserve an early reply from Ministers. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) pointed out how the culture of spin has undermined effective local democracy.

There remain serious allegations surrounding the Secretary of State and his special adviser. He may believe that he has satisfied those who are calling for answers. I have to tell him that he has not. We have yet to hear a proper answer to the report that his special adviser swore at and lied to a journalist from *The Sunday Times* on 6 October, a point made powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton. We have yet to be told that there will be a proper investigation—*[Interruption.]* Ministers may regard this as somewhat amusing. I have to tell them that the press and the public will not.

Mr. Spellar: Obviously, this is a speech that the hon. Gentleman prepared earlier before listening to the responses from this Dispatch Box. Let us take the quote from *The Sunday Times* journalist. According to the newspaper's report, he said that he would be running

"a story tomorrow that will say Railtrack is bankrupt and that the government is taking control, renationalising it."

As we were not going to renationalise, it was perfectly correct to tell them what we were doing. Why does not the hon. Gentleman get it right?

Mr. Collins: The Minister has made a most basic error—he has assumed that he is the only hon. Member in the Chamber who has a photocopy of *The Sunday Times* article. In fact, Jo Moore refused to answer any questions about Railtrack, so the journalist said:

"I will tell you that we are running a story tomorrow that will say Railtrack is bankrupt".

Is that untrue, or do the Government now contend that Railtrack was trading perfectly safely? *[Interruption.]* I see, fine. The journalist continued:

"and that the government is taking control".

That was also an entirely fictional story. Indeed, he then used the word, "renationalising". Was Jo Moore's reply, "You've got part of the truth"; "You're a little way towards it"; or even "You're getting warm, but I cannot tell you."? No, she replied:

"If you run that, you'll look a f***ing idiot."

That is not the appropriate behaviour of special adviser to a Secretary of State, and it is one of the many reasons why she should be sacked.

Hugh Bayley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Collins: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. Unlike Jo Moore, he has already been sacked from the Government. He probably did not deserve to be sacked; she certainly does.

We have yet to hear whether there will be a proper inquiry into the reports that Jo Moore sought to involve Mr. Alun Evans in a dirty-tricks campaign against the London transport commissioner, Bob Kiley. We have certainly not had any response to the revelation made by the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee—a Labour Member, so I should have thought that Labour Members would like to listen to what one of their own has to say—*[Interruption.]* Fine, they are not interested in what a Labour Member, the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, has to say, but they will hear it any way. Last week, he said that the report about Jo Moore's misbehaviour towards Alun Evans had been independently confirmed by sources in the civil service.

Bizarrely, the Secretary of State implied this afternoon that Mr. Kiley was the originator, not the target of those dirty tricks. Of course, that is by no means the only bizarre aspect of the saga; it seems that at one time the Government were trying to say that Ms Moore had never even sent the e-mail.

I now turn to what is now known as "the Marsden memorandum"—the record of his amicable conversation with the Government Chief Whip, whom I am delighted to see in her place. The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham said:

"Stephen Byers' spin doctor Jo Moore says September 11 is a good day to bury bad news."

The Government Chief Whip's response was:

"Jo Moore didn't say that."

The hon. Gentleman said:

"That is exactly what she said in her e-mail."

A little flustered perhaps, the Government Chief Whip then said:

"We don't have spin doctors in Number 10—or anywhere else!"—

an absolute cracker.

We still do not know what Ms Moore does for her salary of £70,000 a year—more than any Back-Bench Member receives. She is paid that amount for a three-day week, so pro rata, she is paid more than a member of the Cabinet. She cannot talk to journalists on *The Sunday Times* because they will not take her word for anything. She cannot brief anyone on rail issues; the Government have to hire a City public relations firm to carry out that part of her job. If she cannot speak to the press, people might think that she was keeping fingertip control over developments in her Department, but the linchpin of the Secretary of State's defence this afternoon was that the decision to issue the now notorious press release on councillors' expenses had already been taken before she sent her e-mail.

So we have a dilemma: if we do not believe the Secretary of State, we know that he acted on immoral advice and both he and his special adviser should go; but if we believe the Secretary of State, we must think that for £70,000 a year, his special adviser does not even read her papers and knows nothing of what is going on in her Department, so she is incompetent.

We find out that Jo Moore's job is a rather cushy number, because for £70,000 a year, she has the chance, as we learn from one of this weekend's diary columns, to leave this message on her answerphone at work:

"Hello, this is Jo Moore. I'm afraid that I'm now away for the week as it's half term. Erm, so please don't leave a message after the tone because I won't be calling you back. Thanks. 'Bye."

"'Bye" is precisely what we want to hear from Jo Moore; it has long been time that we heard that. We shall vote soon and it is already clear that a number of Labour Members will vote for the motion tabled by the Opposition. The Father of the House, the hon. Member for Linlithgow, said in our debate that Ms Moore's continued employment sullies the Government; he will vote for the motion. The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham said in a brave speech that he too would vote for the motion. As he said, if a Minister had used those offending words, he or she would have lost their job. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should reflect on his words on the "Today" programme this morning, when he said:

"I would hope that MPs, regardless of it being a three-line whip, would think to themselves, 'What do my constituents want? Will they actually support me if I slavishly follow the Government line . . . Or do I actually now stand up and finally be counted?'"

It is time for Government Members to stand up and be counted. There is only one honourable course that they can take; there is only one way that hon. Members of all parties can seek to uphold standards of public decency; there is only one way in which hon. Members can demonstrate that they are listening to the outrage of their constituents, and that is by voting "Aye" in favour of the Opposition motion.

9.41 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): One would never have thought from that peroration that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) was the sensitive soul who referred to

[Mr. John Spellar]

supporters of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) as "Ward 8 from Broadmoor". One would never have thought that he could be so shocked or that an expletive deleted would throw him and give him a touch of the vapours, let alone a journalist from *The Sunday Times*—and we know what sensitive souls and caring individuals the press are. What a load of sanctimonious nonsense we heard from the hon. Gentleman and many other Members.

Early in our debate, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) asked why we were having it. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) put his finger on the reason; it is because the Opposition cannot make a case on any other issue and cannot think of anything else to say. It is truly extraordinary that, on the first Opposition day debate under the new Conservative leader, they have chosen this subject. The meeting at which members of the shadow Cabinet took that decision must have been interesting. It must have been a case of pass the parcel with the Leader of the Opposition asking, "Shadow Chancellor, would you like to lead the debate?" and the shadow Chancellor replying, "Well, it's a bit difficult when we've got the strongest economy in Europe." When the Tories were in government, they doubled the national debt in only five years, but we have been paying off that debt. The economy has been growing strongly; even with the impact of world recession, our economy is holding up the best, so obviously the shadow Chancellor wanted to duck the issue.

The shadow Secretary of State for Health would probably not have been keen to have a debate in the face of record hospital building, dramatically increased numbers of medical trainees and increased funding for hospitals, let alone the Tories' own appalling record and, of course, their commitment to privatise the health service. The previous portfolio of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) was education. In the face of rising standards across the country, what case could Opposition Members have made, given their record? Each shadow Minister passed the parcel until it ended up with that hapless bunch who are shadow Ministers for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Beauty and the beast had to sit down and decide which issues they were going to discuss. They could not discuss the underground, because the Conservative Government neglected investment year after year. Even the disagreements between us and the Mayor are about how we spend the extra money that the Government are putting into the underground.

The Opposition could not debate buses because they created havoc with privatisation, which led to difficulties in many cities across the country. They could not debate aviation because the Chancellor took a world lead in organising insurance cover for our aviation industry, which many other countries have followed. We know that they could not debate the railways because only one Conservative Member did so in the debate. I give the right hon. Member for Wokingham credit for that, even if his supporters were referred to as "Ward 8 from Broadmoor". The Conservatives know the difficulties that they would face if they spoke about the railways. They would have to answer not only for privatisation but for the subsequent mismanagement and the rushed botched job on Railtrack in 1996, driven by ideology and a shortage of cash.

Having considered transport issues, the Conservatives will have looked across the rest of the DTLR portfolio and on each issue seen solid, realistic action that is delivering for people across the country. They could not deal with any of the questions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) about the social environment, abandoned vehicles and housing because they neglected those issues over the years and did not give a damn about the people living in such areas.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Is the Minister really saying that abandoned vehicles are more important than whether Opposition Members can trust the Government of his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at this very important time?

Mr. Spellar: I am prepared to take a survey in any pub, club, workplace or bus stop in the country, asking people whether abandoned vehicles and dereliction in their areas are more important than the nonsense of this debate. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to make that clear.

The debate was no more enlightening or elevating than the motion. We heard the usual Liberal Democrat self-righteousness from the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). Any Member who has seen the leaflet "Focus" in their area will know the saying—I am sure that the Tories say it as well as Labour Members—that there are lies, damn lies and Liberal "Focus" leaflets.

The hon. Gentleman made quite a bit of special advisers. I understand that the Liberal Democrats have a couple of them in Scotland—Sam Ghibaldan, for policy, and Polly McPherson, for media—and a couple in Wales, so why all the complaining about the proliferation of such advisers?

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to talk about the extra Short money that the Liberal Democrats have received. In the 1992 to 1997 Parliament, the main Opposition party received just £1.5 million and the Liberal Democrats £316,000. In the last financial year, the Conservatives received £3.377 million and the Liberal Democrats £1.085 million. I do not know whether they are all spending that money down the pub or on special advisers—the people whom they are so keen to oppose. That is not to mention the considerable number of ex-special advisers who litter the Opposition Benches, who were certainly not shrinking violets in post.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) also raised the question of the number of special advisers. He seems to be in vogue on the Tory Benches at the moment, but that will probably not last as they remember some of the disagreements that they have had with him. In answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, he said that when my right hon. Friend worked for Harold Wilson, he was paid by the party. As has been rightly pointed out by Opposition Members, the world has changed—under both Governments. The nature of government has changed and the demands of a 24-hour media especially have had a dramatic effect. That is why we have Short money and special advisers. My hon. Friend must accept that.

My hon. Friend must also accept that special advisers were initially employed to protect the independence of the civil service, rightly dealing with political issues and

maintaining a degree of separation between themselves and civil servants. It is rich for the Tories—who represent the party of Bernard Ingham, the Saatchis, Tim Bell and others—to argue about the role of special advisers. Was it Sir Bernard Ingham who described a member of the Tory Cabinet as "semi-detached"?

Chris Grayling: If the role of special adviser was created to protect the civil service, why did a special adviser issue press instructions to the civil service?

Mr. Spellar: The issue rightly went further and consideration was given as to how it should be dealt with. I meet Bob Kiley regularly and he has never complained about that. Indeed, Ken Livingstone recently said that he and Bob were not worried about it, and he complimented my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

As my right hon. Friend said in his opening remarks, the key consideration is whether an attempt was made to alter a report that was undertaken—allegedly objectively—by a team of consultants. That is a legitimate exercise when putting across Government policy.

Mr. Collins: Will the Minister confirm that the only political party for which Sir Bernard Ingham stood was Labour and yet he worked for a Conservative Government, which illustrates the difference between us in office and him in office? If Mr. Bob Kiley has not complained to him, will he accept, when we send him the transcript of Mr. Kiley's remarks on the BBC's 6 o'clock news, that Mr. Kiley is extremely unhappy? Will he go back to his Department and institute a full investigation into the allegations that Ministers have consistently dodged?

Mr. Spellar: As I said, I meet Bob Kiley regularly. We have a good business relationship and he has never raised that issue. The mock indignation on his behalf is thoroughly unbecoming.

We have dealt with *The Sunday Times* article, but it has rightly been pointed out that Jo Moore refused to respond to leading questions on Railtrack. She did not spin. She said:

"Railtrack is a private company. You should address your questions to them. I have nothing to say about Railtrack."

When asked whether we were going to renationalise it, she rightly said that we were not. It is misrepresentation and indeed spin by Opposition Members to present that in a different way.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) made an unfortunate point. He implied that there was a link between the commencement of the bombing in Afghanistan and the Railtrack announcement. Once the schedules had been published and we had decided to open up discussions on Railtrack, it was clear that an announcement would be made on Monday morning. Press leaks precipitated that and did not serve Ministers' interests because their weekends were thoroughly disrupted.

It is improper to make such suggestions about the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. Having served in the Ministry of Defence—*[Interruption.]* If the Conservative deputy Chief Whip stops bawling, I can make it clear that the Ministry of Defence keeps that information on a—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) is upset this evening. The House needs to be calmer.

Mr. Spellar: So the Conservative Deputy Chief Whip should be, Mr. Speaker, having tabled such a lamentable motion.

I was making a serious point. The Ministry of Defence and the military obviously keep such information enormously tight—on a need-to-know basis—and rightly so. The suggestion that they would leak that story to another Department is both extraordinary and a considerable slur on their professionalism.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) tried to get the debate back on to a stable basis and asked some straightforward questions on financing. He will be aware that there have been discussions with a number of people in local government and other stakeholders. They will be looking into giving councils flexibilities, incentives and the support that they need to deliver top quality public services, as well as removing red tape and giving them the opportunity to be much more innovative and truly responsive to local needs and aspirations. The modernisation of local government finance remains a priority for us, including new freedoms for local authorities to borrow capital, about which my hon. Friend asked.

The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) said that he would vote for the Conservative motion. I am not surprised about that in someone who rushes off to give *The Mail on Sunday* a full transcript of a conversation with the Chief Whip.

Mr. Paul Marsden: I have been goaded now. Does the Minister not realise the depths of despair felt by the public because the Government cannot understand that this special adviser should go and that, for the sake of parliamentary democracy, we should surely understand what is right and what is wrong? For goodness' sake, do the decent thing and make her go.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Spellar: I notice which side of the Chamber is cheering. For an hon. Member who experienced such support from the Labour party when he was jumping in and out of deciding whether he was going to be a candidate at the general election to demand that someone should be peremptorily sacked is, frankly, unbecoming.

The debate this evening has demonstrated the sheer lack of ideas of the Conservatives—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We only have a few more minutes. The Chamber is too noisy. Hon. Members should listen to the Minister.

Mr. Spellar: In recent press reports, the Leader of the Opposition has said that he wants to lead the party of ideas. What has become clear today is that the Conservatives have no ideas. They do not even have anything meaningful to say. They could have used today to talk about railways, as the right hon. Member for Wokingham did. They might have seen fit to offer an apology for the years that they spent in government running down the system and failing to invest in the

[Mr. Spellar]

network, but there was not a peep out of them. Even after their defeat at the hands of the electorate they are unrepentant. They are more than happy to defend the failed privatisation and even the £88 million dividend that was paid out while the company was going bankrupt.

The simple fact of the matter is that the Conservative party has nothing to say. It has nothing to offer.

Lynne Jones *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not going to give way. I know the reason why.

Mr. Spellar: We have seen the same old Tories, hiding from their record, refusing to apologise and avoiding the real issues. They went to the country in 1997 and again in June and the public sent them a clear message. They are not fit for government and we have seen tonight that they are not fit for opposition either.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 167, Noes 340.

Division No. 39] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Maude, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'y)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mcleish, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rayneford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and Angela Smith.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 342, Noes 205.

Division No. 40] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malleber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*

Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Tony McNulty.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House believes that Ms Jo Moore's e-mail of 11th September was horrible, wrong and stupid; notes that she has been dealt with under the Department's disciplinary procedures and that the Permanent Secretary has given her an official warning as to her conduct and that she has expressed her heartfelt regret and offered a full apology; welcomes the decisive action that Ministers have taken in regard to Railtrack which will be welcomed by the travelling public; rejects the policies of the Opposition, who would have continued to pour money into propping up the company,

thus amplifying the problems caused by the way they privatised the rail industry; and further welcomes the work of DTLR ministers in developing positive policies, to improve the position of local government, to tackle problems of homelessness and urban regeneration and to develop proposals for regional government and contrasts this with the policies of the Opposition who decimated local government, ignored the problems of deprived communities and centralised power.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Drug Abstinence Order (Responsible Officer) (No.2) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 17th July, be approved.—[*Mr. Ainger.*]

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Sovereign Rights

10.28 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I wish to present the petition of Joan Martin and 3,500 of the citizens of Beaconsfield and elsewhere.

The petition states:

In 1975 the British people, in a referendum, agreed to continue in a Common Market, a group of equal and free European Nations trading together without barriers and tariffs.

By default the British people have, without their consent, become citizens of a European State run by a non-elected bureaucratic Commission in Brussels.

This foreign power has suborned our legal system and the authority of our Parliament.

Wherefore your petitions pray that your Honourable House do all in its power to re-establish our sovereign right to rule ourselves in accordance with the freedoms, liberties and rights granted to us and our Heirs forever under Magna Carta in 1215.

To lie upon the Table.

Housing Development (Hampshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Ainger.*]

10.29 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I am grateful to have this opportunity to raise the issue of housing development in Hampshire. This is a matter of great importance throughout Hampshire, especially in my constituency of Fareham. During this year's election campaign it was the most important local issue. That is not surprising. Fareham used to be a rural constituency. It was a centre for strawberry growing and horticulture, but as a result of housing developments over the past 20 to 30 years, there are few strawberry fields and nurseries left. It is now predominantly a suburban constituency.

The development of Fareham and housing growth in its western wards, where most recent building has occurred, has led to more traffic and ever expanding schools. However, the infrastructure for supporting such large-scale development has lagged behind the actual development. The powers of local councillors to deal with planning matters have recently been eroded. The response to the genuine anxieties of local people about housing development is often that the council's hands are tied because the Government made the decision.

At a time of growing public anxiety about housing development in Hampshire, the power of local councils to deal with local issues has been removed, leaving a vacuum. The source of Hampshire's problems is regional planning guidance note 9, which covers the south-east. The Government said that provision should be made in Hampshire for a net average increase of 6,030 houses a year—more than in any other county in south-east England. Constraints on development in Hampshire mean that a disproportionate share of those additional dwellings will be built in south-east Hampshire, including Fareham.

The Government's guidance on housing development does not stop there. They have become increasingly involved in decisions about the location of houses and housing density. There are two flaws in the Government's approach to housing development. The first is the failure to match infrastructure development with housing development and the second is the Government's desire to micro-manage housing development, which undermines local democratic accountability.

First, let us consider infrastructure. I want to give two examples of the response to past difficulties to illustrate one of the problems at the heart of the Government's approach to planning an infrastructure. Junction 9 of the M27 serves two major development areas: Whiteley and the western wards. More than 20,000 adults live in those areas and many others commute to work there. Development has been well flagged in the borough and county plans for several years. However, there were no traffic infrastructure improvements to deal with the congestion around junction 9. It was clear that building houses and offices in that area would cause traffic problems.

Instead of improving the junction in parallel with housing and commercial development, the council could obtain funding from the Government only when the traffic problems had emerged. Improvements would be considered only when traffic gridlock had occurred,

even though the need for them was obvious from the development plans. The junction is now properly configured for current flows, but only a third of the development of Whiteley has been completed. When the remainder has happened, we will return to gridlock. Further housing development in Hampshire, especially south-east Hampshire, requires a transport infrastructure to match it. It should parallel the growth in population, and not be an afterthought.

The second infrastructure issue is the provision of school places. The provision of primary school places is less of a problem than that of new secondary schools because the capital costs of a new primary school can be met through capital programmes or developers' contributions. The provision of secondary school places is more difficult.

Brookfield school, which serves part of the western wards, has expanded in 10 years from 1,000 to 1,570 pupils this year. It will take a further 90 pupils when new classrooms are built. However, that does not cater for all the secondary school places that are required for pupils who live in the west of the constituency.

Children from Whiteley have to be sent to the Henry Cort community school in the centre for Fareham because Brookfield, their nearest school, does not have sufficient capacity, despite its rapid expansion, to accommodate them. Travelling to Henry Cort means a journey over the M27 at peak time and down the A27 into Fareham. That is followed by a journey along Highlands road, which is already a rat run for traffic, avoiding Fareham town centre. School buses and parents on the school run clog up already busy roads.

I do not believe that anyone, in retrospect, would design the secondary education of children in the west of Fareham in that way. The sensible approach would be to build a second secondary school to serve the western wards. Sadly, the sensible approach does not feature in the Government's capital programme. The county council cannot obtain Government funding to open a new secondary school.

A new secondary school in Whiteley would serve several rapidly growing local communities in Fareham and neighbouring boroughs—the likely focus for much of the new housing development in Hampshire. A new secondary school would ease the burden on existing schools, reduce the cost of home-to-school travel, and reduce traffic volumes on already congested routes. Rather than the expansion of existing schools, we should have had a new school to cope with the increased demand.

The Government require Hampshire to build more houses, and Fareham to bear a disproportionate share. Will the infrastructure be there to support that growth? On the basis of past experience, the answer will be, "Yes, eventually, but too late, and not configured properly to take account of the needs of local people."

If we are to proceed with large-scale housing developments to meet the Government's housing targets, the Government must provide funds so that the infrastructure is there to meet the needs of new residents. They should take an holistic approach to development. Infrastructure issues will have to be factored into plans, and properly financed. At a time when more and more people are concerned about issues relating to the quality of life, the Government need to support large-scale development with a capital programme that pre-empts problems, rather than waiting until the problems have been created.

Ministers may respond that this is not a problem for them, and that the local authority should deal with it. But the trend appears to be towards more and more central Government intervention—towards, as I said earlier, micro-managing development. Let me give an example. The Secretary of State's predecessor called in a housing development known as North of Whiteley in August 2000. An inquiry was held into the development of the site in November 2000, the inspector reported in February 2001, but only in July 2001 did the Secretary of State announce that he had not made up his mind. He wanted further evidence on, among other things, the availability of housing land and greenfield sites.

The site was earmarked for development in the Fareham borough local plan review, published in June 2000. The plan had been through the due process: consultations had been received, and an inspector had held an inquiry. In a sense, it was the product of a democratic process. It has the support of local councillors, who are accountable to the people of the borough. In effect, however, by his intervention the Secretary of State has ripped up the part of it that is most important to my constituents—the section on housing development.

If the Secretary of State or, more likely, the Government office of the south-east—GOSE—had bothered to read the plan, he or it would have realised that there are not many brownfield sites in Fareham. That is not surprising, I suppose, in what was once a rural constituency. Ironically, the only large brownfield site identified in the plan was HMS Daedalus, shared by the boroughs of Fareham and Gosport. It was a military base, which the Ministry of Defence in its wisdom has now decided to retain. Large-scale housing development can only happen on greenfield sites in Fareham. If the Secretary of State wishes to decide how much additional housing needs to be built, he will have to accept that the development must take place on greenfield sites.

But it is not just in regard to where houses should be built that the Secretary of State becomes involved; there is also the question of how many houses should be built. Let me give another example. There was a site in Peters road in Warsash, again earmarked for development in the borough plan, and 210 houses were allocated to it. In response to the Secretary of State's guidance, issued last year, that allocation was increased to 249 houses. More than 300 local residents petitioned against the development, calling for more money to be spent on important local services. They rightly feared that higher densities would put more pressure on the local infrastructure.

The development in Peters road is a further example of both aspects of the Government's involvement in housing development to which I object: lack of infrastructure support and, once again, interference by central Government. It has been called in by the Department and is being reviewed by GOSE, which has admitted that it will not be able to deal with it in the required time scale. Government interference is hindering the building of houses that the Government want to build. Above all, there is the power of central Government to dictate the number of houses to be built in a county, which was the starting point of my speech.

[Mr. Mark Hoban]

The Secretary of State can dictate the number of houses to be built in a county; he can then influence whether they are built on greenfield or brownfield sites, and how many houses are built on a site. All that can be done from luxury offices in Victoria or through the GOSE office in Guildford, with little reference to people on the ground who know what the real issues in Fareham are.

Increasingly, housing development decisions, which should be in the hands of local councillors who are accountable to local residents, are being constrained by a tighter and tighter framework drawn up by the Secretary of State. One advantage of councillor involvement in planning is that it allows local input and accountability. The local councillors understand the problems and needs of the borough and they, not the Secretary of State or his officials, know how much traffic can be absorbed and how much capacity a school has for new pupils.

If councillors lose discretion over housing development, who will be accountable to the people of Fareham for building houses on greenfield or brownfield sites? To whom shall I direct my constituents when they challenge a housing development—a councillor whose hands are tied by the Secretary of State? Will the Secretary of State meet residents' associations to justify building high-density housing in residential areas or will he delegate that to the Minister? More likely, it will be delegated to some anonymous official in the GOSE who will issue bland replies about a particular development.

Local councils' ability to represent their residents, shape their communities and reflect local needs is being eroded by an increasingly interventionist Department that cannot trust local people to make decisions. It is time to move the planning and development debate on. We must move away from predict and provide, which all Governments have used. That approach guides housing development, but not the provision of roads, schools and local services.

I want local authorities to have genuine control over housing development to ensure that borough plans are meaningful, not the window-dressing exercises in participation that the Government seem to think they are. We should require local councils to accommodate the growth of their local population—that is reasonable—but they should decide whether to build to accommodate further economic development. We should not be afraid to let people voice their concerns about development and affect council decisions about the location of that development.

In Hampshire, an increasingly interventionist Government are exercising tighter and tighter control over housing development and acting, in the words of one planning officer, like a shadow development control agency that second-guesses or even overrides democratically elected councils, but does not take responsibility for the infrastructure that large-scale development needs.

We should rebuild the power of local councils so that they can take the decisions that affect the local community and be accountable to local people for them. Housing development would therefore meet both the needs of local people and the capacity of local infrastructure.

10.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on securing the debate. He has raised an important subject that is of concern to the Government and to local people. However, the trend is quite the reverse of what he says. Our planning regime and our policies allow for maximum local flexibility and careful consideration of local population trends. Also, they ensure that decisions can be taken by the local planning authority. We shall produce a planning Green Paper towards the end of the year and that too will consider further ways to improve the planning process.

The hon. Gentleman raised concerns about several recent cases being dealt with by the Secretary of State. It is important that we do not prejudice the decision-making process and what I have to say should not be taken to imply any particular views on those cases. Let me reassure the hon. Gentleman that the intention of our policy is to protect the countryside, which he says is also important to his constituents in Hampshire.

Our planning guidance on housing—PPG 3—contains a clearly stated presumption that previously developed land and existing buildings will be reused for housing before consideration is given to developing greenfield sites. Research undertaken by local authorities, particularly in Hampshire, shows that they have considerably underestimated urban capacities.

That is further confirmed by research which shows that authorities ignore key sources of capacity and use capacity studies more as a constraint than considering what could occur under conditions of greater demand. Many thus reinforce existing restrictive planning policies rather than contribute to urban renaissance.

We recognise that not all housing development can be accommodated in urban areas. How much development should take place outside existing urban areas will depend on the overall need for housing land, the capacity of existing urban areas to accommodate additional housing and the efficiency with which land is developed. Where development has to take place outside urban areas, we look to local planning authorities to utilise the most sustainable option.

In the south-east, we have been building at some of the lowest densities throughout the country. Many people are saying that the land is so precious that we cannot build on it as many houses as are needed, and the hon. Gentleman raised that issue. However, authorities and developers often make little attempt to build more economically. That means that meeting the housing requirements uses more land than is strictly necessary. We need to plan for a wider range of housing, more smaller units and less lavish provision for the car in residential layouts. We need to examine more sustainable patterns of development and movement generally so that people do not have to travel miles by car.

We have also made available guidance on how to manage the release of land in such a way as to minimise unnecessary loss of greenfields to development. That is a sequential approach that is set out in PPG 3, to which the hon. Gentleman did not refer, which provides a great deal of discretion for the local authority. It enables it to decide how best to release land for development to ensure that the interests of greenfield areas are properly protected.

In regional planning guidance, we have moved away from the predict-and-provide model. The hon. Gentleman said that the Government, like all others, have implemented it. We follow a system that is more about monitoring and managing the planning process. The Government do not impose housing targets or quotas on local authorities. It is wrong to say that everything will be decided centrally.

Mr. Hoban: The Minister used a similar explanation in answer to one of my written questions. The covering letter that was sent out with RPG 9 makes it clear that the Government's proposals were being published, along with the Government's targets for housing development in Hampshire and other counties in south-east England. It is not quite right to say that we are not dealing with Government targets. Government targets are being imposed.

Ms Keeble: The figures have been reached after much consultation and discussion. There is a proposed rate of growth outside London for the south-east of 39,000 additional dwellings a year. That is an ongoing rate of development, which will be reviewed within five years. It is for local authorities appropriately to monitor and manage the housebuilding programme in their areas.

There are those who say that we are proposing to concrete over the south-east, but the Government are not putting the south-east under development pressure. Of course, there are some pressures because of population growth, and the important question is how they are best managed. Housing needs in the south-east outside London derive in a large part from the needs of people who are already in the region and of those who are migrating into it from London.

We have asked Hampshire to provide for 6,030 additional dwellings a year. We look to the structure plan authorities to distribute these figures in the provisions to the districts, which are best placed to undertake the task with their knowledge of the local area. They must take into account the principles of sustainable development, as set out in our planning policy guidance notes, and ensure that greenfield development takes place only where it is absolutely necessary. If Fareham objects to the distribution set out in the structure plan, it is for the local council to take up the matter with the county council directly. We think that these decisions should be taken locally and that it is not for the Government to make decisions at that level of detail.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of delay in certain planning cases, and in one proposal in Fareham in particular that has been called in. Unfortunately, as he said, we have not been able to issue a decision within our target period. However, that case is not straightforward and we needed further information from the parties concerned. We are currently considering that information, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the delay is not deliberate. I am sure that he would agree that we should consider the issues very carefully before allowing the development of a greenfield site. Indeed, that has been, to a great extent, the drift of his argument this evening.

The hon. Gentleman raised two issues relating to infrastructure; one was transport and the other was schools. As he rightly said, in both cases it is, to a great extent, the responsibility of the local authority—the local education authority in the case of schools—to ensure that there is proper provision for the population growth. The local authorities have their structure plans and their studies, and they can examine the kind of population growth that is expected.

Mr. Hoban: I raised this question directly with Hampshire county council. It would like to provide additional schools, and it has dealt with the issue of school places by expanding Brookfield school. However, there is no capacity in the capital programme—and the amount that it is allowed to borrow from the Government—for building a new secondary school. There is a real problem there that is not addressed simply by expanding existing schools.

Ms Keeble: In other local education authority areas, including areas in which the population is growing, the LEA is able to make proper provision for the education of the children by providing new schools. Obviously, it is not up to my Department to determine those matters, but there is a whole range of measures that local authorities can use to consider options for financing. It is well within the means of a local education authority to plan for the proper education of the children and to ensure that the proper facilities are there. Understandably, in some areas the population grows and in others it shrinks, so that the LEAs have to make arrangements for taking out surplus school places, but that is up to the discretion and the proper decision making of the local education authority.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of transport infrastructure. As he will know, we have introduced local transport plans that take a broader, more holistic view of planning for transport. These plans are expected to be consistent with land-use planning policies and should take account of new development. A major element of the Hampshire local transport plan is the proposed light rapid transit system linking Portsmouth with Fareham, via Gosport. Earlier this year, the Government announced local transport plan funding and Transport and Works Act 1992 powers for the scheme. This will reduce traffic congestion, improve access to the Gosport and Portsmouth peninsulas, and boost the regeneration of those areas.

As part of our review of the planning system we will be looking at planning agreements. These are often used to enable improvements to local infrastructure. We will ask whether they should cover a wider range of benefits for the community or whether they should incorporate a system of impact fees designed to reflect the full environmental costs that a development generates.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): We are happy that the light rapid transit system was announced immediately before the election. However, there is widespread suspicion that, having been delayed for some time—and the announcement having been made just before the election—the plans may drift sideways and that nothing much will happen until just before the next election, when perhaps the LRT will be reannounced. Can the Minister give me some reassurance on this point?

Ms Keeble: I hope that I can. The Government have made light rapid transit systems a priority, and we have

[Ms Keeble]

made a commitment to introduce a number of routes. They show extremely good results in terms of passenger usage, and have been a success in terms of public transport options. On that basis, we would certainly expect to see this scheme carried through. If the hon. Gentleman has any doubts about that, I shall be perfectly happy to give him some extra assurances on the progress of the project.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasise that we are serious about our policy that brownfield sites should be developed before greenfield sites, and we have introduced policies that will ensure that local authorities have a great deal of control over the way in which they release local land for development. We also want to ensure that people's housing needs are met in the most sustainable way. Under the forthcoming Green Paper, we are taking steps to streamline the planning process, but we remain committed to our policies. I hope that that gives the hon. Member for Fareham the assurance that he requires.

We are dealing with delays, but in speeding up decision making, it is crucial to continue to reflect our policy to protect the environment. That message must get through to authorities and developers. They must implement the sequential approach and remove greenfield allocations where they are not justified, so that they achieve the hon. Gentleman's purpose—to protect the open countryside that his constituents value. However, we will step in and use our powers where that policy is not applied.

The Government's policies on planning and development should achieve exactly the aims that the hon. Gentleman wants, and they provide for proper flexibility and decision making locally. In conjunction with the extra money that we are spending on all the infrastructure needed to create a good society, our policies should provide for successful development in Hampshire and for his constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 24 October 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL

Motion made,

That the promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill which originated in this House in the last Parliament but had not received the Royal Assent may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the bill in the present session of Parliament; and the petition for the bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable to it shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office no later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the bill presented in this House in the last Parliament;

That on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the bill on the Table of the House;

That in the present session of Parliament the bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it has passed in the last Parliament, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages;

That no further fees shall be charged to such stages.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Ethical Trading Initiative

1. **Mr. Khalid Mahmood** (Birmingham, Perry Barr): If she will make a statement on her Department's support for the ethical trading initiative. [6111]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): My Department has supported the ethical trading initiative since its establishment in 1998. It is an alliance of major British retailers, development non-governmental organisations and trade unions dedicated to the improvement of labour standards throughout the supply chain of the retailers concerned. The ETI brings together £60 billion in annual turnover, and therefore has a considerable worldwide reach. The retailers subject themselves to independent monitoring, and work to bring their supply chains into compliance with International Labour Organisation standards in a way that brings benefits to workers in developing countries.

Mr. Mahmood: Does my right hon. Friend agree that improving the observance of core labour standards in supply chains can help developing country workers to get a better deal out of trade? What further steps can her Department take through the ETI and other initiatives to ensure that labour standards are better observed worldwide?

Clare Short: I agree strongly with my hon. Friend. As the House knows, core labour standards include having no child or bonded labour. Some children are still working when they should be at school because their parents are so poor, and some people have to bond their future and their children into labour. That shows what desperate levels of poverty we have in the world.

The ETI is a very important initiative: a £60 billion turnover has a wide international influence. We want to build on it and spread it across the world. It is being watched, and may be imitated, in other countries worldwide.

Medicines (Patents and Pricing)

2. **Dr. Ian Gibson** (Norwich, North): What discussions she has had with the pharmaceutical industry about patents and pricing of medicines. [6112]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): On 8 October, I chaired the first meeting of the working group on access to medicines, which brings together United Kingdom Ministers, the pharmaceutical industry, the World Health Organisation and the World Trade Organisation, among others. Our aim is to encourage research and development for new drugs, and access to existing drugs, to treat the diseases of poverty across the developing world. The group has made good progress in identifying ways in which to encourage more research and development. The second and third meetings will discuss donations, pricing and affordability.

Dr. Gibson: Does my right hon. Friend agree, on the basis of her experience, that the pharmaceutical industry is much more interested in patents than in patients? How does she interpret the current bout of philanthropy among the big pharma-companies, which, after all, measure their annual profits in millions of pounds and trillions of dollars?

Clare Short: Pharmaceutical companies are, of course, run for profit. That includes Indian pharmaceutical companies. In consequence, only 10 per cent. of worldwide research is conducted to obtain better drugs for the diseases of poverty: malaria, HIV-AIDS—for which a vaccine is needed—and tuberculosis, including new strains. The poor of the world cannot generate a market.

We are trying to spread basic health care systems across the world. At present, even if the drugs were free, most poor people would not get them, because they have no access to health care. We are trying to establish worldwide alliances aimed at conveying cheaper drugs to poor countries, allowing pharmaceutical companies to charge higher prices

in other countries so that they achieve a rate of return, and bringing about a global partnership that will produce better treatment for the diseases of poverty. The pharmaceutical companies are co-operating, but this is a new dance for them.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Will the Secretary of State include in her discussions a specific look at the impact of the patenting of human genetic material? It is feared that, as patents are taken out on the human genetic sequence, researchers in both the public sector and developing countries—even when doing their own research—may have to pay prohibitive charges to those who hold the licences on the material that they need.

Clare Short: I have not looked into that in any detail, but we have set up a Commission on Intellectual Property. We have experts from across the world trying to ensure that the law on intellectual property—which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is strongly linked to patenting—serves the interests of poor countries, and does not marginalise them. I will ask my Department to look into whether we need to consider human genetic material, and I will write to him.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): More people in Africa die of malaria than of AIDS. It is estimated that if malaria could be abolished in Africa, the continent's gross domestic product would be increased by some 15 or 20 per cent.—four times as much as the continent receives in aid. Does not the situation cry out for a project by Governments in the rich world, Governments in the poor world and the pharmaceutical industry to work together to eradicate malaria?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. I believe that 1 million children in Africa die of malaria every year. Obviously we want action on both malaria and HIV-AIDS; we do not want to switch between the two.

There is a World Health Organisation initiative, "Roll Back Malaria", which we are supporting strongly. Even by applying consistency to the drugs that we have, and ensuring that all children sleep under insecticide-dipped bed nets, we could massively reduce the toll on both life and health.

Ill health is linked to poverty. When people are ill they cannot work, and when their children are ill they beg, borrow and steal to obtain drugs for them. As my hon. Friend says, there is masses more that we can do, but we are also supporting international efforts to develop new drugs for malaria. When the drugs are not available, resistance develops. If the drugs could be used more consistently, they would be more effective.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The right hon. Lady will be aware of the argument presented by the pharmaceutical companies that if they cannot hold on to patents, they will have insufficient funding to develop new drugs. What is her answer to them?

Clare Short: My answer to that is that the hon. Gentleman was not listening earlier. It is a complex area. I do understand. It is the Government's strong view that we need a framework of intellectual property law across the world to achieve collaboration whereby cheaper drugs are available at lower prices in poor countries, pharmaceutical companies enjoy higher returns in other countries and there are international agreements on differential pricing. We need flexibility in the agreements that takes account of the needs of poor countries, but we need patents and intellectual property protection to get the research and the drugs that the poor in the world need.

Africa

3. **Margaret Moran** (Luton, South): What action her Department is taking to support poverty reduction and development in Africa. [6113]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Since 1997, we have doubled our spending in Africa and focused our efforts on poverty reduction. On present rates of progress, none of the international development targets will be met in Africa, but significant progress is being made in some countries, which shows that we could do better. To speed up economic growth and poverty reduction across the continent requires a much bigger effort in resolving conflict, dealing with HIV-AIDS and improving the effectiveness of economic management and public services. There needs to be a crackdown on corruption and more investment. That is what the new Africa initiative and the partnership around that is meant to drive.

Margaret Moran: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. As she will be aware, Malawi is one of the poorest nations in Africa. Is she aware that on a visit some years ago, parliamentarians were advised that the lack of education among women, and the lack of sex education in particular, were among the causes of poverty there? Fifty-four per cent. of its population live below the poverty line and 48 per cent. of its children are malnourished. What assistance is this country giving to Malawi to deal with those causes of poverty?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. Malawi is desperately poor. Something approaching 64 per cent. of the population are chronically malnourished. It has few natural resources and is densely populated.

We have a growing programme in Malawi. My hon. Friend the Under–Secretary is to visit Malawi in the next month or so to take our programme forward. We have focused on primary education. All the evidence is clear: if a generation of girls get through school, they bring about profound development effects in their country as they grow up. They have fewer children and those children are more likely to survive, household income rises, the children go to school and receive better health care. We are working on that and on reproductive health care and reducing maternal mortality. I agree with all the points that my hon. Friend makes.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does the Secretary of State agree that we do not need new pledges and agreements? We just need the international community to deliver on existing commitments. The international community promised at Copenhagen in 1995 that there would be universal primary education and a substantial reduction in

child mortality by 2015. At present, it is not going to meet any of those targets. What can be done to galvanise it into meeting them?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We do not need more and more conferences and meetings across the world. We need to implement what we have already agreed. I am happy to say that the hon. Gentleman is wrong to think that we are not on course to meet any of the targets: we are on course to meet the target of halving the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015, which means 1 billion people making the journey out of extreme poverty between 1990 and 2015. However, there will be more to do because the world population will grow.

Some of the other targets have been met in Asia but will not be met in Africa on present trends. We need to up our ambition. We have more focus and agreement on the targets. However, we need to co-ordinate our efforts so that we do not have piecemeal projects but improve governance, the effectiveness of economic management and the provision of health care and education. I agree with the hon. Gentleman and hope to work more with him on those issues. We are making more progress, but we will have to do an awful lot more if we are to have a just world and we will not have a safe world unless it is more just.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to study the UNICEF report entitled, "The State of the World's Children 2002", which shows that malnourishment among children in sub-Saharan Africa has increased in the past decade; that only 47 per cent. of children are immunised against diphtheria; and that one in 13 women are likely to die during childbirth? Is not her focus on poverty in that region absolutely right, if only because it offers the opportunity for others in the international community to follow her lead?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for those comments. Most people find it unbearable to think of large numbers of children dying before the age of one or five—before they have had the chance to develop their lives. However, in a world that has more than enough food for everyone, it is somehow even more unbearable to think of vast numbers of children being so chronically malnourished that their bodies and brains do not develop properly and their whole lives are blighted by hunger.

We have made progress in African countries such as Rwanda, Uganda and Mozambique, and in post-conflict countries such as Tanzania and Ghana, but we have got to do better. Africa will not meet any of the international development targets without a bigger effort. Immunisation rates are improving, but we can do more if the world has the will to co-operate.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the answers that she has given so far. Can she assure the House that in targeting aid and encouraging investment, she will focus on countries such as Tanzania, which is already making progress in terms of good governance, democracy and the rule of law, rather than albeit understandably focusing only on countries with critical problems? To do so will encourage other countries to follow that lead.

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's fundamental point. Governments who are determined to drive reform by building up systems of government can prove much more effective. All the research suggests that aid proves more effective in countries where there are reformers, but also in countries where there are large numbers of poor people. We are increasingly backing reformers, and rightly so because that produces results, and we need models of success. However, some of the poorest and most oppressed people in the world live under bad Governments, and we must look for more subtle ways to intervene, bring immediate help and drive demand for better governance. That is the more difficult task, but we must not neglect it.

Sudan

4. **Mr. Malcolm Savidge** (Aberdeen, North): What action her Department is taking in co-operation with other Government Departments to promote an end to war in Sudan. [6114]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Excluding a gap of perhaps 10 years, the war in Sudan has been fought almost continuously since its independence in 1956. It has caused the loss of 2 million to 3 million lives, the displacement of millions of people and deepening suffering and poverty across Sudan, particularly in the south. The people of Sudan desperately need a peace agreement that brings justice and development to all parts of Sudan. The recent lifting of UN sanctions provides an opportunity for progress. The Government are working to energise a greater international effort to achieve that peace agreement.

Mr. Savidge: I agree with the Secretary of State that the lifting of UN sanctions offers a real window of opportunity. Does she agree that both sides must show a real readiness for compromise if we are to achieve a settlement, which is essential if we are to offer the genuine hope of poverty reduction and development for all the people of Sudan?

Clare Short: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. In certain countries such as Sudan, some of those who lead the fighting live comfortably while the people rot and suffer. There have been calls for Sharia law across the territory, which is unacceptable given that half the people are not Muslims. It must be possible to respect each other's religion—to respect an Islamic north and a Christian and animist south. There must be progress, and it is in the interests of everyone, in both parts of Sudan, that we achieve peace. Now is the time for increased international effort, and I have some hope that we can make progress. Sudan is a heavily indebted poor country. If it could achieve peace, it could get debt relief, and we could get the development programme going and ensure that the oil revenues are used for the benefit of the people.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): What representations have the Government made to the Government of Sudan on the recent increase in the bombing

of Bahr el Ghazal, which was the famine area in 1997? What effect does she think the bombing will have on the delivery of aid to that region?

Clare Short: We make constant representations to the Government of Sudan and there has been some progress. Obviously, we want the bombing to be reduced and, indeed, ended in Sudan, as in many other parts of the world, especially Afghanistan. The Government of Sudan have co-operated in the current response to the worldwide terrorist attacks. The US Government recently appointed a special representative to try to drive forward progress. There is a real chance of progress in Sudan, and we must all work hard to ensure that that takes place.

Maternal Deaths

5. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): What steps are being taken to reduce maternal deaths in less developed countries. [6115]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): More than 500,000 women die each year during childbirth in developing countries, where maternal mortality rates are up to 100 times higher than in western Europe.

We have invested more than £1 billion since 1997 in helping to provide better health care overall, including for pregnant women. That makes a real difference in reducing deaths. We have significant maternal health programmes in Malawi, Nepal, Kenya, Pakistan and Bolivia. We also support the World Health Organisation's "Make Pregnancy Safer" initiative.

Ms Drown: Is my hon Friend aware that 30,000 of those maternal deaths, and the deaths of 200,000 babies every year, occur because of tetanus acquired at birth? Often it is the infected blade that cuts through the umbilical cord that condemns the mother or baby to death, even though an inexpensive vaccine is available that would prevent that. Will my hon. Friend work with the United Nations Children's Fund—UNICEF—to explore ways of ending these wholly unnecessary deaths?

Hilary Benn: I know that my hon. Friend takes a particular interest in this subject, and we welcome the work that UNICEF is doing on immunisation in general and neo-natal tetanus in particular. One contribution is improving the overall level of health care so that knowledge is spread, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently approved a £35 million contribution to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation initiative, which is working closely with UNICEF to immunise more people against tetanus and other diseases.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): High levels of maternal death account for lowered life expectancy among women, which in Afghanistan is as low as 38.7 years. That is due in no small part to the lack of medical care, but also to the repression of women under the Taliban. What work has the Department done to help women in Afghanistan, and what steps is it taking to press for their better treatment?

Hilary Benn: I welcome the hon. Lady to her first International Development questions and wish her every success in the post.

In recent years, the United Kingdom has contributed some £32 million in support to the people of Afghanistan to address the problem that she raised and others. As she will be only too well aware, the situation in Afghanistan is extremely difficult. The Secretary of State will make a statement shortly. We must make progress so that we can restore good governance to Afghanistan, because only when we reach that point will we be in a position to try to deal with the issues that the hon. Lady raised.

Mrs. Spelman: The Minister mentioned good governance. The vision of the new Government of Afghanistan that the Foreign Secretary presented yesterday made no mention of women. What representations have the Department made to ensure that the new Government of Afghanistan better represents women?

Hilary Benn: The representation of women in the new Afghanistan will be crucial. One of the biggest problems that that country faces in its future development is the fact that half the next generation have not been educated for the past five or six years. The single most useful intervention that could be made in the future of Afghanistan is to ensure that the next generation of girls gets into school, because, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, that can lead to all sorts of benefits in respect of development and, ultimately, the participation of women in society more broadly.

Nigeria

6. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): If she will make a statement on her Department's work in Nigeria. [6116]

Hilary Benn: Nigeria has suffered a long period of economic, social and political disruption under a series of military Governments, and poverty is widespread. So far, reform has been disappointing, but we are committed to long-term support so that the country can fulfil its considerable potential. DFID is working at federal level to support economic reform, the reduction of poverty and strengthening of the justice system, and at local level, with four states, to show how reform can deliver practical benefits to the poor. We also continue to support the fight against HIV-AIDS.

Linda Gilroy: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He will know that I and a number of members of the UK branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association visited Nigeria this summer. We came away with a strong and clear understanding of Nigeria's pivotal importance to Africa's future welfare. Will my hon. Friend reassure the House that he will keep a close eye on the Department's programme in Nigeria, especially in light of the regrettable incidents of recent days and weeks?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Nigeria has one fifth of the continent's population. About 70 per cent. of the country's population live on less than a

dollar a day, so progress in Nigeria will be crucial to Africa's chances of meeting the millennium development goals.

My hon. Friend will know from her recent visit that Nigeria has great natural resources. It has enormous potential if it can put the past behind it and seize the opportunity that now presents itself. The House will also be aware that a dozen leaders of African states met in Abuja formally to launch the new African initiative, which we greatly welcome.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I read in a newspaper this morning that there is talk of a Marshall aid plan for Africa. Is that a possibility, or is it just pie in the sky?

Hilary Benn: The initiative that the leaders of Africa have taken in establishing the new African initiative is a very welcome development. It is a recognition, from within the continent, that Africa needs to take control of the process involved in dealing with the issues of good governance and the other matters that hon. Members raised in earlier questions. The international community's responsibility is to make sure that, by helping to improve health care and education, we play our part in supporting those Governments as they reform and tackle the questions of governance. That will lead to the sort of regeneration in Africa that I think the whole House wants.

Zimbabwe

7. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What actions she proposes to promote good governance in Zimbabwe. [6117]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We have worked hard but completely without success to try to prevent the continuing deterioration in economic and political governance in Zimbabwe. The economic situation is very grim, with a 5 per cent. fall in gross domestic product last year and growing poverty and hunger across that agriculturally rich country.

At a meeting of Commonwealth Ministers convened by Nigeria in Abuja on 6 September, the Zimbabwean Government undertook to restore the rule of law and to act against violence and intimidation. Unfortunately, there has been no progress since 8 September. Commonwealth Ministers are due to visit Harare this week to discuss that lack of progress.

Mr. Winterton: I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for the honesty of that response. As she said, the Commonwealth Ministers action group is visiting Harare this week. Those of us who have taken a great interest in the wonderful country of Zimbabwe over a number of decades recognise the role that it has played historically as the larder of central southern Africa. Will she say what message the Government are sending through that action group to bring pressure to get the people of Zimbabwe to reject President Mugabe and elect a Government who can give them democracy and progress, and enable Zimbabwe to play a major role in Africa?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The situation in Zimbabwe is a complete tragedy. Zimbabwe is a naturally wealthy country with a highly educated population. It should be an engine of economic growth and progress for Africa, but instead it is deteriorating and damaging the economic development of all neighbouring countries. There are other tragedies: we are preparing for food aid—imagine that, in a country so agriculturally rich—and one in three adults are infected with HIV, the worst rate in the world.

Presidential elections are due. It is very important that everyone in the world mobilises to try to ensure that the people of Zimbabwe are given a chance to have a free and fair election, and to change their Government if that, is their wish.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the right hon. Lady not recognise that one of the problems with President Mugabe's regime is that he presents to the media the removal of white farmers from land that they own legitimately as a campaign to help the landless, when in fact the victims of his policies are the farm workers, while the so-called war veterans have been generously provided for by him and his associates ever since he came to power? What will the Government do to redress the misrepresentation of what is happening in agricultural areas such as Nyama and Mutare in the eyes of the world's media?

Clare Short: There is no doubt that there is a strong case for land redistribution in Zimbabwe. That was the view of the previous Government, and it is the view of this Government. It needs to be done in a transparent, law-abiding way that focuses on the needs of poor people rather than political cronyism and the destruction of Zimbabwe's agricultural productive capacity. The current push for forcible land seizures looks to be more political; it followed on from Zimbabwe's Government losing a referendum and fearing that they were losing political support.

The hon. Gentleman is right that in the early stages, other African Governments had some sympathy with regard to land redistribution and were not as critical as they might have been. That is not the situation any longer. Neighbouring countries are seeing the economic effects on themselves and on large numbers of black farm workers who are losing their jobs and living in poverty. The whole world understands how bad things are, and we are all working together to ensure that things are put right as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Missile Defence

Q1. [6141] **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): If it is his policy to support ballistic missile defence in principle.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): The position is unchanged. We believe that it is important to tackle the potential threat from ballistic missiles with a comprehensive strategy that includes arms control and counter-proliferation, diplomacy, deterrence and defensive measures. We will continue to work closely with the United

States in all these areas. We understand the role that missile defence can play as one element of that comprehensive strategy, but as yet we have had no specific proposal from the United States.

Dr. Lewis: The Prime Minister will appreciate that that question was tabled long before the events of 11 September. In the light of his admirable decision to stand shoulder to shoulder with our American allies over those terrible events, will he now, once and for all, state whether he is prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder with them over ballistic missile defence, particularly in view of the fact that more than 200 of his parliamentary colleagues are clearly massively opposed to ballistic missile defence?

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with those who are opposed to it. During the summit with President Bush in February, we made it clear that we were prepared to look at defensive as well as offensive systems. We have not as yet, however, had a specific proposal from the United States. I think that it is better to declare our position finally when we do have such a proposal. I take this opportunity of welcoming greatly the dialogue between Russia and the United States, which I think offers a way forward for the future.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): There is no foundation, is there, to press reports that the Prime Minister has already given undertakings of support to President Bush and that that will be made public once certain difficulties with the Labour party are overcome?

The Prime Minister: We might have to wait quite a long time in that case. The private position is exactly the same as the public position.

Engagements

Q2. [6142] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 24 October.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

Michael Fabricant: The whole House will be aware of the crippling effects of rheumatoid arthritis. Some three quarters of a million people suffer from the disease. May I draw to the attention of the Prime Minister the plight of my constituent, Councillor Tony Lanchester, who happens to be the former Labour leader of Lichfield district council, and who suffers from the disease? He goes to Cannock hospital but cannot be prescribed drugs for the disease because the health authority will not pay for it. In the next bed, patients from Sutton Coldfield have their drugs paid for by their health authority. That state of affairs is repeated in every constituency in the country. What steps can the Prime Minister take to stop this postcode prescribing?

The Prime Minister: I greatly sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's constituent. Rheumatoid arthritis is a very debilitating condition. Under the present system, there is postcode prescribing and health authorities may make different decisions for patients in different parts of the country. That is precisely why we want to change that system, which we inherited. We have introduced a new system in which there is independent assessment of drugs and their effect on people. Then, because of the increased funding, we are able to ensure that those drugs are available. I hope, therefore, that the problems of the hon. Gentleman's constituents and others will be dealt with in time.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Will the Prime Minister consider an area where the level of infant mortality is as high as that in Afghanistan—the Great Lakes region and, specifically, the Congo? In the past three years, 2.5 million people have died from conflict-related deaths there. Will my right hon. Friend consider the recommendations of the all-party group and look into brokering a package to help people in the Great Lakes region?

The Prime Minister: The all-party group has done us a service in providing that report. As my hon. Friend says, literally millions of people have died in the past decade as a result of conflict and famine in the Great Lakes region. For that reason, we strongly support the Lusaka accord and hope that it can be implemented. We are working with others in the region to try to ensure that the people there have some chance of stability for the future. As we deal with the appalling situation that we are having to deal with in Afghanistan, it is right that we remember that other parts of the world have also been scarred by conflict. If we put the international focus on them, I am sure that we can do some good there too.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): As someone who found himself on patrol in Northern Ireland 25 years ago, I welcome any moves toward peace, particularly ones as significant as those made by the IRA yesterday. They were part of a peace process that was begun by John Major and taken forward by the Prime Minister. It is vital, however, that that event is not a one-off gesture, as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will understand, but a process that leads to all IRA weapons being put beyond use, as specified by the Belfast agreement. Will the Prime Minister tell us when he expects decommissioning to be completed? Will that be before the de Chastelain commission remit runs out this February?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome of the move that was made yesterday. It is a big step forward and it deserves a generous response. In effect, the position in Northern Ireland is that every political party of any substance or with any support in any part of the community recognises that the only way to resolve differences in future is by peaceful and democratic means. Yesterday was a day when people finally understood that the gun and the bomb have no place whatever in the future of Northern Ireland. I certainly pay tribute to the efforts of my predecessor in the peace process and to those of successive Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, not least my right hon. Friend the present incumbent, who has done an immense amount in the past few months to move the process

forward. On decommissioning, as the de Chastelain commission said yesterday, that is in its hands as part of its mandate and that is the right way to resolve it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Taking note of what the Prime Minister says about all the parties, does he agree that it is now the responsibility of the so-called loyalist groups to come forward and ante up to this action too? Can the Prime Minister tell us whether he has had any indications that so-called loyalist paramilitaries are willing to make any reciprocal response and does he agree that loyalist political leaders, who have done a lot of talking recently, now have a major responsibility for ensuring that their arms are also put beyond use?

The Prime Minister: Certainly, that is right. The loyalist leaders and paramilitaries have an obligation to do everything they can to put weapons beyond use too, and to bring under control situations such as the one that exists in north Belfast, which rightly shocked people throughout the United Kingdom. I very much hope that loyalists will respond properly to this move. Most of us believe that some of those who engage in paramilitary action who call themselves loyalists actually have no loyalty to the proper principles of the United Kingdom at all.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland spoke today and yesterday about security normalisation, but he also said that the process of demilitarisation should begin. Obviously, where there is a clear reduction in the level of terrorist, threat changes to security can of course be made, but the threat from dissident groups such as the Real IRA remains high. As one of them chillingly said on the radio this morning:

"The Real IRA will take up the mantle of being the IRA now, and continue the challenge to Britain's occupation."

Given that even after the complete decommissioning process there will still be a large number of illegal arms in Northern Ireland, will the Prime Minister assure the House that changes to security will be made only on the basis of a clear assessment of the terrorist threat, and that nothing will be done that weakens our continuing ability to deal with terrorism both in the Province and in the rest of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: Of course we will and should act on advice. We have an absolute duty to make sure that we protect the people in Northern Ireland. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that we shall do what is necessary for that. As a result of yesterday's move—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will disclose the details later—there are changes that we can make, but they are fully consistent with the advice that we have. Of course we all want to see a situation in Northern Ireland as soon as possible where policing and security are carried out on a normal basis. That is what the people of Northern Ireland wish to have.

Of course there is a risk from splinter republican groups—the so-called Real IRA—and loyalist groups. It is obviously important that we take account of that, but it is also important that we do not let any of those groups have any form of veto over the process of moving forward to a more peaceful era for Northern Ireland. So, yes, we will act on advice—we have to protect our people properly—but we believe that yesterday's announcement changes the situation significantly.

Q3. [6143] **Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): As we struggle to define global politics after the events of 11 September, does my right hon. Friend think that, as part of that discussion, we need to consider relocating those world organisations—largely born in the 1940s—such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, from America to places in the rest of the world?

The Prime Minister: World-based organisations are indeed located in different parts of the world—some in Geneva, some in London, some in the United States of America and some in other parts of the world. Decisions as to the location of future organisations will be made at a future date.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): That sounds like a pretty wise answer.

Given that because of the sheer pressure of numbers of refugees amassing at present on the borders of Pakistan, Pakistan has felt obliged to close its borders to Afghanistan, what steps are the Government taking to reopen the issue of debt relief to Pakistan for the financial, physical and internal political pressures on that country? Indeed, that applies not only to Pakistan itself but to the wider Asian sub-continent. Does the Prime Minister agree that tackling debt relief now could be of real practical benefit?

The Prime Minister: We are doing what we can on that front. We recognise the importance of debt reduction for Pakistan. My right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development have both worked hard to do that. We are taking a series of measures in terms of the aid we are giving Pakistan—indeed we have increased that recently. Of course much of the debt is not actually ours, so there is a limit to what we can do, but we are working with the international community to do it. The fact that Pakistan passed the first phase of its IMF programme and did so in a way that should commend itself to the IMF is a big step forward in itself and will of course lead to significant measures from the international community to help Pakistan.

Mr. Kennedy: Does the Prime Minister concur that the allied coalition members who are not expected or required to make a military contribution should, none the less be strongly encouraged to make a financial contribution? Will he take every possible opportunity to stress that course of action to them?

The Prime Minister: We are doing that. Indeed, to be fair, many countries are now helping Pakistan substantially. Pakistan is also dealing with the problem of about 2 million refugees from Afghanistan. One of the reasons why we have asked for additional sums of aid to be made available is precisely to deal with the refugee problem. Some $700 million has been agreed for the humanitarian effort as a whole and, if more is necessary,

I am sure it will be agreed. The finance is there, but we need to make sure that the refugees are being properly looked after and that the organisation is in place to do that.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): During the Gulf war, there was much talk about building a new world order and, after the Gulf war, we heard very little more about it. Will the Prime Minister therefore take it from me how deeply and widely welcomed is his personal commitment to the need for social and economic justice across the world? Will he tell me what actions he intends to pursue internationally to achieve that new dispensation after the present necessary military actions are over?

The Prime Minister: I hope that we have learned from the mistakes that were made by the west in Afghanistan some 10 or 12 years ago. The truth is that we left the country with very little hope of reconstruction. As a result of that, the Taliban regime eventually came to power, and the consequences of that we now know. That is why it is important that we work with the United Nations to make sure that there is a broad-based successor regime to the Taliban and then commit ourselves to the reconstruction of the country, the elimination of its drugs trade and the production of stability in the political process. As I think we now recognise, that would not merely be right for the people of Afghanistan but would be in our self-interest.

Q4. [6145] **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): The Prime Minister told his party conference earlier this month that the humanitarian campaign would be pursued with every bit as much thought and planning as the military campaign. Although I appreciate that there will be a statement later this afternoon on the international humanitarian crisis, will he give the House his personal assurance that the military campaign being pursued is compatible with the humanitarian campaign? Will he spell out in detail how it is working in practice?

The Prime Minister: I do not know whether the hon. Lady saw the comments from the World Food Programme, saying, indeed, that it was not the bombing that was stopping food getting through into Afghanistan. Food is getting in, and I think that, in the past week or so, something like 5,000 tonnes of food have gone in. That is not sufficient—I think the requirement is 1,700 tonnes a day. We are doing everything we can, but the principal problem that is faced as convoys go into Afghanistan is the activities of the Taliban regime.

I hope that the hon. Lady will accept my commitment to do all that we can to make sure that the humanitarian process is taken forward and will join me in calling on the Taliban regime to facilitate aid going into Afghanistan and not to engage in the harrying tactics, the theft of aid, the theft of vehicles and the refusal to co-operate with UN aid workers that are, at present, the hallmark of that regime.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Prime Minister not recognise that the continued bombing campaign, including the use of cluster bombs, in Afghanistan is forcing large numbers of people to seek refuge in Pakistan; is bringing devastation and poverty to the people of Afghanistan; and seems to be directed, in part, against conscripted soldiers and against civilian targets? Does he accept last week's call by the aid agencies for a halt in the bombing to allow the humanitarian aid to get in? That would prevent more death and destruction.

The Prime Minister: I just answered a question about the humanitarian programme and I drew attention to comments of spokespersons for the World Food Programme who said that it is not the bombing that is preventing the food getting through.

In respect of the campaign itself, there are no civilian targets at all. Unlike bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network who set out to kill as many civilians as they possibly could, we do everything we can to minimise civilian casualties. As I said earlier today, there is a simple choice. After an atrocity such as that of 11 September, we decide either that we are going to act against those responsible and against those sheltering those who are responsible or that we do not. In the light of that atrocity and the fact that we know that that network of terror intends to commit further such atrocities, I cannot see how we could possibly stand back and do nothing.

I respect entirely my hon. Friend's right to disagree with the course that we are taking, but I believe that course to be right.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Prime Minister recognise that the European convention on human rights as incorporated into United Kingdom law is proving an obstacle to protecting the lives of British citizens?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not accept that. However, we have made it clear that our plans include a derogation from article 5 if that is necessary.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Apart from that slight contradiction, is not the problem more fundamental than the Prime Minister implies in his solution? The Home Secretary said yesterday that he shares the instincts of the British people, who cannot understand why terrorists are able to hide in this country when they would not be able to do so in, for example, France. Sadly, the Home Secretary's proposals so far will not allow those who threaten our national security to be deported any quicker. Is it not true that simply locking such people up indefinitely cannot be a substitute for deporting them from our country? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: The answer to hon. Members who shout out is that the Home Secretary mentioned the derogation from article 5 in his statement a week ago. Obviously, they did not pay much attention to it.

I find the right hon. Gentleman's points curious. In response to the Home Secretary's statement, the shadow Home Secretary asked for detailed scrutiny of legislation, but basically supported the proposals. The right hon. Gentleman knows that I have offered him an opportunity to consult us and to produce different proposals. However, it would be a mistake to scrap the European convention on human rights as incorporated into British law. I do not know whether that is his position. If it is, we are willing to listen to him. I believe that it is possible to make the necessary changes and protect our citizens without getting

rid of the European convention on human rights, which gives our citizens a legitimate course of action in certain circumstances against the Government.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is not going from one extreme to the other. The Prime Minister has taken a valuable lead, for which I applaud him, in building the coalition with, for example, the Arab states. Is he aware, as I am, of their dismay as they see convicted terrorists using our legal system to avoid their natural judicial process? When we are asking our allies to make huge efforts as part of the war against terrorism, is it not time to ensure that terrorists cannot shelter behind our laws? In that same spirit, we stand ready to work with the Prime Minister to tackle the problems that are being caused by the European convention on human rights. Surely—this is the point—when the law is wrong the law must be changed.

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman's general point. It is important that our laws do not give succour or help to people who engage in terrorist activities. That is why the Home Secretary made his statement and why we want to change the law on, for example, extradition, because that process takes far too long. All that is agreed. Indeed, last year we tightened the law in the Terrorism Act 2000 to allow us for the first time to take certain actions against groups that operate out of this country. I also entirely agree—I have made this point often—that we cannot ask for the support of other international leaders in the fight against terrorism if we allow groups who harbour terrorists to operate out of Britain. All that is agreed. However, if the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we get rid of the incorporation into British law of the European convention on human rights, then I disagree, because that would be a mistake.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that we are engaged in the coalition because of the principles contained in the European convention on human rights? We are defending human dignity and people's freedom under the law, including their right to a fair trial and to be protected from arbitrary justice. The moment we start derogating from or denying those principles, we give the victory to the terrorist.

The Prime Minister: It is also worth pointing out that the European convention on human rights—which is not a product of the European Union, incidentally—is something on the basis of which people are able to litigate, whereas previously they were only able to do so by going to the European Court of Human Rights. What we have done allows people to litigate here in this country, and I regard that as a sensible thing to have done.

There is specific provision in certain circumstances for a derogation from some of the articles of the convention, and I think that that is a right step to take, but to get rid of the convention altogether is wrong. Across the range of government, there are circumstances in which it is right that the citizen should have a general ability to take Government to court and claim that certain actions of Government transgress basic civil liberties. That is a step forward for our constitution, not a step backward.

Q5. [6146] **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): Does the Prime Minister remember saying on 30 April 1997, in the days when he used to be the master of spin, that the nation had 24 hours in which to save the national health service? Why, 39,255 hours later, is he saying that he needs more time in which to save the NHS?

The Prime Minister: The answer is simple. The policies of the previous Conservative Government had resulted in underfunding of the NHS, a cut in the number of training places for nurses, a cut in hospital beds and an end to the hospital building programme. All those things have now been changed, with the result, as the hon. Gentleman will know from his constituency, that we are now putting more money than ever before into the health service and the education service. The difference between my political party and his is that whereas mine believes that that money should go into the health service, his believes in taking it back out again.

Q6. [6147] **Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): In the longer term battle against terrorism, peace in the middle east must move rapidly up the agenda. A peace that offers justice and security to both Palestinians and Israelis must be restored to the world's agenda. Does my right hon. Friend agree that only outside intervention can break the current deadlock in the middle east? Will he give a commitment to lead, with the same energy as he has rightly led in Afghanistan, the charge for a diplomatic solution to bring pressure to bear on Israel and the Palestine Authority to return to the negotiating table and secure the peace that will help the people of the middle east?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to say that some outside help might be needed to get the peace process in the middle east restarted, but nothing can happen unless the key parties themselves want to take that process forward. I urge them strongly to do so. For all the difficulties, all the bloodshed, the daily funerals, the reprisals and the retaliation, people know that at some point Israelis and Palestinians will have to come back to the negotiating table and work out how to live side by side in peace. Whatever difficulties we have met during the peace process in Northern Ireland, at least it offers some sign that if people persevere, whatever the problems they face, it is better than leaving a vacuum into which extremism inevitably moves.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Recognising that an important step was taken yesterday in Northern Ireland—although it is not the end of the road by any means—I should like to tell the Prime Minister that in response to that and in the interests of good government, and entirely without prejudice to the decision to be taken by my party on Saturday, earlier this afternoon I again nominated the Ulster Unionist Ministers in the Executive.

However, I ask the right hon. Gentleman to reflect again on the important point that was put to him by the Leader of the Opposition in respect of decommissioning and the fact that the remit of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning expires in February 2002. Although we would love to leave matters to the commission, primary responsibility rests with the Government. If when we reach February 2002 some, any or all paramilitary organisations

have not achieved complete disarmament, what sanctions will the Government apply to them, so as to avoid others having to apply sanctions?

The Prime Minister: The point raised by the right hon. Gentleman is legitimate. It is important that we make sure that the members international commission can carry out their mandate in full. What I was saying earlier to the Leader of the Opposition, is that it is important that they are the ones now seized of that issue and that they carry it out in accordance with that mandate. I am sure that if any difficulties arise in relation to that, they can be sorted out.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Given that international unity is crucial to our present campaign, will my right hon. Friend encourage our American allies to show caution and flexibility over divisive policies, particularly in assessing the priority that they still seem to be giving to breaching the international treaty obligation which the United States, the United Kingdom and nearly all nations entered into last year to maintain and strengthen the anti-ballistic missile treaty?

The Prime Minister: Of course, it is important that we strengthen measures against nuclear proliferation. All that I would say to my hon. Friend is that President Bush is right to say that weapons of mass destruction and their proliferation bring about a change in the context in which we discuss these issues. As I said when I was with President Bush in Camp David in February, it is important that we look at defensive and offensive systems to try and take the issue forward. I think that my hon. Friend will find in the discussions, most recently with President Putin following the summit in China, that the United States and Russia are reaching towards a new and better understanding of how they progress on those issues.

I have always taken the view that it is best to make progress through dialogue and consultation. However, it is true that we have a new situation today in international relations and the international threat that we face. I believe that President Bush is right, to raise the issue of what are the best offensive and defensive systems for countering that threat. I believe that with good will we shall reach agreement.

Afghanistan (Humanitarian Situation)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I should like to keep the House informed about the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and my recent visit to Pakistan. As the House knows, the humanitarian situation remains fragile. Humanitarian agencies, particularly the World Food Programme, are performing impressively under very difficult circumstances. Deliveries of food and other essential relief supplies, which were halted after 11 September, have resumed, and the quantities crossing into Afghanistan are increasing. Deliveries inside Afghanistan are continuing but are very difficult. So far the refugee outflow has been smaller than expected; contingency plans are in place in case the exodus increases.

The situation is very worrying, but the House will be aware that a severe crisis existed long before the events of 11 September and is the result of 20 years of conflict, the policies of the Taliban, and the drought of the last three years. All those events have devastated the livelihoods of millions of people. Emergency humanitarian supplies have been provided inside Afghanistan and to refugees in Pakistan and Iran for many years. Immediately after 11 September all international staff were withdrawn from Afghanistan because of fears for their safety, which led to a cessation of all supplies into Afghanistan. I and others have been working since then to get supplies moving again.

Because of the harassment of humanitarian workers and Taliban restrictions on the use of telephones, it is difficult for aid agencies to communicate with colleagues inside Afghanistan. Precise information on deliveries is therefore sparse. The Taliban have looted the offices and stocks of some aid agencies. Afghan hauliers are also fearful of harassment and attack, but despite those difficulties programmes inside Afghanistan continue, thanks to the brave efforts of local staff of the United Nations, the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations who have continued to work in the face of extreme hardship and serious personal danger.

Our capacity to influence the humanitarian situation is limited. Access to many areas of the country is not possible, but the international community remains determined to do all in its power to continue to provide desperately needed assistance. We are looking at all options; for example, the World Food Programme is looking at air drops and the possibility of opening new land routes from neighbouring countries, such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Since deliveries recommenced on 11 October, the World Food Programme has continued to make progress; regional stockpiles are adequate and deliveries are entering the country in increasing amounts. The World Food Programme is moving towards achieving its target of delivering 1,700 tonnes of food a day. Over 5,000 tonnes were delivered in the past week, and when I was in Peshawar a few days ago rates had reached 1,300 tonnes a day. We need to do better, but we are making progress. We are also doing all that we can to maintain the onward distribution of those supplies from the major warehouses inside Afghanistan. Given the difficulties, the World Food Programme is now looking at delivering food direct to more destinations in the country.

We are also working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to identify and prepare sites for refugee camps in Pakistan. We continue to urge all neighbouring countries to adopt an open border policy and to allow those seeking refuge safe passage. Agencies are also attempting to provide assistance to those who remain on the Afghan side of the border.

As the House is aware, our aims are to bring to justice those responsible for the events of 11 September, to dismantle the al-Qaeda network and to maintain humanitarian supplies to the people of Afghanistan. It is essential that we pursue all three aims at the same time. The humanitarian effort remains difficult for all the reasons that I have outlined. It is not the case that a pause in the bombing would solve these problems. Indeed, a pause would simply encourage the Taliban to harass humanitarian supplies more than at present to prevent further military action. We all understand why that call is being made, but it would be a grave error and we must not do that.

All our objectives could be achieved much more rapidly if a new Government could be put in place in Afghanistan. Key to this process will be the central role of Ambassador Brahimi, Kofi Annan's newly appointed special representative for Afghanistan. We warmly welcome his appointment. Ambassador Brahimi is well respected and has considerable experience of the region. His is a difficult task and we stand ready to support him and his office in any way that we can and which he requests.

There is also a need for the current coalition military campaign to be fully informed about the humanitarian effort and situation. Co-ordination mechanisms have been put in place, although closer co-ordination is still required. My Department continues to liaise closely with the United Nations and our United States and United Kingdom military colleagues at both headquarters and field level to ensure that there is a shared understanding of each others' objectives and to create safe areas as rapidly as possible.

We also continue to urge other donors to turn pledges to the UN appeal quickly into actual payments. As against $600 million requested, more than $700 million has been pledged, but only $70 million has so far been received. Although immediate needs are covered, unless pledges are released soon, on-going operations will be hampered. We are working on that.

We cannot resolve the humanitarian and political crisis in Afghanistan without attention to the regional context. Afghanistan's neighbours, particularly Pakistan and Iran, have generously provided for millions of Afghan refugees for many years. Pakistan's role is of central importance. President Musharraf's Government have given strong support to the international effort in Afghanistan. We should not underestimate the burden that that places on a country that is already playing host to 2 million refugees while undergoing painful economic reform to overcome the legacy of previous misgovernment.

Last week, I had fruitful discussions with President Musharraf, Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz and other Ministers in Islamabad. The Government there remain strongly committed to the efforts of the coalition, and to economic reform and poverty reduction in Pakistan. They are also firmly committed to parliamentary elections by October 2002. There is a real prospect that that Government can achieve a much better future for Pakistan than it has experienced in recent years, but the country's economy has taken a knock as a consequence of the

[Clare Short]

events of 11 September. Pakistan needs short-term help, debt relief and continuing support to maintain the long-term reform effort.

I reaffirmed to the Government our commitment to a new International Monetary Fund/World Bank programme of budgetary support and to writing off remaining Government debt. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is looking urgently with his ministerial colleagues at how we might best collectively agree a debt alleviation package for Pakistan that underpins its reform programme.

Afghanistan is a country that has suffered terribly for many years and faces a very severe humanitarian crises. The reason why bin Laden has his headquarters in Afghanistan is linked to the cause of the crises. Afghanistan is a failed state because of 20 years of warfare and the excesses of the Taliban regime. We must retain our resolve to bring those responsible for the events of 11 September to justice, to dismantle the al-Qaeda network and to maintain our humanitarian assistance.

Through the efforts of Ambassador Brahimi, we must also support the establishment of a representative Government in Afghanistan who will work with the international community to resolve the immediate crisis and start the long haul of reconstructing Afghanistan and offering its people a better future. Our Government remain determined to do all that we can towards that end.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I thank the right hon. Lady for coming to the House and addressing us on this very important issue. I received a copy of her statement while the House has been sitting. As we have just had International Development questions, I shall study it in more detail later.

We were surprised to learn that the Secretary of State withdrew from an audience with the Select Committee on International Development yesterday. I understand that the date had been in her diary for a long time. Although it was originally suggested that there would be a general discussion of DFID's programme, it seemed reasonable for the Committee to request that the discussion focus on Afghanistan, especially as it decided on 16 October to conduct an inquiry into the crisis. The right hon. Lady was informed of the proposal well in advance of the final decision on 16 October. To respond by trying to limit questions on Afghanistan and ultimately to withdraw from the audience sets an unacceptable precedent for a Minister unilaterally to state the terms of such an interview. The whole House is worse off for the missed opportunity.

A Select Committee can pursue a line of questioning on its specialist subject, whereas when a statement is made, hon. Members do not get the chance to ask supplementary questions. I understand that the Secretary of State returned on Friday from Pakistan, whence we have had a number of statements in the media during the week. Again, statements were made through the media at the weekend. Is there any good reason why the right hon. Lady's statement could not have been made at the first opportunity, on Monday? If it had been followed by a Select Committee appearance, Parliament would have been given a far better basis for informed debate.

The fact that today's Order Paper contained no questions on Afghanistan for International Development questions—today's were tabled in July—made the need for the statement all the more urgent. We have had four debates on the crisis, but only one has been responded to in terms of international development. That has limited our opportunity to question the Government's policy on the humanitarian aspects of the crisis. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should let the hon. Lady put her case, and the Secretary of State will then answer. That is the best way.

Mrs. Spelman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the last occasion we debated the crisis, a number of questions were asked about its humanitarian aspects to which the Minister who was present could not reply. I set out those questions in a letter to the right hon. Lady on 17 October. I hope that she will now answer some of them.

The right hon. Lady will know that I have called for an appeal launched by President Bush asking every American child to donate a dollar to an Afghan child to be matched in this country. The appeal is to be administered by the American Red Cross. The British Red Cross is willing to administer such an appeal and has visited officials in the right hon. Lady's Department. I hope that she will use this opportunity to support that valuable initiative.

There has been little unanimity about how much aid is required for the region. The key question is the amount of aid that is required and whether it can be delivered to where it is absolutely needed. The World Food Programme says that we need to get 50,000 tonnes of food into Afghanistan every month. However, a month from now, two regions of Afghanistan will be cut off by snow. Those two areas need 70,000 tonnes of food to be stockpiled within the next month. The right hon. Lady said that the regional stockpiles were adequate. I have quickly done my sums, however, and I find that those levels cannot be achieved at the rate of 1,300 tonnes a day. Christian Aid, which delivers the programme to some of the worst affected regions in central and north-eastern Afghanistan, estimates that 120,000 tonnes of food must get into those regions within the next four weeks. The sums simply do not add up. Even at the target rate of 1,700 tonnes, the amounts cannot be achieved. Does the right hon. Lady's acknowledge that that is not enough for the worst affected areas? Unless the World Food Programme and Christian Aid have got their figures wrong, the basic fact is that we are not getting sufficient food into those parts of the country.

It is also necessary to question whether the food is reaching the people of Afghanistan. Despite claims from the World Food Programme that food is getting in, Oxfam and Christian Aid, which deliver the food and administer the process, have repeatedly said that they are running out of food. Who is right?

A Christian Aid worker who has recently returned from Afghanistan has told me that a convoy left Quetta in Pakistan with 600 metric tonnes of food on board, but that by the time it reached Kabul there were only 200 metric tonnes left. In other words, two thirds of the entire convoy had been removed en route. It is no wonder that the aid agencies claim that not enough aid is getting through. Does the right hon. Lady acknowledge that a significant proportion of food aid—the statistical amount given—never reaches its destination?

We heard reports that 7,000 tonnes of food had been seized from a UN warehouse last week, and that Médecins sans Frontières had reported that the Taliban had seized

medical supplies from its compound. I would be grateful if the Secretary of State informed the House, on the basis of her recently refreshed knowledge of the situation on the ground, of just how obstructive the Taliban are being towards the delivery of aid. What does the right hon. Lady mean by "harassment"?

Another question relating to delivery is whether the food is getting to the more remote regions of Afghanistan. A colossal number of people are on the move within the country. Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a real need to get food to people in their villages, so that they can remain where they have shelter and be in place to plant next year's crop?

What is the Secretary of State's latest assessment of the number of people on the move? Does she accept the assessment of many aid agencies that many people are likely to die a lonely death in the mountains, not necessarily from starvation, but from illnesses generated by malnutrition? The chief problem facing the refugees is the collapse of the food distribution network. Will the Secretary of State inform the House of what progress has been made in restoring aid networks right into the interior of Afghanistan? I would like to say at this point that we share her view that a pause in the bombing would not help in that respect.

Yesterday, the Select Committee interviewed representatives of the aid agencies, and concern was expressed about the lack of co-ordination on the ground. The Secretary of State has said that closer co-ordination is still required. Can Mr. Brahimi be urged to make that happen? Relations with the local Afghan NGOs have been vital to the aid distribution network—indeed, Christian Aid's programme has been successful because of its local partnerships. The right hon. Lady was right to describe those local NGOs as brave. They are brave indeed: they put their lives at risk to deliver food where it is really needed.

I should like to raise the question of refugee camps, particularly as the Secretary of State has just returned from Pakistan. Is she satisfied that standards in the refugee camps are adequate? We have urged that the camps should meet the Sphere project's minimum standards for refugees. Was it her experience, when visiting the camps, that those standards were being met; and if not, what steps has she asked to be taken to ensure that they will be?

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports great difficulties in the refugee camps. Many are not sited in ideal locations. In some, boreholes have had to be drilled through 400 m of granite to obtain water. What pressure can the Secretary of State bring to bear to ensure that refugee camps are better sited, so that practical targets such as the provision of water can be more easily achieved?

A particular problem is that the border with Pakistan is intermittently open. Obviously the Secretary of State's visit to Pakistan failed to persuade the Government there to keep the border open, to put an end to the mixed signals being sent to people living in Afghanistan. Aid workers in yesterday's Select Committee meeting said that a potential disaster was looming on the border. I would be grateful if the Secretary of State commented on that.

Given that the right hon. Lady has just returned from Pakistan, where a generous aid package was agreed, will she give an undertaking that the Chancellor will come to the House to give details of that debt alleviation package, and that such an announcement will be made here in Parliament?

It was reported in yesterday's newspapers that the Taliban are going to run one of the refugee camps in Afghanistan. Will the Secretary of State confirm that that is true? She referred to agencies running the camps in Afghanistan, and I would like to know whether the Taliban are, in fact, running them.

Will the Secretary of State also give an assurance that women and children will be treated fairly in the refugee camps? The present policy of allowing village elders to make decisions does not give them adequate protection. War always takes its toll on women and children, but they represent the future of a war-torn country.

The Government share an enormous responsibility to get right the humanitarian aspect of the crisis; otherwise ordinary Afghan people will never believe us when we say that our war is not a war with them.

Clare Short: I regret that the hon. Lady has misled herself about the Select Committee. What happened is that it changed what it wanted to discuss at the meeting at short notice. It has been trying to visit Pakistan to go to the camps. The security advice is that its members could not be protected—we had a lot of trouble and during my visit I had endless phone calls about that. The Select Committee should do its job, but our first accountability is to Parliament, then the Select Committee probes. To try to get there instantly in a way that strains all our systems is not helpful or wise.

We had a meeting with the new Select Committee fixed, including a memorandum on all the Department's future commitments, but there was a last-minute switch. It was impossible for me to get a memorandum prepared for the Select Committee without taking my staff off the work of improving the humanitarian performance in Afghanistan, and I decided that to do that would be wrong. The Select Committee should review the way in which it is demanding the attention of my Department in a way that would deflect us from the objective, which is to get better provision on the ground.

I have seen the hon. Lady's letter. I do not know whether the House remembers, but in Kosovo I had difficulties, because the staff who do the work also have to serve the House of Commons. I have asked my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to try to ensure that this time we do better. Obviously the public want replies, but it is difficult to manage the Department's resources. The staff are the best in the world, but they are enormously overworked.

The hon. Lady has a number of misunderstandings. She does not seem to understand the nature of the crisis, the lack of information, how dangerous it all is, how nobody knows in detail what is going on inside Afghanistan or the nature of the Taliban regime. The regional stockpiles are outside Afghanistan. We also need stockpiles inside. If the hon. Lady reads the statement, she might understand that a little better.

The hon. Lady quotes frequently some of what the NGOs here have said, but she should remember that they are using that material partially to call for a pause in the bombing. She might like to prevent the misuse of details

[Clare Short]

of what is going on for that cause, which she says she does not support. How destructive are the Taliban? Enormously, in every single conceivable way. I thought everybody knew that.

On the danger of a collapse of the network inside Afghanistan, the nightmare would be the same situation as existed after the Russians withdrew, when all the factions fought each other and there was chaos across the country. Should such a situation come about, we would have great difficulty bringing in humanitarian support, so everything needs to be done to avoid that. No one can absolutely guarantee success, but we can all unite in being determined to try to prevent such a situation from arising. That is our determination.

I do not agree that there is a lack of co-ordination on the ground. The UN agencies are co-ordinating well, but the situation is enormously difficult. The camps have been there for 20 years, including the time when the hon. Lady's party was in power. On what happened in Pakistan with the refugees, after the campaign against the Russian presence in Afghanistan ended, the international community turned its back. Since our Government took power, we have provided support for the camps in Iran and Pakistan, but one reason why their Governments will not open the borders is that they took millions and millions last time, and then the international community abandoned them. I am trying to establish a guarantee to them that they will have support this time in order to get the borders open. We all need to work together on that.

It would not be right to ask the Chancellor to come to Parliament to announce a package on debt, as Britain is one of Pakistan's smallest creditors. The largest are Japan, the United States of America, France, Germany and South Korea. The Government of Pakistan are making proposals for a highly concessionary debt rescheduling over perhaps 40 years, which would get their debt down. The United States is trying to be responsive. Of course, full details will be provided to the House. The United Kingdom will try to help, but it is not a leading creditor.

I am not aware of the Taliban running camps, but we do not have information about everything that is going on inside Afghanistan. There is no doubt that women and children are suffering desperately. There is no doubt that the best way in which to deal with backwardness and extremism is to respect and empower women and educate girls. That is what we are trying to do in Pakistan and we will try to do it in Afghanistan as soon as we can.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): There has been a great deal of talk about getting food into the areas that need it, but I am puzzled by the lack of any reference to water. One of Afghanistan's problems is that there has been a drought in the area for three years. I am told that in the border areas in Pakistan, particularly around the camp of Chaman where there has been trouble, it is necessary to drill 400 m through granite to obtain water, and that only the Pakistan agriculture service has strong enough drilling equipment. Given that in many places there could suddenly be thousands upon thousands of people, will the Secretary of State assure me that she is confident that services are in the area to ensure that water is available?

Clare Short: As my hon. Friend says, the drought that has affected Afghanistan has also affected neighbouring areas of Pakistan. Its worst effect has been on agricultural production—hence the lack of food—rather than directly on drinking water, but when we speak of food, that includes emergency supplies such as medicines and, often, water. In the strained communities in Pakistan and Iran that are hosting refugees, water is under strain, health care is under strain and education is under strain. We need to help the hosting communities as well as the refugees, so that they are willing to give more help themselves.

I can assure my hon. Friend that we will do all in our power to improve conditions in the camps, and to secure a better welcome for refugees as they come out. Up to now, the refugee movement has been much less than the United Nations expected: it predicted another 1.5 million. Our information is that people are moving within Afghanistan back to their villages, rather than out to the borders. Perhaps those with more transport have already gone. We must take the help to where the people are, and we must do it as well as we can. We cannot control everything, but the international community and the Government are determined to do all in their power to ensure that humanitarian relief continues to get through to the people of Afghanistan.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I welcome the statement, and thank the Secretary of State for releasing it a bit early so that I could see it. It helped to alleviate the boredom of Prime Minister's Question Time, I must say.

Does the Secretary of State agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy), the leader of my party, that it is essential to open up the borders of Pakistan and Iran? Does she further agree that not only must the multilateral debt of those countries be addressed—they must be helped with that debt—but they must be guaranteed the costs of looking after the refugees? I understand that the numbers are mounting, and that there are now some 3.5 million in Pakistan alone. Does the Secretary of State also agree that the stability of Pakistan will be crucial during the next few months?

The right hon. Lady highlighted the difficulties of food distribution, which I have to accept, but I was delighted when she said that the World Food Programme was considering air drops of food into Afghanistan. Can we expect the World Food Programme to start—I quote myself here—bombing Afghanistan with food and aid in the very near future?

The right hon. Lady mentioned the warnings that we have been receiving from aid agencies of impending famine in Afghanistan during the last six months—a long period—and we now know that there is a 50 per cent. shortfall. If we are to get enough food in before the winter snows, we must double our efforts, whatever the difficulties. Will the right hon. Lady reflect on the fact that aid agencies were criticised for not giving warning in time before the famine in southern Sudan in 1997? The Select Committee of which I was then a member conducted an investigation of the problem. Does the right hon. Lady think that her recent comments about the aid agencies went beyond the plain-speaking decency for which she is renowned?

Clare Short: I agree that it is highly desirable to open the borders. I have already explained how scarred Iran and Pakistan are by the lack of help from the international

community for the millions of refugees whom they are already hosting. We are working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which has stockpiles in the region and emergency camps to deal with a big exodus of people. It is difficult because both Iran and Pakistan are saying, "Put the camps the other side of the border." We cannot do that safely. We have to keep working at it.

As the hon. Lady says, we must undertake to Iran, Pakistan and other countries that we will provide for the refugees and that we will be there for the duration. The trouble is that the international community let them down badly before. Debt relief for Pakistan is crucial, as I have already said. The stability of Pakistan is also crucial. If that were to become a problem, we would be in great difficulties, but the Musharraf Government are not worried. Some of the pictures that we see on television exaggerate the extent of demonstrations, as television tends to do.

Air drops are an expensive and difficult way of delivering food, as the hon. Lady knows from the experience of Sudan, so we must get as much in as we can. Not all the country is inaccessible when the snow comes; only some of it is. For the remote areas or the areas that become inaccessible, the World Food Programme is thinking about the possibility of air drops.

When people talk about the aid agencies, there is a muddle. The monitoring of the risk of famine and the distribution of massive quantities of food are all done on our behalf by dedicated United Nations agencies, with people from all over the world devoting their lives to serving their fellow human beings. Our NGOs and other international NGOs often help with distribution on the ground and do an honourable job.

I pick no fight with the aid agencies. The problem was that they issued their statement when I was in Pakistan, so wherever I went I was asked whether the humanitarian situation meant that we needed a pause in the bombing. It is not true that the bombing is the cause of our problem It is not true that, if we paused, we would help the people of Afghanistan. Indeed, I think that all humanitarian relief would then be harassed even more than it is now. It is a mistaken call. We all know why in their hearts good people hate bombing, but they are wrong to have made that call. I think that it is my duty to try to explain that as clearly as I can.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Secretary of State just said that the media are exaggerating the extent of internal unrest in Pakistan in relation to the bombing, but just today we read in the newspapers of some firing from within Pakistan on US helicopters attempting to use a base in Pakistan. Recent polls have shown that 70 per cent. of Pakistani people are opposed to the bombing. Are we not taking a gamble that the military stage of the advance will be over sooner rather than later? If that gamble proves to be mistaken, not only will we see the instability in Pakistan across the region, but thousands of people will starve to death in the snows of Afghanistan.

Clare Short: All good people should regret war and bombing—I think that the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) made that point in our debate on 8 October—but we must use force where it is necessary to destroy a greater evil. What happened in the United States of America could be repeated in all countries across the world, and the forces that are destroying the lives of the people of Afghanistan are harbouring that evil. Therefore, we have to keep our nerve and pursue all our objectives.

Of course, we should minimise the bombing and move from the military phase to a political phase as soon as we can. We should all unite on that and not wobble. If we paused, there would be more mayhem and division in the world and more trouble for the people of Afghanistan. We must be clear-minded and carry through what we have to do.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I have seen for myself, in a private visit, the absolute nightmare that has been caused by the Administration of Afghanistan, the horrendous numbers of refugees and the apparent disunity among the refugees. Is the Government's long-term intention to encourage the refugees to return to Afghanistan when things have improved? If it is not possible for them to return, will the Government and all the western powers agree to give continuing aid to Pakistan to cope with a genuine nightmare situation?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. A serious reform effort is under way in Pakistan. It has not only had local elections throughout the country but even elected some women, which is unprecedented in the country's history. It has also just completed its first IMF programme; it has had plenty of IMF programmes, but never before has it completed one. We have to help Pakistan with debt relief so that it can put more money into improving the lives of its people and growing its economy. On top of all that, it has more than 2 million refugees straining all its systems.

The international community has not sufficiently supported Pakistan. I therefore agree with all the points made by the hon. Gentleman. Part of the purpose of my visit to Pakistan was to pledge the United Kingdom's continuing support. We are providing more support to Pakistan during the emergency, but our support will continue for its reform effort. This is a fantastically important opportunity for the people of Pakistan to have a better future and we must not allow the crisis to divert them.

We must guarantee support for the refugees. Educated Afghans have left their country and can be found everywhere in the world, even in Ladywood. We are also working on a rehabilitation programme that is sharing ideas throughout the international community, so that we can begin the process of rehabilitation in Afghanistan as soon as possible. We want to enable all Afghans to go home, but we want particularly to encourage educated Afghans to go home, to help to reconstruct their country.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement and for demonstrating yet again to the House and the country her quite remarkable grasp of the detail of an immensely complex situation, in marked contrast to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). Should ground forces be in Afghanistan when the proposed air drops of food are made, will those forces participate in that project? Delivery of the supplies will have to be accurately targeted, and it will be necessary to have friendly forces on the ground so that pilots know when they have reached

[Glenda Jackson]

the right areas. Additionally, as Afghan smugglers seem to have had inordinate success in getting people across borders, could they not be used to get food into Afghanistan?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is not being suggested that ground forces be used in the provision of humanitarian aid. One important international principle is that the UN and humanitarians should not become mixed up with the military, although the two groups should co-operate, share information and not get in one another's way. We hope that the military will be able increasingly to provide safe areas, so that humanitarian workers are able to return and the humanitarian effort can be expanded. Those are our goals.

The US air drops have been more a matter of winning hearts and minds than of the provision of the massive amounts of food that are necessary. My hon. Friend asks whether Afghans themselves can take food into Afghanistan. The World Food Programme has started using Afghan truckers to take food into Afghanistan because they not only have their own trucks but know their country the best.

New contracts are being signed with more Afghan truckers so that they can cover more parts of Afghanistan. When one group of truckers returns from Afghanistan, another group goes there after receiving news on events in the country, such as whether they are being harassed and whether the warehouses are holding up. That is our best source of information on whether the distribution system is working. Afghans are keeping the system going, very bravely and in the face of terrible harassment.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does the Secretary of State understand that the Select Committee is unanimous in wanting to have a positive working relationship with her Department? After all, it is difficult enough to get international development on the political agenda at all without those of us who are concerned about the issue having a spat.

I think that if the Secretary of State goes back to her private office she will find that she has been inadvertently misled. I wrote to her on behalf of the Select Committee saying that we did not expect a further memorandum, as we fully understood that her officials would be busy working. All we wanted was the Secretary of State, having returned from Pakistan, to come before the Select Committee to tell us what she had seen first-hand. I made that clear. I think that the whole House will have been disappointed and think it a pity that, although we heard the Secretary of State on the "Today" programme talking to the country as a whole, she did not feel able to explain all those matters directly to the Select Committee.

Yesterday, the Select Committee took evidence from some of the non-governmental organisations, and it was quite clear that, for understandable policy reasons, they do not want humanitarian agencies to be caught up in the coalition military effort. Therefore, it seems that the concept of humanitarian corridors will not work. What is clearly needed is someone to help broker the humanitarian issue.

Does the Secretary of State think that there is a role for Mr. Brahimi in that respect—not only in pursuing diplomatic issues but in helping the humanitarian effort by helping broker relations with the Taliban to allow food aid into Afghanistan? Unless there is work on the other side of the border, food aid, as well as refugees, will accumulate at the borders and little will get distributed.

Clare Short: I very much hope that I will have the same quality of relationship with the hon. Gentleman that I had with his predecessor as Chairman of the Select Committee. I enormously admire the contribution that his predecessor made to advancing thinking and agreement across the House on the significance of international development.

I have not been misled. It took me four or five minutes from my bedroom in the British residence in Islamabad to get to the "Today" programme. I do not agree that it is good practice to appear before a Select Committee without a memorandum, because all the figures—on supplies and so on—are crucial. My immediate accountability is to the House, and while I was in Pakistan I tried to get the House authorities to agree to a statement. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I tried to have an informal meeting with the Select Committee. I am going to Africa tonight. We cannot ignore Africa, because that would make it feel neglected. My Department, which is fairly small, is working flat out. We will account to the Select Committee in every way that we can. This is an enormously serious emergency, and we must use our resources as best we can.

I welcome the meeting with the Select Committee, but the last-minute switch to the suggestion that we should meet without a memorandum was wrong. My immediate accountability is to the House, and that can be probed by the Select Committee. I promise full co-operation. I made the decision because I thought that it was the right way to deploy the resources of my Department, and I still think so.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): As most people would agree, my right hon. Friend has been proactive in handling her portfolio. Does she agree that the Prime Minister was positive and far-sighted this afternoon, when he criticised the past failures of the west to take opportunities to address the reconstruction of Afghanistan? Would she take as a model northern Iraq, where many hon. Members have witnessed the complete transformation, in a matter of years, of the absolute despair of the Kurds?

Does she agree that the United Nations agencies, NGOs and others made their contribution to that dream being realised, and that it is not impossible to repeat that in Afghanistan? Will she work with them and with the new ambassador, whom she welcomed this afternoon, to ensure that we play our part in seeking to repeat in Afghanistan what has been achieved in northern Iraq?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I agree that the neglect of Afghanistan has allowed it to become a failed state with the problem of housing al-Qaeda. The whole world should learn from the lessons of Afghanistan and other countries.

The model should be smaller countries such as East Timor and Kosovo, which, before their reconstruction, had had no state institutions. That reconstruction was led by the UN. The job in Afghanistan will be much bigger, because it is a poorer and bigger country, but I am sure that it can be done. As I said earlier, plans are in place.

Great things have been achieved in northern Iraq, but that is part of a country under a no-fly zone, so it is a complex example on which to build. We must commit, in detail and in the long term, to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and that is the commitment that the international community has made. Ambassador Brahimi will lead; we and others are determined to follow. The World Bank is preparing to do so. We must get the whole international system ready to move, and we will.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the right hon. Lady recognise that there is widespread support for her view that military action is compatible with the delivery of humanitarian supplies? Does she further recognise that there is considerable support for the view that a temporary cessation of military action—bombing or otherwise—would be a grave error?

Clare Short: I do agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman. As I have said, a pause would lead only to more harassment of humanitarian staff. It would be a disaster, and an invitation to those who wanted to resist the coalition to resist the humanitarian supplies. However, many of our fellow citizens and people across the world are upset at the thought of hungry people being in a country where bombing is taking place, and I respect their compassion and concern. It is our duty to bring the conflict to an end as well as possible, to secure our objectives and to minimise civilian casualties. We must also get the political track moving as rapidly as possible and establish zones of peace in which the humanitarian effort can be improved. I agree that it is an error to call for a pause, but I respect the reasons that prompt people to make that call. We must respond as best we can.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): My right hon. Friend will be aware that *The Times* carried a report this morning stating that land mines were being dropped in Afghanistan. I also understand that it is accepted now that delayed-action cluster bombs have already been dropped there. Given that such ordnance now kills more than 300 children a year in Kosovo, will my right hon. Friend say what effect these armaments will have on the way in which a humanitarian programme can be carried out?

Clare Short: I am not aware of the report to which my hon. and learned Friend refers. I have not read a newspaper for a considerable period of time, as that is not a priority in situations such as this. I am certain that land mines are not being dropped, but Afghanistan is littered with land mines—because there have been 20 years of war, and because land mines are such cheap weapons. On top of all the other suffering of the people of Afghanistan, there is therefore massive disability in that poor benighted country resulting from wounds and injuries caused by land mines.

As I said to my hon. and learned Friend at another meeting earlier, I think that I have read reports—non-newspaper reports, if I can put it like that—of some use of cluster bombs. I do not think that they have been used much, and I promise to look into the matter and get back to my hon. and learned Friend. I shall report that response to the House. There is a land mine problem in Afghanistan, but they are not being dropped. They are there already, I regret to say.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the Secretary of State tell the House how dropping cluster bombs and Gator land mines will assist humanitarian efforts in any way? That can never be right.

I have a high regard for the right hon. Lady, but will she tell the House whether it will be possible at some time to publish a report about what is happening with the humanitarian effort, and what is being undertaken? Many hon. Members would like to know the direction of the effort. That is not intended as a critical question, as I know that the Secretary of State is working hard on the matter. However, it is awful that humanitarian aid is being provided at the same time as there is indiscriminate use of land mines.

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman was not listening. Land mines are not being used, but the country of Afghanistan is littered with land mines because of 20 years of civil war. In a civil war, land mines are cheap weapons and people use them endlessly. Afghanistan has an enormous land-mine problem from the past. No one is using land mines now—unless the Taliban are, which is possible. What I mean is that no one that belongs to the coalition is using land mines.

I cannot speak with authority about cluster bombs. I think that I read a report that stated that some use had been made of them, but I think that that use has been limited. I promise to find out and report properly. I do absolutely undertake to begin publishing regular reports on the humanitarian situation as soon as possible. We need that information in the House, and across the world. People want to know that we really mean it when it comes to aid, and that help is being got to people.

I was talking to Mark Malloch-Brown, the head of the United Nations Development Programme, who has co-ordinating responsibility in the UN in this matter. We get different figures from different parts of the system, because supply stops and starts or goes up or down. Averages based on figures for a month, a week or a day result in different figures, with the result that people start not to believe what we say. We need to tidy up the process and make it honest and clear. We need regular reports, and I promise to do my best to bring that about.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I assure my right hon. Friend that there is a tremendous fund of good will, nationally and internationally, behind her efforts to tackle the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. She should not be expected to tackle single-handed a crisis that has been in the making for months and years, and ignored by the international community and the media.

I have a specific question for my right hon. Friend. May I urge her, quietly and gently, to get away from the language and strategy of random air drops, from a great height, of inappropriate aid? Even in these tremendously difficult circumstances, would not it be better to adopt a clearer strategy of targeted air lifts that are received on the ground and distributed according to need? Air lifts are what are needed, not air drops.

Clare Short: There is no doubt that this crisis was there already. I have said before that professionals in my

[Clare Short]

Department who have worked in crises like these across the world thought before 11 September that Afghanistan might be heading towards a famine. It has received very little international attention and there has been very little willingness to pledge resources. We have been increasing our pledges, but United Kingdom citizens have been unable to work safely in Afghanistan for a long time, so it has also been difficult us to make efforts beyond the refugees. Not many people seem to appreciate that there was a crisis in the region before, and that shows how fickle attention is to such matters.

Air drops are always the least best option because they are so expensive. Some 90 per cent. of the costs of emergency relief to Sudan go on air drop costs rather than on what is provided for the people, so trucking is extremely important for laying down stocks, filling up warehouses and building more of them. Even if some food is diverted, we have to keep pumping it into the country because then at least the price will come down and there will not be a famine. We cannot afford to be fussy and not get the food into the country. The United States stuff is about hearts and minds—they are sending meals, with peanut butter, crackers and jam. That is fair enough, but it is not humanitarian relief.

The welfare programme is looking at very remote and difficult areas. If we can get some areas of the country in peaceful enclaves under a new Afghan Government, we can really start to supply humanitarian relief. We hope that we will be able to do that as soon as possible.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Secretary of State has played a commendable part in the international aid effort in getting in aid from Pakistan, whose border is particularly difficult. She mentioned Uzbekistan; we know that the Americans have established a forward base in the north-west of the country, where presumably they have secure corridors into that base. Would it be possible to co-ordinate with the military authorities, using those secure corridors, and consider using the front-line states on the north-east and north-west to get aid to the dreadful situation in Afghanistan, as well as concentrating on Pakistan?

Clare Short: As I have said before, the military and humanitarian sides need to know what the other is doing and not get in each other's way. Indeed, the military can assist by creating safe areas, but it must not muddle the situation. Humanitarian aid must go to anyone, whatever the side, wherever they are; it must never be used as a weapon in military action.

As I said in my statement, the welfare programme is looking at Tajikistan and Uzbekistan with regard to trucking. It is not as simple as using the corridor. We have to get supplies into the country; UN staff have to go in to the country, and they have to be housed and organised. However, we are looking at the possibility. There should be co-operation with the military side, but it should not control humanitarian supplies. If the military can create safe zones, that is the beginning of the end of the problem. That is the job for the military.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I should like to return to the central issue of the closed border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In my right hon. Friend's discussions with General Musharraf, did he give her any indication that he would be prepared to open the border if the coalition or the wider international community were prepared to underwrite the costs?

Clare Short: That is a very important question, and my hon. Friend is right to come back to it. The formal position of the Government of Pakistan and, I understand, of Iran, is that the border is closed and there are millions of refugees. Our country complains, yet we are much better off and we have nothing like the same numbers of refugees. People are saying, "Why don't you provide camps just on the other side of the border?", but that offends humanitarian principles. In practice, 100 camps are being prepared in Pakistan in case of an exodus because of great hunger or the consequence of fighting. So although they are saying no, they are preparing camps, and that is a hopeful sign.

Quite large numbers of people are going across the mountains to Pakistan. While I was there, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees negotiated with Pakistan's Government that people going to live in families and in communities can be provided with food aid so that they can cope. However, there is a hold-up on the border going into Baluchistan. People are coming from the Kandahar area, which is the Taliban stronghold. There has been a lot of fighting so, unsurprisingly, there are large movements of people. We must get them over and settled. We must do more. I am trying my best and I will try harder.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State is right to say that we should not be mixing military and humanitarian activities. Does she agree, however, that British and American forces have traditionally been first to help those suffering from starvation? May I press her on the open frontier? Surely it is not simply a question of Pakistan being frightened of a large influx of people from Afghanistan with which it cannot cope. As we have experienced with our open frontiers, is there not also the possibility that they could allow undesirables to flock in and add to the upheaval in Pakistan rather than helping to solve the Afghanistan situation?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is right. Pakistan is worried about numbers. It has had 2 million refugees for the best part of 20 years, which is putting a strain on communities, but it is worried about armed groups causing destabilisation. We all know the example of Rwanda, where those responsible for the genocide led the exodus and controlled the camps. They were provided with humanitarian relief by the international system, so the leaders of the genocide were strengthened by the humanitarian effort. Such examples do not help us and that is a part of the concern in Pakistan. None the less, we cannot have people backing up at the border. We have to guarantee to help provide all the resources and then ask for the opening of the borders, as hon. Members have said, but we also have to check that there are not military incursions and attempts to destabilise Pakistan.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that, given that Ramadan begins in three weeks and that the winter will come around the same time in Afghanistan and will be very harsh, calls for us to stop the air action are misguided and could play into the hands of the Taliban regime and Osama bin Laden and his

network, who would use the three weeks available to regroup, reorganise and hide, making it impossible for us to liberate Afghanistan from the misogynist terrorists of the Taliban and allow the United Front, the Northern Alliance to make gains and a new government to be established in large parts of the country?

Clare Short: I agree with my hon. Friend but, as I told the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), many of our fellow citizens are calling for a pause in the bombing not for those reasons but because they want relief to be brought in. We do not have clear reports of what is going on in Afghanistan. Many people imagine far more bombing than is taking place in that vast country. I agree, but we have to get more information to people. We have to get our citizens to think about my hon. Friend's point. I am sure that we can win the argument. It is important that everyone in the House takes a part in reassuring our population that we are doing what we can and that we are bringing in the humanitarian relief so that we keep our people united behind the action and well informed.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): While I too was sorry not to see the Secretary of State in the Select Committee on International Development yesterday, I welcome her obvious determination to help the humanitarian situation in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the surrounding region. The right hon. Lady mentioned the refugee camps in the Congo outside Rwanda, in particular those around Goma. The Select Committee visited a camp outside Islamabad in 1999, which was run essentially as a part of Afghanistan. The women were segregated, there was no education for them and it was difficult to get health care to women or children. Indeed, we hear that extremist madrasas are run in some of the camps and that they may prove to be a breeding ground for extremist terrorists. Will the Secretary of State speak with UNHCR, or whoever is running the camps, to ensure that they are open, that there is no possibility of breeding further terrorism and that all people there—be they male or female—get a decent opportunity to live?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman makes some important points. I met the UNHCR when I was in Islamabad. It is trying to upgrade the camps. There has been a period of neglect and decline. In the North-West Frontier province, where there has been much movement in both directions, fundamentalism and extremism have spread because of the situation in Afghanistan, the drought and the poverty. I met with Ministers there who were engaging in a programme of development. As the Education Minister of that province said, the way to combat extremism and backwardness is by educating girls. We are going to partner that province, which is right on the border and has a tribal area, to progress that sort of development. That is what we need in the new Afghanistan—real education. Again, as one of the Ministers in the new Pakistan Government said, we have lost 20 years. There should have been 20 years of education in Afghanistan, but instead there has been a move backwards. We must never let that happen again.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): Will my right hon. Friend convey to her officials our thanks for the hard work that they are putting in to ensure that food aid gets through to the refugees? Does she agree that a bombing pause—however desirable some people think it would be—would not only allow the Taliban to regroup, perhaps prolonging the war and creating more refugees, as she has pointed out; it would also, by prolonging the war, create a situation in which it would be more difficult for the aid agencies to get into Afghanistan and tackle the long-term problems that so desperately need to be resolved there?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his thanks to my officials. My Department has superb officials. The relevant unit goes to world crisis after world crisis, dropping everything when something happens and working all the hours that God sends. They are great people and I am sure that the whole House will congratulate them on their work. They are admired throughout the world as they are some of the best at this work. Britain is one of the fastest countries to move resources around the world. I am very proud of my officials and we should all be grateful to them.

I agree with my hon. Friend's point about the likely effect of a pause and the likely prolongation of the war. We must try to achieve our objectives so that military action is as short as possible. We must keep the humanitarian action going and get the political track moving. Highly informed people hold the view that many of the armed factions in Afghanistan would switch sides if there was the prospect of a better Government, then we could start bringing the thing to a rapid end. That is the most desirable thing for the people of Afghanistan and the world. That is what we must work at.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): What is the moral authority for the coalition members' demand that Pakistan and Iran should open their frontiers when they themselves maintain draconian controls on those fleeing conflict, including that in Afghanistan? In particular, will the Secretary of State condemn the hypocrisy of the Australian authorities, and will she ensure that any Afghan refugees reaching this country are welcomed and helped?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. We lecture Pakistan which, as I said earlier, is massively poorer than our country and has many, many more refugees in proportion to its population, but is being asked to host perhaps a further 1.5 million. The communities—in the North-West Frontier province and so on—who are being asked to host those refugees are extremely poor and are affected by the drought.

There are Afghan refugees in the UK and, obviously, their case for being genuine refugees is overwhelmingly strong. The tragedy is that so many of them—like some in Ladywood—are educated Afghans. In situations such as this, when education in a country is limited, it is difficult for educated people to remain there; they tend to flee and are scattered throughout the world. We must welcome and care for them, but we have to help them to go back and rebuild their country because Afghanistan will need them.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Following the questions about land mines and cluster bombs put by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) and the hon. Member for

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), did we not hear the Secretary of State herself say that every ordnance and target had to be run before the Law Officers? Given the circumstances of her answer, which I quite understand, would it not be right that the House—perhaps tomorrow—should be given a statement from the Solicitor-General, representing the Law Officers, clearing up exactly what is happening in relation to land mines and their generic relation, cluster bombs? Should there not be a statement from the Solicitor-General to the House tomorrow morning?

Clare Short: I think I should share my problem with the House. In response to a question from my hon. Friend, the Prime Minister said that all the targets were looked at by our Law Officers. I repeated that on the famous "Today" programme interview that was referred to earlier and received a letter saying that I was not supposed to say that the Law Officers scrutinise the targets. I do not know why.

Statements are a matter for the Speaker. Of course, the House must remember that the UK is only a small part of the military operation. Because of the coverage in our media, people imagine that we are a massive part of that operation. Obviously, our Government and Law Officers are responsible for what our Government do but not for the actions of the US Government and others who will join the coalition. I leave the House with my dilemma—perhaps I shall get another letter.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I commend the Secretary of State for her visit to a zone of extreme instability and real crisis and for the realism of her report to the House? However, may I press her even more strongly on the need to ensure the stability of Pakistan, which she herself has emphasised? If there were a further wholesale migration of people into Pakistan, Pakistan's provincial, racial and ideological stability could be called into question. As the Musharraf Government have done well in exceptionally difficult circumstances, is it not time that Pakistan was readmitted to full membership of the Commonwealth and all its councils?

Clare Short: I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman's point. As yet, Pakistan is in good shape but it needs continuing support as it has taken an enormous economic hit on its exports. The cost of shipping, air freight and insurance have all gone up, so it needs short-term help to keep its reform effort going, as well as help with any refugees.

The Musharraf Government provided a route map to the last meeting of the Commonwealth committee that monitors progress and they firmly promised parliamentary elections by, I think, October next year as their own court required. They are absolutely committed to that.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that Pakistan needs to be protected and helped with the refugees that it is hosting, and a short, rather than a long, military campaign would help it too. We must do our best so that we obtain an outcome that is best for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Northern Ireland

4.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): Mr. Speaker, with permission, I will make a statement about developments in Northern Ireland. It is the statement I have often been told I would never be able to make to the House.

Yesterday, the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported that it had witnessed an event—which it regarded as significant—in which the IRA had put a quantity of arms beyond use. The materiel in question had included arms, ammunitions and explosives. The commission was satisfied that the arms in question had been dealt with in accordance with the scheme and regulations. In other words, the IRA's act constituted an act of decommissioning under the commission's statutory remit.

The word "historic" tends to be over-used about the Northern Ireland political process. There have been so many twists and turns, so many moments of optimism and so many setbacks along the way. But yesterday's move by the IRA is, in my view, unprecedented and genuinely historic. I believe that it takes the peace process on to a new political level.

That has been recognised in Northern Ireland itself. Rarely has the whole community been so united. As the *Belfast Newsletter* said this morning,

"for most people, Ulster this morning seems a more hopeful place in which space created by the IRA's unprecedented move will be seized by those with political vision and courage".

From another perspective, the *Irish Times* said that

"a rubicon has been crossed . . . a historic milestone has been passed. It is an affirmation by the republican movement—in tangible terms—that it cannot operate in both the paramilitary and political worlds".

Let us recall why we got here. We got here through a widespread recognition—after 30 years of death and pain and misery—of the futility of violence. That was the spur and its memory should remain the spur to all of us.

Let us remember also just how far we have come in the past four years. There have been major constitutional changes, including the establishment of the principle of consent and the ending of Ireland's territorial claim to Northern Ireland. The new institutional architecture, which has been shown to work, can and must be revived by yesterday's historic move. The Human Rights and Equality Commissions have been set up and are already hard at work. After much debate, an unprecedented new beginning to policing, with cross-community support, has been made. None of those has reached full fruition, but we were told that all of them were impossible to accomplish. Yesterday, another seemingly impossible vision became a reality.

This is the culmination of efforts by many people over many years, including my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach in the Irish Government, John Major, successive United States Administrations, the republican leadership, which has shown itself to have the vision and confidence to bring an armed movement to the point of ceasefire, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and the party that he leads, and the smaller pro-agreement parties.

I also pay tribute—I hope it is not embarrassing—to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and his colleagues. Were it not for his persistence, willingness

to take risks and sheer courage under attack, it is no exaggeration to say that yesterday's events are unlikely to have happened. It is a vivid illustration of the power of engagement and the powerlessness of detachment. It is those who have taken risks for peace who have achieved this progress, not those who have doubted from the sidelines. Of course, the whole House will want to join me in thanking General John de Chastelain and his colleagues. They have shown endless patience and dignity. The best thanks that we can give them is to let them get on with the task that they have been asked to discharge.

Yesterday's events opened up opportunities, which we need to seize, and also challenges, which we need to face in three areas. First, the political institutions that are the democratic core of the Belfast agreement—the Assembly, the Executive, the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council—should now be restored to full operation as quickly as possible, and should operate in a stable and uninterrupted way. The decision of the leader of the Ulster Unionist party earlier today to put Ministers back into government is a helpful step in creating a new dynamic.

Secondly, we need to press on with the implementation of the Good Friday agreement in all its aspects. I have placed in the Library of the House the Government's fuller response to the Decommissioning Commission's report. I should mention in particular that we will complete the implementation of the Patten report, including the review of the new arrangements to which we are already committed and the introduction of legislation to amend the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 to reflect more fully the Patten recommendations.

We intend shortly to publish an implementation plan for the criminal justice review and to draft legislation to be introduced during the current Session. We will undertake a progressive rolling programme of security normalisation, reducing levels of troops and installations in Northern Ireland as the security situation improves. Our aim is to secure as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements. That is the task that now confronts us in the period ahead.

I can today announce a step in that direction. The IRA's action in putting weapons beyond use has wide political significance. It also, in itself, makes a contribution to the improvement that we all want to see in the security situation.

In the immediate aftermath of yesterday's event, I have discussed the situation with my security advisers, including the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland. There is, of course, a significant continuing threat from republican and loyalist dissidents. Notwithstanding that, the Chief Constable confirms that yesterday's developments represent a real improvement.

We therefore intend, as an immediate response to yesterday's development, to demolish the observation tower on Sturgan mountain in South Armagh; work on this has already started today. We will demolish one of the observation towers on Camlough mountain in South Armagh; work on this is starting today. In addition, we will demolish the supersangar at Newtownhamilton police station adjacent to the helicopter landing site; work on that will begin tomorrow. We will also demolish the Magherafelt army base; work on that will begin tomorrow. All of this done on the advice of a Chief Constable whose integrity and knowledge of these matters is unsurpassed in the House.

There is a third priority: all paramilitary groups should now play their part in building on yesterday's progress. That is not just about decommissioning. When small children cannot go to school without being terrorised, or innocent civilians cannot sleep in their bed without fear of being bombed, the scale of the challenge still confronting us is evident. Some of the loyalist organisations have played a crucial part in the peace process. I ask them to ask themselves what they can do now to move the process forward. Whatever else happens, there must be an end to the mindless sectarian violence of recent weeks.

There are other difficult legacies of the past. The early release scheme was, I know, one of the most painful and contentious aspects of the agreement. All qualifying prisoners have now been released. We and the Irish Government have now accepted that it would be a natural development of that scheme for outstanding prosecutions and extradition proceedings for offences committed before 10 April 1998 not to be pursued against supporters of organisations now on ceasefire and contributing to the peace process. Both Governments have agreed to take such steps as are necessary to resolve the issue as soon as possible, and in any event by March 2002.

Piece by piece the Belfast agreement is taking shape. As the Prime Minister said last night, we are a long way from completing our journey. There will, no doubt, be obstacles ahead, but at a time when the world is grappling with the effects of the most evil terrorism and we see in the middle east the awful consequences when political dialogue breaks down and opportunities are missed, I can tell the House that the political process in Northern Ireland is alive and moving forward. To sustain that, we will require hard work, steady nerves and the continued ability on all sides to reach out and make difficult compromises. The Government are ready and eager to play their part in doing that.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in giving me an advance copy of his statement, which I much appreciate.

This is unambiguously good news for the people of Northern Ireland. I endorse utterly the right hon. Gentleman's tributes to all those whose efforts have brought about today's result. However, I should like to give nuance to some of his remarks. It is a fact that many people in Northern Ireland in both communities have, reasonably and rightly, immediately welcomed the excellent news. But it is not entirely surprising, given the suffering and horrors of the last 30 years, that a significant number have reacted to the news with cynicism and scepticism. I think that they are wrong to take that view, and hope and pray that they will come to change their mind. However, we in the House must all make an effort to consider the concerns and feelings of all the people of Northern Ireland in both communities.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that what has happened is the first vital step in a process that must be completed and must continue until all the arms in the hands of former terrorists have been decommissioned? Does he agree that the next move must come from the so-called loyalist paramilitaries? Does he agree that in the

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

vital continuing process of decommissioning no one will want to make unilateral or unreciprocated concessions? I hope that he himself will not make any such concessions. On the other hand, we do not want a crisis in the institutions—another stand-off—every time a new act of decommissioning needs to be made.

Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree therefore that it would be highly desirable to negotiate some kind of co-ordinated and programmed process leading to full decommissioning? Does he consider that General de Chastelain's remit is sufficient to allow him to negotiate such a package? If not, will he consider other ways of achieving the same objective? Will he now give the House a clear answer to the question to which the Prime Minister did not give a clear answer when he was asked it earlier today, both by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)? What happens—we hope that this is not the case—if decommissioning is not completed by February next year when General de Chastelain's remit runs out? It is only common sense to make contingency plans for that eventuality. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that that has been done, even if he does not want to tell us what those plans are?

Turning to a matter that will be of considerable concern to many in the House and outside, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that his reference to abandoning

"outstanding prosecutions and extradition proceedings"

amounts to the promise of an amnesty for people who are now on the run? Does he accept that there was no mention of an amnesty in the Belfast agreement and no such proceeding was envisaged at that time? Does he accept that the House has never had an opportunity to consider such an eventuality? Is he convinced that such an amnesty is consistent with United Nations conventions?

I now come to another vital point that was touched on, but no more than that, earlier this afternoon. Can we have an explicit and unqualified assurance from the right hon. Gentleman—the Prime Minister was neither explicit nor unqualified on this subject this afternoon—that there will be no question of any reduction in police numbers, troop numbers and their equipment and support below the levels that the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding believe necessary to fulfil adequately the tasks that they have been given? I would very much appreciate a clear and explicit assurance on that vital matter.

Finally, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that this is a splendid opportunity for all those involved in lesser degrees of confrontation in Northern Ireland, including aggressive demonstrations such as stone throwing, to make a contribution to de-escalating tensions and begin to heal the hatred that exists? In that context, will the right hon. Gentleman join me in appealing to all community leaders in north Belfast to take advantage of the present conjuncture to begin to negotiate an end to the harassment of parents and children at the Holy Cross school, and to the difficulties that Protestants have recently encountered in neighbouring Catholic streets?

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for yesterday's news. Any hon. Member, however healthily sceptical, who did not welcome yesterday's move forward would be regarded by the entire House as rather churlish. The hon. Gentleman's fulsome welcome did not detract from the legitimate questions that he asked.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I understood the scepticism and the cynicism that will exist in certain quarters. There is indeed a degree of scepticism, which is not unuseful. After so many decades of pain on all sides, it is healthy for people to be sceptical. Cynicism is somewhat different. It is our job to illustrate to those who are dominated by cynicism that politics can work. Recognition of the futility of many long years of trying to solve problems by violent means is increasingly reinforced by making political progress and thereby defeating cynicism. Nevertheless, I understand how painful and how difficult many of the decisions are to people in Northern Ireland.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the move is the first step in a process that must extend wider and longer. It is part of a process that will take many years to bear fruit. For example, in the general political process, we have embarked on policing, but it is just a beginning. No one thinks that we will have attained the object of that exercise within a short period. When we form the new democratic institutions, they will take a considerable time to become stabilised. New powers—criminal justice and so on—should perhaps be passed down in due course to the new institutions. That will take time, and the same applies to all other aspects of the agreement.

It is understandable that such things, including the resolution of the arms issue, take time. I wish that it had come about earlier; that would have been more helpful, but now we can truthfully say that we have begun the implementation of all aspects of the Good Friday agreement.

I agree that we must ask the loyalists to ask themselves what they can do. There are those who wear the banner of loyalism and demean the idea of allegiance to any country, not just to the United Kingdom. Gangsterism, racketeering and thuggery do not always appear on the stage carrying a banner with the words, "Gangsterism, racketeering and thuggery." However, there are other loyalists who have played an extremely constructive part in the process.

I would want not to damn everyone because of some of the people who have been engaged in what we have seen. I hear from them the response, "We may not be prepared to do what the IRA has done." I encourage them to tell us not what they cannot do at this stage, but what they think they can do. Any movement, particularly a movement away from the murderous bomb campaign that has been taking place, would be another part of the dynamic of changing the recent vicious circle.

The hon. Gentleman asked about unreciprocated concessions. There are two parts to that. Many of the things that we are doing are not concessions. Human rights protection and equality legislation are not concessions but the building blocks of a civilised society. However, if the hon. Gentleman is asking whether everyone who is part of the process expects that we should be able to move all the elements and that everyone should gain from that, I agree.

That is sensible. It does not mean that we should allow timidity to become the byword. As we build trust, which has been sadly lacking, perhaps we should all contemplate

whether we could move just a little further politically than we might have done hitherto. Yes, to moving forward together.

I applaud General de Chastelain and his commission. More than any, they have suffered the brunt of cynicism and sneering over the years. I thank them on behalf of the whole House and everyone in Northern Ireland—I am sure that I speak also on behalf of the two Governments and Ireland as a whole—for their endurance in staying there. They have obtained a discretion, an integrity and an independence that are vital to the process.

The hon. Gentleman repeated a question that is perhaps based on a misunderstanding and which he said my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did not answer to his satisfaction. The remit of the de Chastelain commission does not finish in February. Its remit stems from the two Governments themselves. What finishes in February is the legislative framework that enables decommissioning to take place. That is an important distinction. General de Chastelain will therefore remain for as long as the two Governments wish him to do so.

It is important for paramilitary groups to build on what happened yesterday and for that to happen across the board, laterally and as part of a forward-moving process. There are many tricky problems, but it is my firm belief that the trickiest of all—moving from conflict to peace and from people who were previously engaged in terrorism to people who say that they now want to adopt exclusively peaceful means—is immensely helped by the independence of John de Chastelain and the integrity that he holds. I think, therefore, that it is wise for us to say that we will take his advice on these matters as the process continues and see what he would prefer to have happened.

The hon. Gentleman then turned to the resolution of issues that arise from the early release of prisoners and those who are on the run. He referred to an amnesty. It is important to recognise that the people to whom he referred do not fall into a single category. For instance, there are people on the run of whom the security forces have never heard, those about whom they have no evidence or suspicion and people who have served longer in prison than they would have done if they had stayed there and obtained early release. There are others against whom there may be evidence for long-outstanding charges. It is precisely because of that difficulty that we have expressed the intent to resolve the issue, but have not yet decided on the method that will be deployed. The hon. Gentleman can be assured that when we make that decision, the House will be the first to know and we will bring our proposals before it. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would allow us to do otherwise.

The hon. Gentleman's other question—I am sorry for answering his questions with such fulness, but he asked them with sincerity and integrity and it is worth answering them all—was whether we take and heed advice on security matters. Of course, that goes without saying. There is still a threat out there. There are people who, unlike the IRA, which is moving in a direction that we all applaud, have stayed entrenched. Some of them are republicans and some are loyalists. We will combat them in the illegality and malice of what they are doing as resolutely as we will pursue peace with those who wish to work in partnership with us towards it. However, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, we must not allow them to act as a veto on the rest of the process because of their commitment to using violence.

I hope that I have answered most of the hon. Gentleman's questions. On north Belfast, despite all the difficulties, efforts are being made behind the scenes and many community leaders are trying to resolve a very difficult situation. I merely say this to the people who are protesting there: first, whatever they may think their grievances are, we are willing to address them. They do not have to take the action that they are taking. Secondly, and perhaps more important, to hold young children to ransom as they put forward their demands is not only wrong and should be stopped, but does nothing to advance their case anywhere in Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom or internationally.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I would like to say that the House obviously knows that this is a very important statement, and I want to call as many hon. Members as possible. Short questions and, of course, short answers, will be of great assistance.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): On behalf of the people whom I represent, I would like to thank the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister, the Northern Ireland Office Ministers, their predecessors and their counterparts in the Government of the Republic of Ireland for being part of the process that has brought us to this point today.

This is an historic event. It is the first time in a century that Irish republicanism has yielded one single weapon or bullet, and that is significant. Let us not question the motivation behind the event, but rather accept the event as the gateway to the future that has been created. I hope that the Secretary of State will agree that this gateway will, perhaps, produce a gun-free society in Northern Ireland, and a society free of political violence.

Does the Secretary of State agree that all of us in the House and in Northern Ireland need to encourage the loyalist paramilitaries to see that they have no cause to retain their weapons, and that they can now confidently disarm and leave the protection of any community to the proper security forces in Northern Ireland? Does he also agree that it is important that the dissident republican movements adopt and subscribe to the will of the people of Ireland that this should happen? The intractable problem of the Good Friday agreement and decommissioning is the keystone to our new future.

The other matters to which the Secretary of State has referred—policing, demilitarisation—are moving along, and we hope to hear of the reinstitution on a permanent basis of the institutions. I am sure that the Secretary of State will welcome the statement made in the House today by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that his Ministers have been reinstated in their positions of ministerial responsibility today. I would like to hear the leader of the Democratic Unionist party say that his Ministers will also be restored, and that all four of the coalition parties will at long last work together as an Executive in this Administration of Northern Ireland and in the north-south bodies.

Does the Secretary of State also agree that the real victors, the real benefactors, of this process—which I hope will now move rapidly to its culmination—are the ordinary men and women and their leaders who have

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

personally endured violence and the threat of violence over the years, and who have at all times stood by their abhorrence of violence and their determination to see the democratic process victorious in the end?

Mr. Speaker: When I asked for short questions, I was expecting them to be shorter than that.

Dr. Reid: That was short by Northern Ireland standards. I will attempt to be even more brief.

I thank my hon. Friend for his tribute, his thanks and his accolade to me. I can assure him that the people whom I mentioned earlier are much more important; I just happened to be around when this happened. That is also a good caveat for distancing myself from any consequences if it all goes wrong. One of the first phone calls I received about the news was from Mo Mowlam, who was delighted. I pay tribute to her and to her predecessor.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the stability of the institutions and about the need for those decent, good loyalists to consider how they can contribute to the process. He is also right about the marginalisation of the dissident republicans. I do not believe that they represent any people, any strategy or any modern reality at all. That is why I think they will eventually be completely marginalised.

My hon. Friend is also right about the people of Northern Ireland. They have a character that has been forged in a crucible over decades. They never cease to amaze me, and I am privileged to have been asked to work alongside them.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Despite my evident seniority in the gang of three here, I shall keep my comments proportionately brief. First, I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement. Secondly, does he agree that its real historic significance is to show that, through dialogue and acting in good faith, the pathway to peace has genuinely been cleared? Many people did not believe that to be possible.

On loyalist weapons, is the Secretary of State aware that the Ulster Defence Association said last night:

"Decommissioning is not on the cards"?

The Progressive Unionist party has said that the IRA statement is seriously significant. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of any recent meetings between the Decommissioning Commission and those paramilitary groups, in particular the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Freedom Fighters? Is there any indication that they will follow the IRA's example and live up to their responsibilities in terms of the Good Friday agreement? If not, what practical measures does he foresee the House employing to put pressure on them to do so?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that he will take a strategic approach to demilitarisation, which his statement so rightly laid out, to ensure that those, especially in nationalist communities, who have been cynical about the Government's commitment to it realise that there is a long-term and well thought out plan to maintain the impetus towards normalisation? Will he also give his view of the time scale for moving forward to implement Patten to a fuller extent than has been achieved so far?

I, too, pay tribute to the many individuals in Northern Irish politics and in the House who have shown courage and great stature in getting us this far. Does the Secretary of State agree that many of us consistently supported the Good Friday agreement from the start and that that consistency has been vindicated? Perhaps most important of all, there is now a compelling argument for those who have not seen fit to regard the Good Friday agreement as the way forward to peace to change their view.

Dr. Reid: Yes, I entirely agree that we have come a long way, despite predictions that we would not be able to achieve any of these things. When I say "we", I mean all of us who are committed to making the agreement work. When we are overawed by the challenges of what remains to be done, we can do no better than look back to see how many times it was predicted that we could not do something, and how many times we have. Eventually, managed to do it.

I have no evidence that the UVF has been in contact. More important I suppose, one of its spokesmen, David Ervine, said that he has no evidence that it intends to decommission. However, I have said today that I wish people would reflect on what they could do, even if they feel at this stage that they cannot make such an historic move, and that circumstances are different. They should come in and contribute to the process, because there are many good loyalists who want that. They may have a degree of scepticism, a degree of worry or a degree of trepidation, but they are better contributing to the process than sitting outside it.

On the impetus towards a normal society, yes, I hope that we can keep up that dynamic, but it is not entirely in our hands. Of course we have the major responsibility, but we all have to work together to create the circumstances where that becomes possible. Yesterday's step was a major move in that direction. I hope that the immediate measures that we have announced today show that we are willing to respond and willing to think creatively, and politically to work with others to ensure that we return to what we would call a more normal society there.

The hon. Gentleman asked about Patten. The implementation plan has been published. The first meeting of the new board, which is cross-party, is next week. We shall proceed from there.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): This is a fine statement on a fine development. Despite the Secretary of State being modest, we should congratulate him on the role that he has played in connection with it. He knows that the art of the impossible is hard work, and that goes for his predecessors, back to Peter Brooke who found a form of words that set the whole process going.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will try to do something else that is impossible—that is, get the IRA to operate its own amnesty for people who have been placed in internal or external exile. Nothing would be better in order to bring in the support of doubters on some Opposition Benches. There is an exceptionally good report by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on the matter.

Dr. Reid: I hear what my hon. Friend says, certainly on the last point. We must all make an effort to resolve

past conflicts and painful memories of the past. What my hon. Friend says has a degree of resonance—and, as tributes have been flying round, I think he should be thanked for the consistent contribution that he has made over the years, despite the ebbs and flows of the process. It has been tremendously valuable.

David Burnside (South Antrim): It appears that some Englishmen ask quite long questions as well.

There appeared to be two serious and important omissions from the statement. One related to the proposed amnesty that the Secretary of State announced at Weston Park. If we are looking ahead with some hope, surely the Secretary of State should have made a statement to the House saying that no legal proceedings would be brought against those who have served in the security forces and the Regular Army, including the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Royal Irish Regiment, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Reserve, relating to any incident over the past 30 years.

I entirely agree that we need loyalist decommissioning—the Unionist parties are at one on that—but has not the unfair treatment of loyalists over the parades issue helped, to an extent, to alienate the loyalist community in many parts of the Province? The Secretary of State omitted any reference to what he said at Weston Park about a review of the remit of the Parades Commission, which we consider very necessary.

Dr. Reid: I hope I have helped to correct the idea that we are talking about a single category of people on the run for whom there will be an amnesty. I have explained the complications, and I will not stretch your indulgence by doing so again, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Gentleman may want to reflect on his second point. I know that it was sincere and that he thought he was making it on behalf of those who have been involved in the Army, but I am not sure that the leadership and rank and file of the armed forces want to be thought of as the equivalent of terrorists.

As it happens, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's view of the Parades Commission, although I know that there have been many contentious decisions. Indeed, every decision is contentious, since whether the commission decides that a parade should go ahead, or should be stopped or should be rerouted, one side or the other will claim that it is biased. I am eternally grateful that it has shown the endurance to continue to do that, but we are prepared to review its workings. That was encompassed in the statement at Weston Park, and I am pleased to confirm that it is still the case.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most prominent name on the list that he gave was the last, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume)? Over the years, he showed that the democratic way was the correct way, and also showed tremendous courage, for which he was bitterly criticised in the House, in entering into talks with Gerry Adams. The Hume-Adams talks led to a great furore, and to the work done by the former Taoiseach Mr. Reynolds and the former Prime Minister Mr. Major.

Can my right hon. Friend tell us when we can expect to see the legislation that is likely to be forthcoming on the police and other matters? Will he also include in his accolade members of the Republican movement who, by means of tremendous courage, persuaded the movement to accept the necessity of the democratic process? They had to face up to people with desperate memories of pogroms against them in west Belfast and other areas when they had no arms to protect themselves from an unreformed RUC and militant mobs.

Dr. Reid: As I think my hon. Friend will have heard, among those whom I thanked were the leadership of the republican movement. He will forgive me, however, if—although I have the utmost admiration for my friend and colleague of many years the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume)—I do not produce a hierarchy of tributes. In that spirit, we should remember that while the optimism derived from yesterday's events can be a great driving force for the future, euphoria is often the mother and father of disillusionment later. We should keep our feet on the ground.

It is true that the hon. Member for Foyle made an outstanding contribution, as did many others. It takes two to tango; with a complicated dance such as Northern Ireland, it takes a lot more than two to get through it. While we have had the satisfaction of saying that what happened yesterday was historic, we should have not a sense of euphoria but as a sense of dynamism and optimism to tackle what are realistically some very hard challenges ahead.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): Does the Secretary of State recall the promise that the Prime Minister made to the people of Northern Ireland in the referendum campaign that he would personally ensure that there was parallel movement on all aspects of the Good Friday agreement? While in no way wanting to belittle what happened yesterday, is it not a fact that this is the first move that the IRA has made, and that it has taken nearly two and a half years to make it? Has the right hon. Gentleman had any assurances either from General de Chastelain or from any of the people to whom he has been talking who represent the republican movement that this is not a one-off gesture, but part of a continuing process of decommissioning? If he has not had that assurance and he has given the quid pro quo today in his various announcements, we will shortly be back in exactly the muddle that has held us up for so many months.

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman, or the right hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* Not yet? That is one of the many aspects of the process that are long overdue. The hon. Gentleman, who has tremendous expertise in these matters, will know that all of us would have wanted such a step to be taken earlier. I do not think that that should allow us to diminish it. All aspects of the Belfast agreement have now been started. Very few of them have been completed; all of them are in the process of organic development. We should allow ourselves a degree of satisfaction that we can now genuinely say that the insurmountable hurdle that was envisaged has begun to be overcome.

It is fair to say that, although to the House it may not have been a huge deal, to the republican movement it was a huge deal to go on a prolonged ceasefire. We should recognise that. We each carry our own history. The opening of the dumps was a hugely significant move in the republican movement's terms, too. Now that the actual decommissioning has begun, it has added a new dynamic.

[Dr. Reid]

On the specific question, the first part of General de Chastelain's report states:

"On 6th August 2001 the Commission reported that agreement had been reached with the IRA on a method to put . . . arms completely and verifiably beyond use."

It takes that as its starting point. If the hon. Gentleman checks the statement of 6 August, he will see that it referred to that as an act that would initiate a process.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I, too, urge my right hon. Friend not to be too modest. The House will know that the painstaking work that he, his ministerial colleagues and officials have put in over the past few months in bringing about the developments of the past few days have been highly significant and are much appreciated in the House and elsewhere.

May I ask my right hon. Friend to consider supporting the call of my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and of Sir Reg Empey this morning in an interview that I saw him giving, for the Democratic Unionist party—I hope that it takes this in the friendly spirit in which it is intended—to review its one-foot-in, one-foot-out approach to the institutions? Not only would it bring considerable political weight to the process, but, as its Ministers have already demonstrated, it would bring to the Executive particular talents which are widely admired and would be much appreciated.

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend's contribution carries particular credibility as he was involved in many of the prolonged discussions and made a valuable contribution as a Minister. He is right to mention the officials at the Northern Ireland Office. They are not everyone's cup of tea; indeed, in Northern Ireland they are not anyone's cup of tea because everyone is suspicious that they are on the other side. However, I can truly say—even with the fierce competition of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, who was proudly acclaiming her officials earlier—that I would put mine up against anyone. They are second to none. They are deeply committed to the people of Northern Ireland in trying to ensure that they have a decent, civilised, modern democratic society there.

I wish that the DUP were fully in the process. I think that it represents a very important electorate in Northern Ireland and very important strands of thinking. I think that Democratic Unionist Members make a contribution, certainly when they meet me. Although it is not always a contribution that entirely accords with my own view, it is one that I think we cannot forget. I wish that, like everyone else, they were part of this agreement. I believe that the more pillars of Northern Ireland we build this on, the better it will be. I have no hesitation in saying that, in terms of the individual contributions they can make, they are every bit as able as every other party. There are also some outstanding characters among them, one of whom I believe may be trying to catch the eye of the occupant of the Chair.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The statement refers to what happened yesterday, but what did happen yesterday? Something happened in secret. The Secretary of State does not know what happened yesterday. He cannot tell the House the number of guns that were dealt with, the pounds of explosive that were dealt with, if they were, or the number of other weapons that were dealt with. The last time we met him, the general told us that the Prime Minister would not know that information and that no inventory of destroyed arms would be given to the Government.

Today, however, the Secretary of State has produced a paper that is absolutely transparent—there are no hidey-holes in this statement. We are told that there will be new legislation, even before the new Police Board has even had the decency of being allowed to have a meeting. The right hon. Gentleman has announced that there will be new legislation in the House, although a former Secretary of State told us that the legislation would not be changed because it reflected Patten, and that that was the way that it was going to remain.

The statement also referred to outstanding prosecutions. I do not believe that any Unionist wants any member of the Army to be dealt with as a terrorist but I believe that they deserve to be taken into full consideration when those matters are under consideration. I stand up for the rights of the RUC men and those who are concerned in that matter.

There is another matter: all this dismantling of security. Work is starting today on Sturgan mountain and Camlough mountain, in South Armagh. Work will start tomorrow in Newtownhamilton. Work will be starting to demolish the Magherafelt Army base. All that is transparent; we can see everything that is being done. We cannot, however, see anything that has been done by the IRA, and we are not going to see it. We therefore have a right to be sceptical about it.

On what the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said, there is no coalition between the DUP and IRA-Sinn Fein. There never will be such a coalition, and he very well knows that. For him to come to the House and try to tell people that the DUP is in coalition with IRA-Sinn Fein is utter, absolute rubbish.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman some elbow room, but he must put questions to the Secretary of State.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I shall put one very important question. Will the Secretary of State explain to me and my European constituents why they have been visited by the security forces in the areas where all that dismantling will take place, when they have been warned that there is a threat from the Real IRA? What assurance can he give them, as he pulls down their security, on how they will be protected? They did not say that that threat exists; the security forces told them that it does.

Will the Secretary of State please list the other events that have occurred in north Belfast, such as that involving the man who was shot by the IRA on Sunday afternoon? Why is that not mentioned? Why is the young person who was driven over and killed not mentioned? Is it because they were Protestants that they were not mentioned in the Minister's statement?

Dr. Reid: With respect, Mr. Speaker, I will not respond to the hon. Gentleman's last comment, other than to say that any death in Northern Ireland—whether of a Catholic,

Protestant, Jew or Muslim—is taken with equal seriousness because all those lives have equal worth. That is the view of the whole House.

As regards the commission, it is not entirely true that there is no information about the decommissioning. In fact, the report, although brief, tells us a good deal. Members of the commission witnessed the event; they are relying not on others' words but on their own eyes. They regard it as a significant event, and these are people who have served in the military. They are not armchair generals, but people who have had an active role in the military. They confirmed that the materiel in question included arms, ammunition and explosives; in other words, not one or two rusty rifles.

The commission said that the arms were put completely beyond use and dealt with in accordance with the decommissioning scheme under the legislation approved by Parliament. That means that, under paragraph 11 of the decommissioning scheme of August 2001, the commission has taken a record of the arms decommissioned and has verified the information in that record. In other words, although it is the commission's judgment that such information should remain confidential, the commission has been able to record the details of the arms decommissioned.

Finally, the commission says

"We will continue our contact with the IRA . . . in the pursuit of our mandate".

That means, as the participants in the Good Friday agreement agreed, the total decommissioning of all paramilitary arms. It would be better for the whole House to pay tribute to John de Chastelain for the work that he has done, rather than to cast aspersions on the manner in which he has conducted it.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a perfectly legitimate question, which he put with passion. Of course advisers advise and politicians and Ministers decide, but, as I have said, before I take any decision regarding matters of normalisation, I consult with and take advice from the GOC Northern Ireland—a man with a not undistinguished military record of fighting for his country and no known proclivities towards appeasement or republicanism—and the Chief Constable of the RUC. Both of those individuals were consulted on the announcements that I made today. If it is good enough for them, it should probably be good enough for most Members of this House.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I welcome the statement from my right hon. Friend and the progress made in Northern Ireland. Does he agree that we must not forget the victims of terrorist violence, be they victims of the IRA or of the loyalist murder gangs? Does he further agree that, speaking bluntly, one of the greatest blessings that Northern Ireland could now have would be if the leader of the Democratic Unionist party spent the rest of his political life trying to make the Good Friday agreement work, and thus help to undermine and destroy the forces of violence in which he has never been involved? It would undermine those forces if he took a positive and useful role in making the Good Friday agreement work and in making sure that politics instead of the gun dominates that part of the United Kingdom.

Dr. Reid: Yes of course we remember the victims, on all sides and from all backgrounds, of this terrible period in Northern Ireland's history. It is precisely to try to avoid another generation of victims that we are engaged in this project, which involves so many challenges and difficult decisions. This process is about trying to avoid another 3,500 people dying, as has happened during the troubles.

Sometimes we in this House underestimate what that number of deaths means to Northern Ireland. To reveal the extent of the suffering caused, if the equivalent number of deaths had occurred in the rest of the United Kingdom, the total recorded number of deaths in Northern Ireland has to be multiplied by 40. That gives a total of between 120,000 and 140,000 people. If the same number of deaths had occurred in the US, it would be equivalent to 480,000 people.

We should not forget. As I said at the start of the statement, that should be the spark that causes us to make sure that a conflict that has lasted between 30 and 800 years should not continue to affect the next generation of people in Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland. I agree that I wish that the leader of the Democratic Unionist party would throw his considerable political weight behind the process.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Although I welcome what is clearly good news, will the Secretary of State accept that some of us will be very cautiously optimistic? We have been let down before, and promises have been broken before. To take the process a little further forward and encourage the Provisional IRA to decommission more weapons, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that he needs to take an even tougher stance against those who have failed to decommission? They include the dissident republican groups and the so-called loyalists, both of which should be taken on once and for all.

Dr. Reid: I think that I agree on both points. Being cautious does not stop us being radical: it means merely that we have to have a degree of surety about the risk involved in being radical. There is a sense in which being cautious should not require political timidity.

One old philosopher said that the best way to approach such historically important occasions was with pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will. That would be a good platform for most of us. I see that Tory Front-Bench Members are nodding in agreement: I shall not tell them who the author of that remark was, lest I embarrass them.

We must be prepared to pursue robustly those who remain on the other side of the democratic line, who will not cross that bridge in pursuit of the peace process. Many of them masquerade under the guise of a glorified cause, but are in fact up to their eyes in racketeering, drugs, murder and mafia activities. We should not give them the salutation that they are involved in some great political cause.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): May I offer my personal congratulations to my right hon. Friend, his colleagues and his predecessors? I hope and pray that matters will progress satisfactorily and smoothly, and with a higher degree of tolerance on all sides. Does my right hon. Friebd believe that the wider world can draw lessons from events in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: The message is simple. It is that jaw-jaw is almost always better than war-war. A vacuum is created

[Dr. Reid]

when we stop talking and attempting to reach solutions to problems through dialogue, and that allows men of violence in.

I therefore thank my hon. Friend for her question, her thanks and her hope. I thank her most of all for her offer of prayers.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): What is the Secretary of State's understanding of the word "significant" as used by the commission? Does it apply to the magnitude of the political step taken, or does it imply a significant reduction in the capacity to undertake terrorist activity?

Dr. Reid: I hate to be tautological, but my understanding is that the word is used to mean "other than insignificant". I do not know whether the word is used to refer to the quantity of arms, or the length of time that such arms could have been used to conduct an armed struggle or terrorism.

However, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has read General de Chastelain's report, in which the general gives an indication of why he does not want to go into specific quantities. In our attempts to manage a peace process towards a horizon, we have discovered how difficult it is to move from A to B. General de Chastelain has discovered that too, and his opinion, as expressed in the report, is that to issue further details would not assist—in fact would inhibit—progress towards the goal of a continual process of decommissioning.

I admire General de Chastelain and his work, and I shall not try to second-guess or psychoanalyse his use of semantics. However, the fact that he has bothered to use the word "significant" should be significant for us.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his knowledge of Gramsci, the Marxist. I hold out the hope that he will one day return to dialectical materialism.

The cross-border bodies are a critical part of the Good Friday agreement. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is now no obstacle to republicans serving on those cross-border bodies and that they should be allowed to get on with their work?

Dr. Reid: I hope that that will be the case. One reason why the Belfast agreement encompassed a solution to many problems is not just that the two communities in Northern Ireland were able to come together, although that was important, but that the Northern Ireland Assembly, through the Executive and along with our partners in the Irish Government, were able to give an all-Ireland dimension to tackling some of the practical problems without instilling the fear that that somehow imposed a constitutional arrangement. I hope that those involved will be able to do what my hon. Friend suggests in the near future.

I know that my hon. Friend will understand when I say that dialectical materialism was a product not of Karl Marx but of Joseph Stalin, and that therefore I have never adhered to that particular creed.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Will the Secretary of State tell those in Northern Ireland who, like me, he might categorise as a tad sceptical, why, when considering whether the republican movement is committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means, they should put more weight on an unspecified event where an unspecified number of weapons were allegedly decommissioned or put out of use in an unspecified way than on the very real record of the 107 shootings carried out by the Provisional IRA during its ceasefire, the 270 so-called punishment beatings, the dozen murders that it has carried out, its gun-running in Florida, its exploits in Colombia, its racketeering and its street violence? Why should we put more weight on the unspecified as opposed to the detail? Will the right hon. Gentleman take it from me that those on the DUP Bench apply no different criteria to a requirement for total, verifiable and visible decommissioning from loyalist paramilitary organisations than they do from republicans?

Dr. Reid: I not only take it from the hon. Gentleman, I believe it. I take it, therefore, not as an allegation or an assertion but as something that I am willing to accept. From the use of the word "allegedly", it is obvious that he is not willing to accept the word of General de Chastelain. He and I part company on that. I accept the word of General John de Chastelain and I think that the majority of people in the House accept it.

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): I, too, join the rest of the House in welcoming the very good news about this first momentous step in the peace process. At last we have broken through, and now our prayers must join with those of everyone in Ireland and throughout the country about the continuation of the peace process.

My right hon. Friend referred earlier to the loyalist paramilitaries. What are his views on what steps they should be taking with regard to the next stage in the peace process?

Dr. Reid: I think that the entire House is clear about what step all the paramilitaries should be taking to move forward—they should put their arms beyond use. What I said earlier in response to the comments of a spokesman for some of the loyalist groups is that if they do not feel able to do that, we would welcome them telling us what they could do. Certainly, they should desist immediately from widespread, sectarian, indiscriminate attacks, attacks on small children and attempts to mutilate and ultimately murder people. I cannot for the life of me see how anyone thinks that that will assist their cause. Although we should not be euphoric about what happened yesterday and we should keep our feet on the ground, I hope that the other paramilitaries will consider carefully nevertheless and see how they can build on the events that took place yesterday.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Does the Secretary of State accept that perhaps one reason for scepticism and, indeed, cynicism in Northern Ireland is that people are genuinely concerned about the level of control that the paramilitaries seem to have over the streets? Given that fact, does he accept that while verification of weapons being put beyond use is extremely important, an assessment—his assessment—of the weapons that are kept by paramilitaries on both sides, and not only by the mainstream organisations, is equally important?

Dr. Reid: Yes. It is not just the weapons that are kept, although that is significant, but the activity for which they

are used. None of the ceasefires is perfect. I specified the UDA and the Loyalist Defence Force because the level, scale and nature of the violence in which they were engaged was distinguishable, not by politicians alone but by others whose advice I seek in these matters, from the activities of some of the paramilitary groups—the UVF and the IRA—who, in the round, remain on ceasefire. Our ultimate aim is simple. It is to create a Northern Ireland where people's problems, grievances and political objectives are sorted out and achieved by democratic means. Given the problems that we have had and the length of time for which we have had them on the island of Ireland, while impatience is understandable, the fact that we have managed to achieve in less than a decade things that some people thought would never happen in 100 years should be a spur to us.

I will end with a brief anecdote. On Saturday night, I was in Wexford. I have to confess, although it will destroy my credentials, that I went to the opera. It occurred to me when I was there that it was May 1169 when Robert FitzStephen first landed on the island of Ireland with 600 soldiers. There I was, 832 years later, trying to play some small role in overcoming some of the problems that have persisted ever since. When we understand the nature and magnitude of what we are dealing with and add to that the past 30 years—with the deaths, misery and pain and the burden of history that is on everyone—what we have achieved so far is, thankfully, some recompense to the people of Northern Ireland for having supported this peace process. What we achieved yesterday was another major milestone in that journey.

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): The Secretary of State outlined a series of events beginning today—his term was "security normalisation processes". This process has been going on for many months—in fact, several years. Just as these events are continuous, obvious and transparent, what steps can he take to assure the House that the decommissioning process, if it indeed has begun, will be continuous, obvious and transparent?

Dr. Reid: I cannot guarantee success in any area. We are all putting our efforts into it, but I will not pretend to the House that the peace process is irrevocable or inevitable. Commentators write about that, but my view is that with human beings things only succeed if we continue to apply all our efforts to ensure that they do so. As a general proposition, I do not think that anyone in the House who guaranteed that the process would be a success would be believed or believable. However, if I am asked what can give us the best guarantee of success in dealing with this difficult issue—putting arms beyond use in the midst of a transition from conflict to peace—I have no doubt that it is the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning led by General John de Chastelain.

If the hon. Gentleman has a better idea of how to put arms beyond use and how to achieve that, I am always willing to listen; but if he comes up with the same solution that has been tried for the past 800 years, on the evidence, I should be somewhat sceptical about it.

Points of Order

5.50 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a succinct point of order, Mr. Speaker. Following the exchanges, initiated by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) and taken up by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and myself, concerning cluster bombs and land mines, and in the light of my approaches to the Chief Whip, the Solicitor-General's office and, indeed, to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, would you look kindly, Mr. Speaker, on my request that, as the Solicitor-General will be in the House at 12.20 tomorrow for Question Time, she make a statement to follow up her written answer? That answer stated:

"As chief legal advisers to Her Majesty's Government, the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General are available to advise the Government on all questions of international and domestic law. In this capacity the Law Officers have been asked to advise, from time to time, on legal issues relating to the use of force."—[*Official Report*, 18 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 1284W-85W.]

It is said that the Americans may have dropped this arsenal—this weaponry; none the less, it is also true that it came from the British base of Diego Garcia in the Indian ocean which brings it into order as a legitimate matter for the House to consider. Will you look kindly on allowing some kind of statement from the Solicitor-General tomorrow?

Mr. Speaker: It is up to the Solicitor-General whether she wishes to make a statement. I have no control over those matters. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can raise the matter at business questions tomorrow and put in a bid for such a statement.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware from exchanges that took place earlier that the Secretary of State for International Development ducked out of giving evidence to a Select Committee earlier this week, citing as a reason the fact that she was unwilling to instruct her officials to prepare a written memorandum and despite the fact that the Committee had said that it did not require such a memorandum.

You are the custodian of our rights in this place, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be a new development, whereby a Minister declines to be cross-examined by a Committee because of the absence of a written document for whose preparation that Minister is responsible. Can you do anything to ensure that in future neither the House nor its Committees are treated in that cavalier manner?

Mr. Speaker: The Chair has no power to force an hon. Member to appear before a Committee. I heard what the Secretary of State said and I also heard what the Chairman of the Select Committee said. It seemed to me that there was a mood of co-operation, so that should assist the right hon. Gentleman and everyone else.

Relationships (Civil Registration)

5.53 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for civil registration of a relationship between two people who are cohabiting, and for such registration to afford certain legal rights; and for connected purposes.

The terms "common law wife" or "common law husband" are frequently used to describe people who live together. There are various urban myths about what the terms mean and about what rights people have over one another or over one another's property after they have lived together for a period of time. The time could be six months or two years—it all depends on what one hears. However, in British law there is no such person as a common law wife or husband; no legal rights or responsibilities are earned by people who live together in a relationship.

Before Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act 1753, people's relationships could be recognised in several different ways, which attracted some legal and social consequences. One of the most widely known practices was jumping the broomstick. A couple jumped over a broom that was leant against their front door, thereby gaining certain legal rights and responsibilities. Divorce was certainly easier in those days because the relationship was undone by jumping back over the broom in the presence of witnesses. There is no indication of the means used to resolve arguments over the distribution of assets held in common, although probably there were no assets.

The 1753 Act resulted in relationships being recognised by law when a marriage ceremony took place in a church or chapel. Subsequent legislation widened the measure so that non-conformist ceremonies and those held in register offices were accepted.

What do I seek to do through the Bill? In July, my constituent, Rose Green, visited my advice surgery. She had lived with John Pendlebery for more than 12 years; they were engaged but they had never married—they never got around to it. They loved each other and saw no reason to change their situation. They expected to spend the rest of their lives together, but in September last year John Pendlebery died tragically and suddenly from a brain haemorrhage. That is when Rose found out that people who live together have no rights or responsibilities towards each other. She was not allowed to register John's death. She was not allowed to sign for his funeral. She even had to get his family's permission to make an entry in the book of remembrance.

Rose said:

"It was as though I didn't exist, that I had never been part of his life. It was very hurtful. He was my common law husband, my partner, my best friend, my soulmate. I feel that I am John's widow, though technically I'm not. I have no status. There's no word in the English language to describe what I am to John."

That is why I seek leave to bring in the Bill, so that people like Rose and John who live together can have some rights and responsibilities towards each other.

I am grateful for the support that I have received from the Law Society in preparing the Bill. If anyone wants to read the philosophical underpinning for the changes to the law that I propose, they could do worse than look at the report published by the Law Society in September 1999: "Cohabitation proposals for reform of the law". It can be found at www.lawsoc.org.uk under family law.

I have recently been contacted by the Solicitors Family Law Association which also proposes that there should be a new cohabitation law, separate and distinct from matrimonial law. Those proposals are based on the experience of the association's 5,000 members in dealing with the breakdown of families, both married and unmarried. They are members of the legal professions who work daily with people in the same situation as Rose and John, their children and families. Members of the association say that the existing law is unclear, uncertain and inadequate.

I am also pleased to have the support of the Thames Valley Police Federation. It is campaigning against inequality in the police pension scheme. If unmarried police officers die, their pension dies with them, whereas if they are married, an annual pension of one half of their final pension is payable to their spouse.

That inequality does not affect only a few people, as some have suggested. A recent survey showed that 52 per cent. of the 6,000 employees of Thames Valley police are unmarried; 40 per cent. of that number have said that they have no intention to marry. That means that 600 Thames Valley police officers, or 10 per cent. of that force's employees, would benefit from the Bill.

I also pay tribute to WPC Alison Brown of Thames Valley police. Alison has been in a stable relationship for more than a decade and, like all Thames Valley police officers, pays 11 per cent. of her salary into the scheme, yet should she die her partner would not be looked after. Alison has been leading a campaign for a change in the police pension scheme.

It is ironic that that situation is reflected throughout public sector pension schemes, while many private sector schemes recognise the rights of partners and allow people to nominate whoever they wish to receive benefits if they should die. Although I said that the situation for Thames Valley police is reflected throughout the public sector, that is not quite true. In July, hon. Members voted for our own scheme to allow pension benefits to be paid to unmarried partners. I supported that change and voted for it. It would be ironic if hon. Members opposed the Bill, thus denying others the rights we so recently gave ourselves. I ask hon. Members to consider how that might look outside the House.

Can we learn from the rest of the world? Is there anything similar elsewhere? In some parts of the world, people are considered to have a de facto marriage after they have lived together for a certain period. That is the case in most states in Australia. I considered that option, which would automatically cover all people who live together, but I rejected it. It is important that people choose to have rights and responsibilities towards each other and that they opt in.

If we look closer to home and to Europe, we see a different model of people who live together earning rights and responsibilities. People have to choose to opt in. The model is one of partnership registration, as I propose today. It already exists in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, France, Germany, Belgium and the Catalonia region of Spain. Denmark has had a scheme for registration of partnerships since 1989, with the other countries following on at intervals. Virtually all our near European neighbours have introduced the change and the sky has not fallen in.

One concern about the Bill is the financial implication. It would amend social security legislation to place registered partners in the same position as spouses and unmarried heterosexual partners. At present, lesbian and gay partners are treated more generously under social security provision, and it seems likely that the savings to the Treasury that such a change would involve would offset any small costs arising from changes to inheritance tax and pensions.

I am also grateful for the support and help that I have had with the Bill from Stonewall and Angela Mason. Shortly after a piece appeared in my weekly newspaper, the *Reading Chronicle*, about Rose Green, the constituent I mentioned earlier, I was contacted by Ed and Tony who have been in a stable relationship for many years. Because he was a few years older than Tony, Ed was concerned about what would happen if he died first. I am grateful for the support that I have received from Ed and Tony in putting together the Bill, but they are not alone.

John is in a seven-year relationship. With his partner, he is buying a car, and the model comes with a year's free insurance, but that insurance applies only to what are described as "normal" couples. Therefore, John and his partner have to decide who can be insured for free—the other will have to pay.

Dick and Ben are in their 70s and have been together for 50 years. They have endured the general prejudice against the gay community, as well as some of the injustices that the Bill sets out to correct. They jointly own their home and most other assets, so they will face massive inheritance taxes that might make it impossible for the survivor to remain in their home.

Rachel has been with her partner for 21 years, and they are life partners. Rachel has just been diagnosed with cancer and, because she is the breadwinner, that has brought home to both partners the financial, legal and other concerns that they have. Rachel says that the NHS has improved in its recognition of same-sex partners, although she has also said that one is left feeling grateful rather than with the feeling that one has the right to be recognised.

Mark wrote to me to support the Bill. He said:

"Many people criticise homosexual people for the alleged frequency and rapidity with which they change partners, yet still take the opinion that a measure to support enduring and meaningful gay relationships is also wrong."

I have introduced the Bill for that reason.

An article that appeared in *The Times* on Wednesday 17 October said:

"Anyone who registers a death on a death certificate must indicate the capacity"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am afraid that the hon. Lady has had her allocated time.

6.3 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I oppose this ten-minute Bill. *[Interruption.]* I oppose it notwithstanding the comments made behind me and I do so as a Member of Parliament, as the Second Church Estates Commissioner and on behalf of my constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) knows that I hold her in the highest respect and I accept fully her right to introduce the Bill. She has mentioned a number of constituency cases, so I will mention some constituents of mine.

As the Second Church Estates Commissioner, I put my opposition to the Bill crisply and succinctly. Marriage, as the law and as the Church of England understands it, is a commitment between one man and one woman. There is no provision in the Church's understanding for anything other than such a union in marriage. As the House of Bishops makes clear, marriage is a pattern that is given in creation and is deeply rooted in our social instincts. Marriage is not, of course, the only pattern given us for a life of love. Unmarried people may have a different pattern of loving relationships that are also to be valued and appreciated.

The Church recognises that love is not only a question of intimate relationships. Married people love others as well as their partners; they love their children, their friends, strangers and sometimes even their enemies.

I respect my hon. Friend, but I wish to refer to some of the concerns of the constituents who have written me. Constituents from whatever constituency have equal rights and they are entitled to be heard in the House.

One constituent has written to say that the Bill is an attempt to bring in by another route what are, effectively, same-sex marriages. The briefing that my hon. Friend sent me on how civil partnership works in France confirms that. She says that, once registered, the partners enjoy virtually the same tax, social security and property and inheritance rights and obligations as married couples except for the fact that they are not allowed to adopt children. Couples who have a civil registration will, in reality, have all the rights of a married couple. That is also clear from the wording that states that Bill would provide

"for registration to afford certain legal rights".

Such registration is not needed for heterosexual couples and my constituent would not wish it be extended to same-sex couples.

My constituent also points out that there is nothing to prevent such couples from making wills in one another's favour and that my hon. Friend's Bill would bring about a major redefinition of what is involved in marriage.

Homosexual relationships are not new but—notwithstanding references to other jurisdictions—every society has restricted marriages to heterosexual relationships that are intended to be monogamous and for life. Were there to be such a major change from that concept, there should be not only a public debate but a referendum. In any event, the Government's position is that marriage is the surest foundation for raising children and remains the choice of the majority of people in Britain.

I also draw the House's attention to the categorical assurance that the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), gave to me on the Floor of the House in the debate reported in *Hansard* on 25 January 1999, at column 22 of volume 324. He said that there would be no reduction in the age of consent to 14 for homosexual acts; that no legislation that suggested an acceptance of homosexual marriages would be proposed by the Government; and that there would be no legal adoption of children by homosexual couples. The former Home Secretary gave me

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

undertakings on all three points and said that it was not the Government's intention to introduce legislation in respect of any of those matters. I shall seek the same undertakings from the current Home Secretary.

I am on public record as being totally opposed to any form of discrimination—whether in the workplace or anywhere else—in relation to one's sexuality. However, I oppose the concept of civil partnership that my hon. Friend proposes. It would provide the same rights as those conferred by marriage, leading to an unravelling of the undertaking given to me by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn.

I shall oppose the Bill for all those reasons. I urge all my right hon. and hon. Friends to follow me in the Division Lobby.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 179, Noes 59.

Division No. 41] **[6.9 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allan, Richard
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Callon, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Hesford, Stephen
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miller, Andrew
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Osten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Price, Adam
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trickett, Jon
Vis, Dr Rudi
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wood, Mike
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Evan Harris and Chris McCafferty.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Burnside, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Fallon, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Francois, Mark
Grayling, Chris
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
MacDonald, Calum
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mudie, George
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Prisk, Mark
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Bob
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy

Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Marion Roe and
Mr. Andrew Rosindell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Jane Griffiths, Dr. Evan Harris, Mr. Simon Thomas, Chris McCafferty, Mr. Chris Smith, Glenda Jackson, Mr. David Lepper, Dr. Phyllis Starkey and Dr. Nick Palmer.

Relationships (Civil Registration)

Jane Griffiths accordingly presented a Bill to provide for civil registration of a relationship between two people who are cohabiting, and for such registration to afford certain legal rights; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November, and to be printed [Bill 36].

Orders of the Day

Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Before I call the Secretary of State, I should inform the House that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

6.21 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In a packed parliamentary programme, I am pleased to be able to introduce the Bill this evening. The Government regard it as a central part of our drive to keep our democracy relevant to and representative of the people whom we serve. Because I know that many hon. Members want to speak and because of the late hour at which the debate commenced, I shall restrict my comments.

When the Labour Government were elected in 1997, a record number of women Labour Members of Parliament entered the House. That was a result of the positive measures that had been taken by the Labour party to increase the representation of women. As a Minister since 1997, I firmly believe that several of the policies that the Government have adopted since 1997 came about because of the increased number of women Members of Parliament on the Government Benches.

We have improved maternity rights and pay. The package announced in the recent Budget increased maternity pay: the flat rate will rise to £75 a week from April next year, and to £100 a week from April 2003. The period for which maternity pay is available will also lengthen, from 18 to 26 weeks, from April 2003. That comes in addition to parental leave, time off for emergencies and the same rights for part-time workers as for full-time employees. The Government have also given a boost to the pay of low-paid workers, the majority of whom are women, through the introduction of the national minimum wage—£4.10 an hour, to be increased to £4.20 an hour in October 2002.

We have also established a national child care strategy to deliver choice by extending the provision of good-quality, affordable and accessible child care. More than 700,000 places were made available under the last Labour Government, and our target is to make 1.6 million available by 2004. We have also guaranteed a free nursery education place for every four-year-old whose parent wants it; that is to be extended to three-year-olds by 2004.

Those are all positive policies which were introduced because of the large number of Labour women Members in the previous Parliament. We should be proud of the real progress that was made as a result of their endeavours. Many of those policies were promoted and supported by women Members and the result is a package of measures that will make a real difference.

The positive discrimination measures that the Labour party introduced and employed in the period before the 1997 election were stopped as a result of a case brought

[Mr. Stephen Byers]

before an employment tribunal. The Jepson case put a brake on the development of positive measures to encourage the participation of women in our elected bodies. As a result of the case, the Labour party was unable to adopt the same positive measures for the 2001 general election.

It is no coincidence that, in 2001, we witnessed the first drop for 20 years in the number of women elected to the House of Commons. We have to admit that responsibility for that drop rests with all the political parties that are represented here. Since the Jepson case, in answer to the question, "What are you doing to improve and encourage the representation of women?", parties have been able to hide behind the decision made in that case and say that they cannot introduce positive discrimination measures because of the outcome of that employment tribunal.

Once the Bill is on the statute book, however, there will be no hiding place for political parties. They will face a stark choice: to do nothing and say that it will all work out all right in the end—just give it enough time—or to acknowledge that something positive and fundamental must be done and that the situation whereby women are starkly under-represented in our national Parliament and in local government has to change.

The statistics illustrate the need for steps to be taken: only 18 per cent. of Members of Parliament are female and three quarters of councillors are male. The argument that we should leave things as they are is, the Government believe, not sustainable. We know from our experience in the House of Commons that momentum to improve representation of women can be lost once positive measures are no longer in place. It is clear that there has to be a sustained effort.

That is not to say that there is not also a strong case for non-direct measures, such as basic equal opportunities training for selection panel members, or parties doing more to encourage participation in politics generally, at all levels and by all sections of the community. However, relying on improvements being made without direct intervention has been tried before and it has failed.

That view stopped the House of Lords being radically reformed until almost a century after the first attempts were made. It meant that there were 24 women members of the House of Commons in 1945, and almost 40 years later in 1983—four years after the election of the first female Prime Minister—there were only 23. It was that appalling lack of women Members of Parliament that made the Labour party introduce positive measures in respect of candidate selection before the 1997 general election.

As I said, the Labour party's approach was challenged in 1996 in the case of Jepson and the Labour party. In that case, an employment tribunal held that section 13 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 did cover the selection of candidates by political parties. That decision is the main reason why the Bill is before the House today. The Bill will amend the Sex Discrimination Act and provide that parts II to IV of the Act will not apply to measures adopted by a party to reduce inequality in the numbers of men and women elected as its candidates. Equivalent amendments to cover Northern Ireland are made to the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976.

The Bill allows political parties choice and flexibility, although the measures taken must be adopted for the purpose of reducing inequality. It leaves untouched all the other rights established under existing case law against discrimination in any other circumstances, as it rightly should, and leaves employment tribunals untouched as the forum for redress. That is the simplest and most focused option available to us. An important principle behind the Bill is that it is not the Government's role to regulate the internal workings of political parties, which would be wrong and inappropriate, so the Bill does not seek to do that. We do not want to dictate what measures could be introduced by political parties to reduce inequality. Indeed, the Bill does not force political parties to take any steps whatever. It is permissive; it simply allows political parties the freedom to decide what measures are appropriate in the circumstances to reduce inequality.

The Bill is not restricted to representation at Westminster. Although the extent of inequality varies between elected bodies in the United Kingdom, the Government believe that they all have significant room for improvement. Compared with Westminster, the devolved Administrations have been more successful in ensuring that women are represented. Women make up more than 37 per cent. of Members of the Scottish Parliament, and more than 41 per cent. of Members of the National Assembly for Wales. However, it is important that those bodies can increase, or at the very least maintain, the representation of women that they have achieved. It is therefore important that the Bill's provisions cover Scotland and Wales. I am pleased that, with the agreement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, they will cover Northern Ireland as well. There have been real improvements in Wales and Scotland and we want to make sure that they are maintained.

The Bill does not just reflect that position and deal with elections to the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the House of Commons, but—and this has received little attention—will cover the selection of candidates for local government elections. That is important, because many people serve their political apprenticeship in local government; they get used to engaging in political dialogue and debate and it may well be from their experience of local government that they feel able to stand for election to the House of Commons. I do not know whether Members share my experience of constituency surgeries, but it is clear that it is often women who campaign actively on local issues. It is women who come to my surgery to complain about things that are happening in their communities. We should look at ways in which we can involve women; doing so through local government is a positive way to allow that to happen in the political process.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does my right hon. Friend accept that if more women are to come into government, particularly local government, it is essential that vacancies be created to allow that to happen more speedily? Is he aware of what happened in the Republic of Ireland, where long-serving councillors were given a gratuity to enable them to leave, thereby creating vacancies for women? Does he not think that that would be helpful in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Byers: I have been trying to avoid the issue of councillors' allowances and pensions for the last two

weeks; I thought that that sort of intervention might come from Opposition Members. On a more serious note, I am aware of the scheme introduced in the Irish Republic, but I am not sure that we want to introduce it in the United Kingdom. However, my hon. Friend may have a list of serving councillors on Glasgow which he may wish to pass on; we can see if a local arrangement can be accommodated.

To return to the serious point about the number of women serving as locally elected councillors, in England, women councillors account for 27 per cent. of local councillors. In Wales, only 20 per cent. of unitary councillors are women. In Scotland, a survey conducted after local government reorganisation found that just over 22 per cent. of councillors were female. Clearly, therefore, there is a major issue of under-representation. Representation in political parties at local government level is low, for reasons of which people will be acutely aware. About 26 per cent. of both Conservative and Labour councillors are women. The Liberal Democrats do better; just over 33 per cent. of their councillors are women, but most people would agree that that figure is still far too low. Some councils do well; 50 per cent. of the councillors on Islington council, for example, are women. The Bill is drafted so that political parties can introduce positive measures to ensure that more women can stand for election as local councillors, and it is important that we recognise that.

After First Reading, I was asked what was the point of introducing a Bill when only the Labour party would use its provisions to introduce positive measures. It will quite rightly be for political parties to make their own decision, and positive measures will be introduced in different ways. However, it is important that the Bill is being introduced in this parliamentary Session because it will be next September or October that many political parties will determine at conference the method by which candidates for the next general election are selected. If we fail to enact the Bill in this Session, political parties will be unable to introduce election procedures allowing the use of positive measures. I am therefore personally grateful that the Government have been able to find time for the Bill.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): On the point about whether it would be only the Labour party that would adopt the measures, will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that, in my constituency at the last election, we had an all-female list of candidates for the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour parties? That was probably only because we had the encouragement of measures for positive action, and it meant that there was a woman MP. Does my right hon. Friend agree that once having women candidates and MPs is seen to be valuable, there will be pressures on all political parties to seek to use those positive measures to get more women candidates?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend has made an important point. People and political parties should be able to see that the priorities of, for example, the governing party reflect the number of women Members of Parliament, as I believe the policies that we adopted between 1997 and 2001 did. The relevance of those priorities to many people, particularly women, ensures that they reflect the priorities of the country's population. One reason why we were successful at the last election is that our programme had relevance because it built on the Government's experience from 1997 to 2001. Provided that there is an underpinning power to introduce positive measures, political parties will increasingly feel that they should use the freedom that we want to give them under the Bill to ensure a dramatic increase in the representation of women in the House, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and local government.

If we look at our own experience, we can see that positive measures are the only practical means by which we can increase women's representation. I know that there is an argument that we should give support by encouraging people and providing lots of training, as of course, we should. However, the only way to achieve genuine improvement in the representation of women is for political parties to adopt positive measures.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if success in selection and election to national and local bodies was based entirely on merit, there would be many more women in the House and our local councils? The Bill is about removing the barriers that stop women having the opportunities to succeed on merit, which is important. Opposition Members often diminish the significance of such measures to diminish women who want to put themselves forward but face huge barriers.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right. The Bill will give political parties that freedom and break down the barriers that exist. We must be honest enough in the debate to recognise that, whether we like it or not, those barriers are present in political parties. We must take on the arguments. The Bill will allow parties to have a debate about the positive measures that should be taken. Some political parties will resist positive measures. That will be their decision, but because we are removing the effect of the Jepson decision, there will be no hiding place for political parties. They will have to account to the electorate for any continuing under-representation of women on their Benches. That will be reflected in the way in which people vote in the general election.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: Yes, of course. I know that the hon. Gentleman has some interesting ideas on the subject.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I hope that I have some interesting ideas, and that I will have the opportunity to catch Madam Deputy Speaker's eye in order to explain them a little more. At this point, I am interested in the right hon. Gentleman's ideas. There are different methods of positive action. Parties may choose whether or not to introduce positive action, and they may choose different forms of positive action. To what extent might the Secretary of State contemplate the Labour party taking positive action? Is he advocating a return to the system of 1993–96 and women-only shortlists? More to the point, if he were advocating such a thing, does he think that, notwithstanding the Bill, it would be liable to challenge under the equal treatment directive?

Mr. Byers: Clearly, it will be a matter for individual political parties to decide on any measures that they want

[Mr. Byers]

to take by way of positive discrimination. We have carefully considered the methods that the various parties have used. The Liberal Democrats have used particular methods for particular elections. In the run-up to the 1997 election, we had all-women shortlists. All those have been examined in relation to the equal treatment directive. The legal advice that we have received is that, provided positive action is proportionate to the issue, there will be no legal problem.

To understand why positive measures are necessary, we need only look at the level of women's representation in the House: 23 per cent. of Labour Members of Parliament are women. For the Conservatives, the figure is just over 8 per cent., and for the Liberal Democrats, just over 9 per cent. The Liberal Democrat conference was told last month that if just 4,149 votes had gone the other way, the Liberal Democrats would have had no women Members of Parliament at all. That shows how fragile women's representation is on the Liberal Democrat Benches.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I am about to conclude, as I know that many hon. Members want to contribute to the debate.

The Bill will allow political parties to take positive action. The Government believe that it is right to give political parties that freedom. I hope that the Bill will be supported in all parts of the House, and that we can send out a clear signal that the status quo is simply not an option, that action must be taken, and that the issue of women's under-representation must be addressed as a priority. That is what the Bill will achieve. I commend it to the House.

6.43 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): It is a pleasure to speak on the Bill. I listened with great interest to the opening speech by the Secretary of State, including the long list of measures that he read out which the Government have taken to help women into the workplace. No one in the House is in any doubt of his personal commitment to keeping women in the workplace.

The Bill is an enabling Bill designed to allow political parties the freedom to take positive action to try to secure a greater representation of women as Members of the House. I make it clear from the start that the official Opposition will not oppose the Bill. That is a position that we struck as a party when the Bill was first mooted before the election, and I am pleased to confirm that position today. We support both the aim and the principle that underlie the legislation—the aim to get more women into Parliament, and the principle that political parties should have the freedom to decide how to achieve that and to determine their own selection procedures.

It may be helpful if, at this early stage of the debate, I make it clear that our support for the principle of the Bill does not mean that my party or I support the concept of women-only shortlists.

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): In that case, can the hon. Lady tell us what measures her party might take?

Mrs. May: If the hon. Gentleman will wait until I have got a little way into my speech, I will deal with that. *[Interruption.]* The speech is about our position on the Bill. I will outline some of the steps that the Conservative party has taken, and some of the steps that we might take.

In his intervention, the hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) illustrated the point that I was about to make. It is sad and frustrating that the debate about the need to get more women into Parliament and how that can be achieved is so often side-tracked into a discussion about all-women shortlists. There are those who, when the subject is raised, leap to the conclusion that it means all-women shortlists. It does not.

There are those who—dare I say it?—are opposed to the overall aim of increasing female representation in the House, who use all-women shortlists in order to frighten the horses, if I may use that term. However, those who support the aim of increased female representation should also have a care not to jeopardise that aim by assuming that extreme measures are the only ones that will be successful.

The Secretary of State referred to the fact that prior to the 1997 election and the legal challenge to what the Labour party was doing, the Labour party used all-women shortlists, but that is not what the debate is about. The debate is about giving political parties the freedom to pursue the legitimate aim of getting more women into Parliament through whatever means suit their particular needs and circumstances. It is up to individual parties to assess the extent to which they have a problem and to find ways of resolving it.

The Bill gives us and other parties the freedom from the threat of legal action and the freedom to take whatever form of positive action we choose. It is important that the Bill is permissive, not prescriptive. It does not introduce all-women shortlists, but takes the selection of candidates for election out of that part of employment law relating to sex discrimination.

This issue often gives rise to highly emotive debate, and it is important that we lay some of the myths to rest. I am standing at the Dispatch Box not because I believe that Parliament should be rigidly statistically representative of the make-up of the population as a whole, or because I believe that without more women in Parliament, women's issues will never be properly represented. I am a firm believer that all MPs should represent the needs and interests of all their constituents. That means men getting involved in issues that particularly affect women, as well as women getting involved in issues that particularly affect men.

I shall be honest with the House. There was a time when I never thought that I would stand up in the Chamber and support such a Bill. I am standing here because I believe there are many women who are not being selected and elected who would make first-class Members of Parliament, and that Parliament as a whole, and my party in particular, is losing out on a pool of talent that would strengthen the House and enhance its public image.

The Bill is about more than strengthening the image of politics and the House. I fear that young women in particular are turned off politics because they do not see it as being for people like them. When I was thinking earlier today about what to say in the debate, I confess that my immediate thought was to make the point that many young women were put off Parliament because they see it as a sea of grey suits—although I suppose I am not in a position to make that comment today.

Over the years, Labour and Conservatives alike have achieved significant milestones in the history of women in the House. The first woman to take her seat in the House, although not the first woman elected to the House, was a Conservative. The first woman Minister and later first woman member of the Cabinet was a Labour party member. Of course, the first woman Prime Minister was a Conservative. Both parties can claim to have had their successes in promoting women in Parliament.

As part of the move to involve more women in active politics after the introduction of female suffrage in 1918, the Conservative party agreed to reserve one third of all positions in the party hierarchy for women. Nowadays, I am pleased to say that women achieve positions in the party hierarchy without the need for such positive action. Notwithstanding the milestones that have been achieved, Westminster ranks 33rd in the world in terms of women's representation, with only 18 per cent. of Members of Parliament in this House being women, as the Secretary of State said.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The hon. Lady is making a very supportive speech. She has declared her backing of the Bill and her interest in it. However, does she not feel that the whole of her parliamentary party should be seen in the Lobby or should at least clearly show its support for the Bill throughout the debate? Is she sure that she has the support of the shadow Leader of the House, for example?

Mrs. May: I can happily assure the hon. Lady that the shadow Cabinet is of one mind on this matter.

As I said, I do not advocate a strict, statistically correct approach, but I believe that we need to ask whether selection procedures in political parties are currently ensuring that women who would make excellent Members of Parliament are overlooked simply because they are women or because the procedure operates against them.

The Labour party's use of all-women shortlists in 1997 led to a dramatic increase in the number of women in the House, although it was challenged in the European courts. *[Interruption.]* It was challenged in an industrial tribunal, but I think that an issue was raised later concerning European legislation with regard to all-women shortlists. European legislation has already been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). The Secretary of State will be aware that we do not oppose the Bill, but those who understand that it is important for this legislation to be enacted believe that it behoves Ministers to be certain that it will not fall foul of European law. I trust that the winding-up speech will include a categorical assurance that that is the case.

I would like to pick up one of the issues raised by the Secretary of State in relation to local councils. The right hon. Gentleman made a very good point about their importance as a possible route into Westminster and a good training ground for Members of Parliament. Obviously, being a local councillor is a valuable thing to do in its own right. I have been a local councillor, as, indeed, has the Secretary of State, and I know from experience that many of the people who are elected to our local councils would also make good Members of Parliament and can see from working in a council that their ambition could go further. Personally, I have always felt that we should encourage councillors to look to Westminster and consider coming here.

I have already emphasised that the Bill is about the principle of allowing political parties to take positive action to encourage the election of more women to Parliament. Thus, as the Secretary of State said, its timing is significant. It is important that it is introduced early in the current Parliament to enable political parties to make decisions about their selection procedures. That applies especially in respect of the next general election, although other elections are coming along, such as those for the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and so on.

A number of measures can be taken. Before the last election, the Conservative party had a policy of encouraging our constituency associations to interview at least the same proportion of women as applied for the seat. We are now in the process of reconsidering our selection procedures to see what further measures need to be taken to ensure that women are not discriminated against in the selection process.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Does the hon. Lady still hold the view that young women who are considering a parliamentary career should not do so until their families are in a position to be left?

Mrs. May: I have never held such a view or expressed such an opinion. I suspect that the hon. Lady has read an incorrect report that was featured on BBC Online some months ago. BBC Online made corrections as soon as I saw that the remarks that had supposedly been made were attributed to me, and the production was changed. I am sorry to say that a member of the Conservative party enunciated the views that were expressed, but they have never been mine and I would never make such remarks.

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Will my hon. Friend confirm that Baroness Thatcher became a Member of Parliament when she had twin children aged six?

Mrs. May: I am very happy to confirm that. Those who have been through the Conservative party selection process consider that the election of Baroness Thatcher at a time when she was the mother of young children showed even more the remarkable nature of that particular lady.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Will the hon. Lady also confirm that Baroness Thatcher argued very strongly, on returning to this country after a visit to Moscow, against the provision of child care places? She did so because of the examples that she had seen in the then USSR of poor little children being taken to nurseries at 6 o'clock in the morning.

Mrs. May: I am happy to tell the hon. Lady that I have no knowledge of that particular comment of Baroness Thatcher. All I can say is that parties move on in their attitudes to some of these things.

I come now to the part of my speech in which I can respond to the intervention of the hon. Member for Wirral, West. I wish to speak about a proposal that I have made, together with my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire. I am pleased that my hon. Friend is present, as he has long been a champion of the cause of

[Mrs. May]

getting more women into Parliament—as, indeed, have a number of my hon. Friends who are sitting behind me.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): And beside you.

Mrs. May: I am very pleased to confirm that they are also sitting next to me.

We propose a limited list that is more balanced between men and women, and which includes a proportion of candidates from ethnic minority communities. Such a balanced and limited list would enable associations to continue to have the freedom to select their own candidates, but from a candidates' list that is balanced between men and women. It has long been my contention that one of the measures that my party needs to take is to increase the number of women on our candidates' lists. A limited and balanced list would enable constituencies to choose from men and women in equal numbers.

Stephen Hesford: In reality, we know that Conservative associations can choose whoever they want. They do not have to choose candidates from the list. If they wanted to avoid the issue and choose whoever they wanted, they could do so.

Mrs. May: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments. I suspect that he has never tried to stand as a Conservative candidate, as it is obvious that he does not know as much about the party's procedures as he thinks. There is a candidates' list and associations have the freedom to choose from people whose names are on that list, but they cannot choose from outside it. Limited and balanced lists would therefore help to resolve inequalities. I think that the introduction of such lists is a positive measure that could well be adopted.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): Is the hon. Lady aware that, before the 1992 election, the Labour party had a policy of including at least one woman on every shortlist, but completely failed to succeed in selecting more women? Does she agree that a positive measure is required?

Mrs. May: I accept that view. I have spoken to a number of people about the sort of measures that parties have adopted in the past. The idea to which the hon. Lady refers, which has been debated in the Conservative party, does not always ensure the sort of positive results that we are seeking. As I said, however, my party is currently considering its selection procedure and concepts such as that of a limited [redacted] gender-balanced list from which associations can choose their candidates. The number of women on such a list would ensure that more women were selected to fight for seats.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): The hon. Lady and I have had a number of conversations on this subject, and I well understand the support that she is expressing today. Do the proposals that she and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) have been discussing include any targets regarding the number of years that it might take for the Conservative party to increase the number of women by, say, 20 per cent. or 25 per cent?

Mrs. May: The hon. Lady will know that it is always difficult to predict election results and to know which seats one will be able to win, so it is difficult to predict the number of years that it will take to reach a particular point.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) *rose—*

Joan Ryan *rose—*

Mrs. May: I am answering the intervention that I have just taken. I hope that the two hon. Ladies who have just risen will forgive me for not giving way, as I am about to finish my speech. A lot of hon. Members want to make their own points in the debate and it is only fair to give them that opportunity. I shall complete my answer to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock). If we had a limited list, we could have a target number of seats. For example, we could have 100 seats, which were divided 50:50, so that we might be looking at getting 50 women into Parliament. We could approach the issue in that way, rather than having a target number of years, which might be more difficult to work with.

I am grateful for the latitude that you have given me, Madam Deputy Speaker. I realise that we are not here to debate the internal procedures of any particular political party. However, I have raised those points because it is important to show that the Conservative party is examining the kinds of positive action that can be taken to get more women selected without going down the route of all-women shortlists—positive action that a party would have the freedom to pursue under the provisions of the Bill.

I repeat to the Government that we share their aim of seeing more women elected to Parliament, and we welcome the fact that the Bill will clarify the legal position on positive action in the selection of election candidates. We welcome the permissive principle in the Bill that individual political parties should have the freedom to determine their own selection procedures, and I hope that at the next election we shall all be able to see the life of Parliament enhanced by the election of more women as Members of Parliament.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. May I remind hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a time limit of 10 minutes on Back-Bench speeches?

7.1 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I shall begin by thanking my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench for introducing the Bill with such speed after the Queen's Speech. I also pay tribute to the present Minister for Women and her predecessors who, I have no doubt, worked long and hard to ensure that the House had the opportunity to debate this important issue. I say that with the slight cavil that there is something rather depressing about the fact that, here in the somewhat ironically named mother of Parliaments, in the second year of the 21st century, we are having to debate how to increase the equality of opportunity for women.

I was extremely encouraged by the speech made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), leading for the official Opposition. I must be honest—I had expected to hear ferocious arguments emanating from those on the

Conservative Benches. In the light of the expressions of a couple of female hon. Members sitting behind her, we might still hear some fierce opposition to what is being proposed. We have a side bet running on these Benches as to who will be the first to use the words "token" and "patronising". There is not a lot of money on it, however.

It is particularly important that the Bill does not attempt to prescribe the methods that political parties use to ensure a more honest reflection of the gender balance of this country. I was surprised to discover from the excellent briefing document produced by the Library that the gender division in the United Kingdom is not, as I had thought, 50:50, but 51 per cent. women. I was interested in the point made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead that there must be more women in the House—I realise that I am paraphrasing—to reflect those issues that are important to women. I have never argued, and I know that the hon. Lady was not arguing, that we need more women because—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): She did not say that.

Glenda Jackson: If the hon. Gentleman would be rather more silent, he would realise that I was making the point that the hon. Lady was not saying that we need more women because only women can proselytise on issues important to women. I have never believed that there is something called a "women's issue". The issues that have made law in this and every other democratic assembly around the world affect, directly and indirectly, the women in those countries. Women are not an homogenous group. There are as many varied political opinions as there are women's views on how we should, dress, bring up our children, and treat or mistreat our male partners.

To ensure that the life of this Chamber makes a continuing and energising contribution to the democracy of this and other nation states, it is important that we begin to reflect more accurately how the lives of women have changed and continue to change. I do not accept that every woman who comes into this place must be a genius. We shall not have achieved what I desire if the make-up of this place is a conglomeration of human abilities and human moralities, which in the short term would mean that everyone sitting on these green Benches would be a saint or ready for sanctification. That is not what this Chamber should be about. This Chamber should be a reflection of the democratic life of this country—its prejudices as much as its liberalities. There should be a place here for a second-rate woman, as heaven only knows there are places for second-rate men, and have been for a considerable period of time during the history of this establishment.

The hon. Lady referred to grey suits. Young women—whether visiting the Chamber to listen to our debates, watching them on television or listening to them on the radio—regard the procedures and practices of this place as totally irrelevant to their lives. They cannot perceive anything in this place that is meaningful to their lives, or, more important, any contribution that they could make. That is why it is vital that political parties change the way in which we select our candidates. This is the central and essential issue.

If we are going to make our democratic processes in central and local government rather more exciting to the electorate, we must ensure that democracy can grow, develop and change. It will have to change. The world at the moment is attempting to come to terms with fundamental and basic changes. When ones reads or listens to exchanges arising, for example, out of the obscenities of 11 September, lip service is being paid to the drastic changes in the world, but there is very little change in our approach to these issues, either philosophically or morally. Certainly there are political changes, but it is one thing to say that we want change, and quite another to deliver it. That is why we have to attach and attract future generations, particularly women.

What is a political arena essentially about? Surely it is about individuals coming together to create a society in which the unique nature of every member of that society can be fostered and encouraged, and in which everyone can live in a structured way without impediment to discovery or dissent, and without going over the precipice into extremes of violence or refusing to listen to anyone else's point of view. A political arena is about how people construct those societies, and how they develop ways of living together and supporting each other across a wide range of realities.

Here, I have to make my only gender-biased point. It is that I believe that the lives of most women are infinitely entrenched in the realities of the exchanges between individual human beings, partly because we are expected to carry responsibility across a wide range of lives in our own countries. We are expected to be—nine times out of 10 we are—responsible for raising children and caring for elderly parents. We are expected to take the role of nurse, doctor, psychiatrist, business manager, chauffeur, gardener, plumber, electrician, window cleaner—you name it, that is what we are expected to do. We are equally expected to have an interest in and commitment to not only our immediate family but our wider community in the world.

It has been my pleasant experience always to have met and worked with women who are only too happy to accept those responsibilities. They regard them in many ways as a privilege, because the benefits of that day in, day out exchange with human beings can be immense and, indeed, intense. Such commitment—the rooted sense of what it is to be a human being, with all the accompanying frailties and strengths—is one of my main reasons for wanting 50 per cent. of these Benches to be filled by those of my gender.

7.10 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) because I very much agree with the points that she made. I shall return to them in a moment. First, however, I must dispel some of the illusions about the Bill. Its scope has been criticised—admittedly not in the House tonight, but outside. Some have said, "Why aren't we dealing with other under-represented groups?" Of course, there is a central difference between women and, for example, those ethnic groups that might think that we should do something for them. Women are a majority in this country and in our view that demands a separate approach and a separate priority.

It is only right to refer to minorities, however, if only because we are missing the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who has an

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

interesting view about their representation. He was quoted speaking at a No Turning Back Group dinner, whatever that may mean:

"All this sucking up to minorities is ridiculous. There are millions of people in this country who are white, Anglo-Saxon and bigoted, and they need to be represented".

I do not subscribe to that view, but there may be people on the Conservative Benches who do.

I am delighted with the support given to the Bill by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who made a good speech. I hope that all parties find it in their hearts to examine carefully what they will do under the legislation, even though it is only permissive. That is an extremely important point that she made, and one to which I shall return—but first the context.

The Secretary of State made a lot of claims about the great improvements made by the Government, but I draw his attention to the fact that, since 1997 and despite all his efforts and those of the Government to improve the representation of women in public bodies generally, there has been only a 1.8 per cent. increase in the number of women appointees to public bodies. The Department of Social Security, the Treasury, what was the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Office of Telecommunications, the Inland Revenue, the Scotland Office and the Northern Ireland Office all have a smaller percentage of women on their public bodies than in 1997. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) for extracting those figures from the Government.

On current trends, the Cabinet Office and the Department of Health will reach 50 per cent. in time for a general election in 2005. The Department for Education and Skills may make it within two Parliaments and the Home Office within three. However, we cannot make predictions for the Lord Chancellor's Department, which makes some extremely important appointments, because it has exactly the same percentage as in 1997. The time taken to reach the target in that example could be infinite.

We approach the debate in that context, to which attention has already been drawn by no less a person than the Commissioner for Public Appointments, Dame Rennie Fritchie. She described the 1 per cent. drop in the overall representation of women between 1999 and 2000 as "disappointing" and warned of the inadequacies of the present legal situation. She added that those responsible for appointments

"must however ensure that any initiative or positive action they take to encourage or achieve wider representation is within the law."

We entirely endorse the Government's view that the legislation is necessary, but the debate involves more than how the parties respond to it. Getting more women to stand and getting more women elected is all very well—it is urgently necessary—but it is not enough. It is essential that, once we attract more women to this place, we make it a better place for them to work in. That is not enough in itself either, because, of course, that is not a gender issue. We must make the House a better place for everybody to work in, especially the parents of young children, and it is extremely important to re-emphasise that point in the context of the legislation.

I have had the privilege to serve on the Modernisation Committee during the previous and present Parliaments. We have been concerned not with spending less time here, but with making our time more productive. That must surely apply to all Members of the House, whatever their gender, age or background. Similarly, it is extremely important to refer to a point made by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate in her eloquent speech: we cannot merely make minor adjustments to working hours and conditions—we must consider the culture of this place.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton), who is recently elected and obviously able to consider the matter from a woman's point of view, is able to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, and expand the point. Having been around this place for a long time, it is clear to me that, all too often, women find themselves marginalised and even belittled.

During the speech of the hon. Member for Maidenhead, there were moments when some male Members on the other side of the House treated her in a way that they would not treat a male Front-Bench spokesperson. We must address that, because it does no credit to the House and it certainly does no good when it is seen on television or heard on radio.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I never noticed such treatment.

Mr. Tyler: The right hon. Lady is a law unto herself and I would not attempt to categorise her in any way, gender or otherwise.

The real problem is the culture of this place, which is a Chamber in which loud male voices tend to predominate. Let us consider what happens at Prime Minister's questions. Those loud male voices lack respect and courtesy. Okay, we understand that there are moments of high tension and high passion, but not many women want to bellow into the microphone or from a sedentary position.

I understand that there are always exceptions, but it is not enough to say, "Wasn't it wonderful? We happen to have had our first woman Prime Minister in this country." Her husband was able to provide the facilities for personal child care. I do not think that he personally provided that care, but the funds were there to make child care available. That is not enough, however, and it is clearly not an acceptable focus for the issue.

I simply underline the general points made by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate about the culture of this place. Furthermore, the political parties must change. Members from all three major parties will have witnessed those occasions when women candidates are asked questions that would not be asked of a man in a comparable position. We all need to examine that. My own party has sought to deal with it by training and example, but I am the first to admit that we have not been wholly successful.

Similarly, it is not enough simply to deal with the exclusion of women from the political process. We must try to retain them. Labour Members will remember the high-profile exodus from the House of a Member who simply did not feel that her place was here. There may be particular reasons behind that case, but I believe that it represents a critical analysis of the way we operate and it is extremely important that we address it. Even if it applies only to a minority of women who want to become Members of Parliament, it is a perfectly valid point that we must take into account.

In the end, the whole exercise is not about favouritism or doing women a good turn. It is about ensuring that we all, and parliamentary democracy itself, benefit from improving the quality of our work, tapping the talents of more than half the population and taking full advantage of the particular skills of those who could bring to the job something that we desperately need. I accept the point that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate made in that connection.

I am bound to say that there are differing views in my party about the necessity for the legislation. I for one am not an optimist. Like Mr. Gladstone, I am an old man in a hurry, so I am not prepared to wait for the results of an attempt at encouragement from some of my colleagues. That is why we made a commitment in our manifesto to deal with the need for

"more family friendly and efficient working practices for Parliament to bring a wider range of people, particularly women, into Parliament and . . . enactment of an Equality Act."

At our spring conference this year, we reinforced that point.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I believe we need to kick-start the process, and that protective legislation is essential to ensure that it is effective. That applies equally to local government.

I was slightly disappointed that the Secretary of State gave the impression that it was important to help women to enter local authority work because it was a useful kindergarten for this place. Local government needs the legislation for its own sake as much as we do. In comparative terms our local government figure—33 per cent.—is rather good, but it is not good enough. Our target is 40 per cent., and I hope that the other parties will take the point too.

As I said earlier, we accept the permissive nature of the Bill. We believe that the Government had two options, and took the right one. They could have been prescriptive, which we think would have been inappropriate. Permissiveness gives the political parties an opportunity to respond to the challenge within the terms of their own party democracy and their own objectives. In making the Bill permissive, however, the Government have taken on a responsibility that they must openly acknowledge. If we take advantage of these measures, there are still likely to be considerable costs. The Government have made no regulatory impact assessment—a phrase used by them—but there is an impact on the parties, and they should assess it.

The Government's attitude is patent nonsense. Political parties are businesses or charities, or they are both. To say that there will be no impact and no likely regulatory cost is simply wrong. We ask the Government to consider the issue again, perhaps in Committee. I assure them that, if they do not, my noble Friend Lord Lester—who I think is the world expert on this subject—will want to deal with it in the other place. In his view, the Bill as drafted does not fully protect parties against an expensive legal challenge, although such a challenge might not succeed. There is a precedent, in the Neill recommendations on the funding and registration of political parties, for the Government to accept that this is a perfectly legitimate use of public funds.

The Minister who will reply may wish to contemplate the fact that his party is likely to be first in the dock. I think that the Government should come clean. They will have to assess the cost of the legal advice that may be necessary. Legal uncertainty has bedevilled this issue for many years in the case of both Labour and my party, and it is extremely important that progress towards equal representation is not delayed again because the necessary funding has not been available.

There should be no doubt about the fact that the permissive agenda is absolutely right, but there may be real doubts about whether we shall make progress if the parties are left to themselves to defend themselves against aggrieved applicants at either parliamentary or local government level. That has already been mentioned.

My colleagues and I are certain that these measures are necessary now. As the Secretary of State has said, other electoral systems facilitate equal representation in a way that ours currently does not. The balance of male and female members of other Parliaments and assemblies is affected not just by selection procedures but by electoral systems. In the Swedish Parliament, 43 per cent. of members—elected through proportional representation—are women. The percentages are 36.4 in the Norwegian Parliament, and 31 per cent. in the German Parliament. My figures for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly are not quite the same as the Secretary of State's: according to my figures, 36.4 per cent. of those elected to the Scottish Parliament under PR were women, as were 38.3 per cent. of those elected to the Welsh Assembly. I suspect that that may be because there have subsequently been changes in the composition of those bodies. In any event, the percentages are far higher than those in the Westminster Parliament.

Incidentally, the Secretary of State did not mention that 40 per cent. of members of the Greater London Assembly are women—again, elected according to a fairer system. According to my figures, 17.9 per cent. of Members of the House of Commons are women, whereas in the last Parliament the percentage was 18.2.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the higher percentage of women in the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament is due to the twinning mechanism introduced by the Labour party, rather than to the list system?

Mr. Tyler: That may be true in the case of the Labour party, but my party managed to achieve precise equality—50 per cent.—in Wales because of the electoral system as well as our internal arrangements. It was a combination of the two.

I do not claim that there is a magic wand. What I do say is that the Bill is urgently needed now, but I hope and believe that it is strictly temporary, for two reasons. First, there is a very welcome sunset clause. If we manage to achieve a better balance in the House, it can die the death and wither on the vine. Secondly, I believe that in the long term the case for electoral reform—of this House as well as other bodies in the country—is so strong that we will find it easier to ensure equality and a gender balance.

The Bill, then, is temporary but also urgently required. On that basis, I hope that it will be supported by members of all parties.

7.26 pm

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I am delighted by the introduction of the Bill, and delighted to have an opportunity to speak.

[Helen Jackson]

I shall never forget why I fought so hard to win the seat that I now represent. When, as a fairly mature politician aged over 50, I decided—fairly tentatively—to fight for the coming vacancy, my young male colleagues on the local council, who had been there for about a third as long as I had and had about a third of my experience, greeted my decision with the words "You? We never thought that you were interested".

It struck me then that it was simply not in their thinking that I might be a competitor. They clearly saw each other as competitors, and were keen to get on with the selection ballot; but they had not reckoned that someone like me—although I had a great deal more experience and good sense than they—was likely to throw her hat in the ring.

That made me think. My experience of life was substantial: for many years I spent time waiting for my children at school gates and attending school meetings, I worked part time to accommodate school hours and school holidays, I travelled with pushchairs on buses, I worked as a carer for my elderly parents in the years before they died and was generally a pretty active political and community person. All that experience, however, counted for nothing when people were considering who might represent them. From that time, I thought "My experience is relevant to politics." I had known that it was relevant in local government, but it then occurred to me that it was more important to be able to speak at national level, and I worked hard towards that.

Women form the majority of users of the public services that receive the bulk of the funds that we parliamentarians provide, yet they form a small minority of members of executive committees. Only 11 per cent. of architects are women. Few women are transport executives, health service managers, senior civil servants giving our Ministers advice or, indeed, decision makers like us, here and in the other place. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said, it is an important disparity in domestic politics that needs redressing.

Labour has struggled to put those policies into practice within the party, but we need the support of a decision at national level—we need the whole Parliament, not just the party, to be in favour of achieving equality in representation.

The issue goes wider than domestic politics. It is important to the whole world, particularly areas in conflict. At the beginning of the previous Parliament, I was asked by Mo Mowlam to be her Parliamentary Private Secretary. She asked me to keep people here informed and to do the talking that PPSs do with Back Benchers, but she also asked me to make and to keep in contact with women in Northern Ireland, to listen to them, to hear them and to talk with them. She did not think that she would hear those voices, with the best will in the world, from her officials and advisers or from the gentlemen of the media in Northern Ireland. She gave me that fairly behind-the-scenes role, in which I was accepted by successive Secretaries of State. The four or five years that I spent working in that context made some difference to the important outcome and implementation of the Good Friday agreement, about which we have been saying, "Well done" to each other today.

I found that after years of conflict in Northern Ireland there was a vibrant group of active women at community level, active women's centres and a huge women's adult education programme. Women in the churches were working together, as were women in business, but there was an equally strong antipathy among those same women to participating in organised politics. At that time, there was not one woman here from Northern Ireland in any political party. That has now changed. We have one very welcome woman from the Ulster Unionist party here today. It was clear in those days that that was not really on that party's agenda.

We are now in another difficult world conflict. I was struck by *The Guardian* poll not long ago that said that only 68 per cent. of women, compared with 80 per cent. of men, were totally convinced that heavy bombing of Afghanistan was the way forward. As the Prime Minister has said frequently in the House, most hon. Members recognise that bombing a very poor country on the other side of the world will not alone be the answer to the huge difficulty that we face. Now is the time to be hearing, to be listening to and to be talking with women around the world—in Islamic countries, but also elsewhere—about the longer-term outcome and how we get through the international crisis.

Many people who had the privilege of attending the United Nations Beijing conference for women and the follow-up conference said that one of the most moving elements of the meetings was the chance to talk to women from the Islamic world and from other parts of the world with a different cultural viewpoint. They were able to come together around the big issues that unite women worldwide—children, caring, education, health—and talk together from totally different viewpoints of poverty and wealth. Now is the time to make it clear that this mother of Parliaments is the right place to say that women's voices are crucial in politics both here and worldwide.

7.35 pm

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I appreciate the opportunity to speak in this debate. I share many of the views of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) about the particular strengths of women and the degree of suffering and disadvantage of women in many parts of the world.

I need to declare two interests. First, I am vice-chair of the British Council. It works in many of the countries represented at the Beijing conference, in which women do not have access to the education and health care that is needed. They pay the price without any of the privileges, and much needs to be done. Secondly, I am chair of a not-for-profit public sector practice of recruitment headhunters, so I speak with special knowledge of and commitment to the role of women. Of course, my ministerial life was very much involved with trying to secure more female appointments. On the basis of that, and feeling strongly about the need for more women in Parliament, I hope that hon. Members will understand why I have some reservations about where the Bill may lead.

I feel passionately about women playing an active part. Much more can be done. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) talked about the Government's failure to deliver on their objective to appoint more women to the public sector. One of the measures that I

took when I became a Minister at the Department of Health was to insist that the NHS joined Opportunity 2000—the biggest employer of women in the world should be the best employer of women in the world. To a degree of ribaldry, particularly from my own colleagues, I insisted that we joined and set targets. Those targets were monitored and for the most part delivered.

Thirty-nine per cent. of non-executive appointments were filled by women in 1994. The percentage of women who were chairs of new NHS trusts rose to more than 30 per cent. We exceeded the targets. We did so because I had two magnificent women as my allies: Dame Rennie Fritchie, now the Commissioner for Public Appointments, and my noble Friend Baroness Cumberlege. Together we tried to ensure that coaching, mentoring and encouraging schemes were introduced throughout the NHS. Far more women were appointed to non-executive posts. Among them were familiar names such as Baroness Dean, Baroness Jay, Baroness Hayman, my noble Friend Baroness Park, Ruth Deetch and Julia Neuberger. When people are committed to finding women who have talent and merit, it can be done. However, no one suggested that the programme that we set in place was unlawful. My concern is that Parliament is proposing to change the rules for political parties, but not for the rest of the country.

One of the areas in which I was particularly involved was the encouraging of a rise in the number of female consultants. I must declare another interest. As a junior gynaecologist, my daughter benefits from the supernumerary specialist registrar scheme for women doctors with young children, which I understand is now under threat. That practical measure was available to help people to combine their careers, overcome obstacles and end up, I hope, as hospital consultants.

I do not believe that we should act only for Members of Parliament. I dare say that the people of this country care rather more about teachers, for example, than they do about Members of Parliament. I say that with regret, and I am very proud to be a Member of Parliament, but I believe that an opinion poll of our constituents would show that teachers receive a higher rating than we do.

Having spent my previous career working in the inner city, in a child guidance unit and as the chairman of a juvenile court, I very much share the view that many children with fragmented families have no male role model. I therefore feel very strongly that there is a real child welfare and development issue at primary schools where there are no male teachers. Yet we are not proposing to have all-male shortlists for primary schools.

My worry is what the public will make of our passing legislation that is specifically for Members of Parliament when we are not prepared to pass similar legislation for other professional groups. I believe that if the legislation has to be amended, it has to be amended for a number of groups and not only for hon. Members. If we do not do that, we shall be seen to be giving ourselves different and preferential treatment.

Joan Ruddock: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. I believe that when there is a time limit on Back-Bench speeches hon. Members no longer lose time by allowing interventions. Does the right hon. Lady not see a distinction between elected office and paid employment in other professions? It is the representative nature of the job that we do that sets us apart.

Virginia Bottomley: I find that a very dubious argument. I am very concerned about child development. Indeed, I am as concerned about children being raised with a good experience of both men and women as I am about women being represented proportionally in this place.

Although I want Parliament to do much more on the issue, I recognise that we have already come a long way. Margot Asquith, a Liberal Prime Minister's wife, said:

"No amount of education will make women first-rate politicians. Can you see a woman becoming Prime Minister? I cannot imagine a greater calamity for these islands than to be put under the guidance of a woman in 10 Downing Street."

Margot Asquith died in 1945. One of the people who most influenced me in my parliamentary journey was the late Baroness Seear, who was bitterly opposed to special measures for women. Her view was that, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said, an hon. Member's job is to represent their constituency, including men, women, the able-bodied, the disabled, the young, the old, the rich and the poor. The next step may be to establish special measures for those who are over 60, under 30, able-bodied or disabled. We are setting a very sensitive precedent.

I think that the House is united in wishing to address the issue of whether more should be done on ethnic minority representation. When I was chairman of a juvenile court 30 years ago, we made particular efforts to try to recruit people from ethnic minorities to serve in the courts, so that the courts had the confidence of the local community. Hon. Members are, however, behaving as though we are quite unlike any other group.

I have already mentioned the Liberal party. The Labour party, with its tradition of very male-dominated, white trade unions has made a huge change. I welcome the number of women Members and especially the number of women who are serving as Ministers. I hope that hon. Members can learn some lessons without being accused of having legislation that covers us but not other equally influential and important groups.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): I appreciate that the right hon. Lady cares deeply about this issue. Does she accept, however, that there is legal recourse for women who believe that they are as talented and able as male counterparts, but feel that they have suffered gender discrimination at work, and that such recourse simply does not exist in the political sphere? Although hon. Members are subject to sex discrimination legislation that is supposed to protect us, we do not receive any of its benefits. If we want to rectify the democratic deficit and low election turnouts, we have to pay attention to women such as one of my constituents, who never became involved in politics until 1997—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Could we keep interventions quite short? Time is very limited.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: My constituent said that she now watches the House's proceedings because there are more

[Mrs. Fitzsimons]

women in this place who look like her. Now, as she thinks that our proceedings have something to do with her, she is engaged in the political process for the first time.

Virginia Bottomley: I shall certainly pursue that point. I believe that it is enlightened self-interest for all political parties to ensure that more women are elected. We all should and can do much more. Earlier, I gave an example of a programme for which I was responsible and that delivered results. I agree that the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats have not yet delivered the results that we should, but I have been enormously encouraged by the action that my hon. Friends the Members for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) have taken already to ensure that we do better and learn more.

In 1984, when I was seeking selection as a candidate, selection committees seriously asked me questions such as, "Mrs. Bottomley, if you want to vote one way and your husband wants you to vote another way, which way will you vote?" A leading Liberal Democrat in the Isle of Wight wrote to the local paper to ask, "Why is Mrs. Bottomley going round meetings, factories and schools? Why is she not making supper for her children?" My children sharply replied, "Mum, she hasn't tried your suppers."

I endorse the comments of the previous Speaker, Betty Boothroyd, when she talked about the danger of the appearance that hon. Members were too concerned about their own convenience and not sufficiently concerned about their duties to the House. In the case of women parliamentarians, I worry that if we go too far in trying to seem that we are quite unlike any other group, we shall alienate the public rather than gaining their support. What we must have and can deliver is far more women in Parliament. Women are not only the majority but, as recent education results have shown us, the brighter part of the population.

7.46 pm

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Last week, I asked the Prime Minister a question, which is not something that I do very often. It was a topical, serious question, but before I got half way through the preamble, there were hearty guffaws from Opposition Members. I exempt from that behaviour the Opposition Members who are here for this debate.

In my question, I said that I was concerned that all the people who had been brought together to form a post-Taliban Government were men. I asked the Prime Minister if he would examine the mechanisms that had truly enabled women's voices to be heard in the political transitions in South Africa and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) said, in Northern Ireland. The knee-jerk reaction from Opposition Members was very important and very telling, as was the parliamentary sketch in the following morning's edition of *The Independent*, which joked about "All Women Shortlists in Kabul".

The brutal suppression of women in Afghanistan is designed to make them invisible in that society. For political commentators to express incredulity at the prospect of women taking any part in a future Afghan Government only demonstrates how successful that regime has been.

Afghan women are seen primarily as victims, despite the fact that they once had the vote. Indeed, there have been women Members of Parliament in Afghanistan and there is a long-standing and powerful women's organisation called the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan which still operates from Pakistan and undercover in Afghanistan.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Is the hon. Lady aware that, yesterday, in setting out his vision for the future Afghan Government, the Foreign Secretary omitted to make any reference to female representation, although the Opposition have been calling for that?

Joan Ruddock: I thank the hon. Lady for her support. All women Members should be pressing for that representation.

Being invisible is something that most women understand and many women have experienced. In her opening remarks, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough gave an example of that fact when she described the reaction of her male colleagues when she suggested that she might be a parliamentary candidate. I believe that that goes to the very heart of why this Parliament is still 82 per cent. male and why we so desperately need this legislation.

I am delighted to be able to participate in this debate, and I congratulate my right hon. Friends on drafting the Bill and finding time for its passage. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women could not attend this debate, but she has been hugely influential in pressing for the Bill's introduction.

I am particularly pleased because, four years ago, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General and I were the first Ministers for Women, we proposed that such an amendment be made to the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. At the time, controversy was raging over the twinning arrangements in Wales and Scotland, which have proved to be so successful. People feared then that there would be a Jepson-type challenge. We argued that only by amending the Sex Discrimination Act could we remove that doubt. The time was not right. The word was out; women had had their chance and it was time to return to business as usual.

Last year, I asked the Library to undertake a variety of calculations. These revealed that, taking all parties into account and without special measures such as all-women shortlists, it would take another 30 years to get equal numbers of women and men in this place. At the rate of increase in the numbers of women pre-1977, it would take 70 years. I estimate, frankly, that if we depended on the Tory party alone, it would take another century.

That is why I have asked questions today of Tory Front Benchers about the mechanisms that they might put in place, how effective these would be and what the future might hold. That is why, in March last year, I proposed a Bill to amend the sex discrimination legislation. It was supported by a number of my hon. Friends who are participating in the debate today. My early-day motion was supported by 124 Members from six different parties.

The publicity that that engendered attracted the usual spate of male responses. One man wrote on the subject of all-women short lists:

"Instead of ensuring the lady candidates came from the ranks of the intelligent and achieving ladies—there are plenty about—great drafts were sent in from the Just Another Bloody Girl Brigade."

I reckoned he had to be a Tory.

Another, describing himself as a socialist councillor, said that he was "fed up with interferences in the democratic process" and would "go ballistic" if they were inflicted.

Let me spend a few moments exploring these myths; the quality of candidates and the democratic process. The charge that women candidates selected from all-women shortlists were inferior was made first by commentators who did not know the women and even before they entered Parliament. It was made again, on no objective basis, once they got here. Who actually did the work to compare the 35 new women with 35 new men and found them wanting? What were the criteria anyway?

The truth is that the real objection was to numbers and to difference. Most, but of course not all, women work rather differently from men. Women in this place have tended to fit less well into its traditions and its style of oratory. Because many of us spoke in favour of modernisation during Labour's first Administration, we raised unrealistic expectations for change that could not and should not have been the responsibility of women Members alone.

As for democracy, selection processes that attempt to address the gender imbalance in a party's list of candidates can only be positive. When 51 per cent. of the population is female, it is a nonsense to maintain that democracy is well served by a Parliament in which women make up only 18 per cent. of the Members.

This Bill is permissive and makes no interference with the democratic elections of the country. It enables political parties to take their own democratic decisions about whether or not they wish to put special measures in place to ensure that the electorate has a more balanced number of women and men to vote for, not just as parliamentary candidates in Westminster, but for the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies, the European Parliament and, importantly, local government.

I am certain that my party will have to readopt all-women shortlists because no other measure—we have tried all the others that I know—will work for Westminster selections and elections. It will not be easy for the party at local level and we will justifiably continue to be criticised for the fact that people from ethnic minorities continue to be under-represented. However, in the case of ethnic minorities, there is much less ground statistically to make up and I am confident that we can do that.

The challenge of the Bill lies with the other parties. If the Opposition parties do not change their selection processes, the proposed legislation will be needed long beyond its sunset clause of 2015. Labour Members will all be fighting to win the next election, but the electoral arithmetic is clear. Women losing their seat in an election with any substantially reduced Labour majority would more likely than not be replaced by men.

The correspondent I quoted earlier asserted that there were plenty of "intelligent and achieving ladies" out there. Like the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley), I have absolutely no doubt about that. Remarkable women are everywhere. The problem with the political parties is that they do not find them and they do not recognise them.

Last week, I was privileged to attend the annual Women of the Year lunch and assembly. This unique event is organised by and the inspiration of an exceptional woman called Tony, otherwise known as Lady Lothian. It has been held every year for 46 years and honours 500 women from all over the country, all of whom are chosen for their achievements. The theme this year was courage. The award winners were: Pam Warren, the founder of the Paddington survivors group—the woman in a plastic face mask; Marie Colvin, the war correspondent, who lost an eye in Sri Lankan clashes this year; and Ellen MacArthur, who sailed alone around the world. These are women who can match men any day. They are all highly visible women, but there were 500 others who are much less visible.

In many walks of life, women are making a contribution, leading and serving communities. We need those women on our councils and in our Parliaments. We owe it to them to ensure that the political parties adopt selection processes that are designed to end the democratic deficit that so distorts our elected institutions.

7.57 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): As ever, it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), who has spoken with much feeling and made a significant contribution to the debate. She will not be surprised to hear that I do not entirely agree with her.

I have always advocated greater numbers of women in Parliament. I have always wanted to see more women succeeding, not only in getting into this House but in holding positions of responsibility. I earnestly look forward to the day when we have a second woman Prime Minister.

Virginia Bottomley: A Tory.

Miss Widdecombe: Quite right.

The Bill is fundamentally wrong. I must ask this question; are all the men in this place sound asleep? Do they realise what the Bill means for them? Have they thought that positive discrimination for women can entail negative discrimination for men?

I am often quite sorry for men. There are lots of injustices with which they have to put up. For example, they do not live as long as we do, but they have to work longer in order to get a pension. That will not be put right for some time. Some 50 per cent. of young men getting married today will not be able to see their children through to maturity in the same household. Whereas in the past women have had it very hard, there are now a few injustices for men. This Bill will create one more.

The Bill says that it will be permitted, that one could have—apparently we should be grateful that we are not being coerced into it—out of all the methods that could be chosen, an all-women shortlist.

What would that mean for a man in that constituency who had given to his local council the same lifelong service that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough

[Miss Widdecombe]

(Helen Jackson) gave to hers, and who had lived in the constituency all his life? Let us say that the man had worked there and escaped from there, and that he wanted to apply for the seat when it fell vacant. He would not be able to represent the constituency if all-women shortlists were in operation.

That would be the reality for men under this pernicious Bill, yet hon. Gentlemen welcome it as a great step forward. It is a massive step towards inequality for men, and the poor souls just let the women walk all over them. They do not appear to care what will happen to them.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Does the right hon. Lady accept that some of the hon. Gentlemen may be intelligent enough to realise that that has been the experience of women over the 700 years for which our alleged parliamentary democracy has existed?

Miss Widdecombe: Women have been able to apply for seats anywhere in the country, but the Bill would mean that no man could apply for some seats, no matter how strong his claim to consideration.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, I shall be equal and give way to a man this time.

Dr. Evan Harris: I am grateful in many ways to the right hon. Lady, and take her admonitions to heart. However, does she accept that the justification for affirmative action and positive discrimination is that it would remedy the effects of the negative discrimination that exists in the selection process? Is she prepared to condemn the special discriminatory treatment meted out by some parties to some women when they tell those women that they should not put themselves forward—and that they will not be selected—unless they have sorted out their child care responsibilities? Such questions are not put to men with children who apply for selection.

Miss Widdecombe: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that when I entered a constituency selection committee and saw that most of the people there were women, my heart used to sink. We should not get the idea that discrimination against women is performed solely by men. It is not.

I do not believe that the Bill will do little more than deny some deserving men their basic human rights. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said that there was a bet about when the word "patronising" would first be used. It is now 8.3 pm, and the time has come. If I had been in a selection committee anteroom with two men who had got there by beating off all the competition yet I was only there because a place had been reserved for a woman on the shortlist, I would not feel helped. I would feel humiliated, insulted and patronised. I am glad to say that my party never did that to me.

I do not believe that the proposal behind the Bill is what was intended by the equal opportunities legislation of the mid-1970s. I remember that legislation, because I belonged to that minority in my party that believed it was necessary. However, feminists in the 70s said, "Give us equality of opportunity and we will show you that we are as good as, if not better, than most of the men." Now, a quarter of a century later, we whinge and whine and demand special treatment because we cannot make it otherwise.

If that is not an insult to women, I do not know what is. Positive discrimination is always negative discrimination against someone. I want every woman in this House to be able to look every man, from the Prime Minister down—or up—in the eye and know that she got here on exactly the same basis as he did. She must know that she has defeated all the competition, and that her path was not artificially smoothed by the removal of inconvenient male competition.

That is the sort of Parliament that I want, and an example of the sort of women's rights for which I have always stood. I firmly believe that the Bill would create two groups of women in the House. One group would be here on the same basis as everyone else, but the other group would be patronised, helped along and specially provided for. That would create two classes of woman MP—and that would be just about the biggest danger to the standing of women in the House.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Would it not be a bigger insult if we had to wait another century for equality? That is how long it would take if the current rate of change in the Conservative party were applied to the House.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no reason for the House to wait another century. There are other ways in which women can be encouraged to come forward. In the Conservative party, they will not want to do so on the basis that they will be second-class citizens in the House.

With great respect to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, I am afraid that I oppose the Bill. I think that it is misconceived and an insult to women. It would also be terrible for the future of men, and the poor souls just cannot see it. They need to wake up.

8.6 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe). This is my 23rd year as a member of the Labour party, and I know that the right hon. Lady is a longstanding member of the Conservative party. I am sure that, like me, she has engaged in discussions for many years about how women's representation can be increased. I have been at many conferences and meetings where all the people attending, male and female, have agreed on one thing—that there should be more women MPs and councillors. The only problem is that some men have not woken up to the fact that more women MPs and councillors would mean fewer men in those positions.

If a level playing field existed that meant that candidates were selected on merit, that would lend merit to the argument of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald. However, that is not the reality, and later in my remarks I hope to outline why.

I am also pleased to speak in this debate because I was chair of the Brentford and Isleworth Labour party. That was of one of the constituencies cited by Mr. Peter Jepson at the employment tribunal considering his case for

overturning the Labour party's position on women-only shortlists. My constituency party volunteered to have a women-only shortlist, and I was pleased that we subsequently elected a woman MP.

I represent the Don Valley constituency, and I was elected on a mixed shortlist. I do not consider that my role—as a woman Member of Parliament and a woman involved in politics—is to lead the vanguard that all women should follow. My position and circumstances mean that I am an exception to the rule, and I feel that I should do something to ensure that other women have better opportunities to be represented in this place.

We should recognise and welcome the steady increase in the representation of women in public life and politics generally, although it may not be as great as we would prefer. As someone who has worked in the trade union movement, I take issue somewhat with my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson). There is no doubt in my mind that the increased voice won by women in the labour and trade union movement has led to the minimum wage, rights for part-time workers, statutory holiday pay, better child care provision and increased child benefit.

Men lead on the Front Bench on some of these issues. For example, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has done much to tackle poverty in families on low pay, but it is the unsung women in our movement who have done so much to make those policies part of the Labour manifesto and the Labour Government's policies. It is no surprise that when male membership of trade unions was on the decline, unions turned to part-time women workers to become members. They have effected enormous change. My trade union is the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union—the GMB—and I was pleased to speak at an equal rights conference not so long ago. I paid tribute to all those invisible women, many of whom could have been general secretaries or Members of Parliament but did not have the opportunity.

I was delighted that, because of women-only shortlists, in 1997 a large number of Labour women entered Parliament. Policies such as the minimum wage, the working families tax credit and increased child benefit have been part of our vision for what we could achieve in government. It is predominantly women, particularly those in low-paid jobs, who have benefited from those outcomes.

Whatever the outcome of the debate to tackle inequality in representation, we must recognise that inequality still exists in the wider community, in this country and abroad. Job segregation, particularly in the manual sector, means that women earn 80 per cent. of men's hourly pay rates. Women still find it difficult to juggle child care and carer responsibilities and to be valued for it.

When I go to economic regeneration meetings in my local community in Doncaster, I am faced with a sea of men, whereas the child care partnership meetings are peopled predominantly by women. The value that is placed on both those important activities is distorted and unfair. It is a sad fact that if a male candidate has been involved in economic regeneration and a woman in creating child care places, the person with the economic regeneration experience may score more points of value than the woman whose contribution has been to child care.

Even the way in which the media portray women says something about the different ways in which men and women are judged. A radio programme the other day referred to research done by major private companies into why women without any child care responsibilities were not getting promoted. The conclusion was that different judgments were still being made. It was said that women get promoted on performance while men get promoted on potential. Merit is not necessarily why people get selected. Too often, people say that a man will go a long way and that even though he has made a few mistakes he has potential and the right kind of face.

Women continue to gain ground in traditional areas. There is a woman bomber pilot on duty in Afghanistan. We have seen the professionalisation of women's sports. Women have broken through in areas we had never thought possible. However, the fact remains that men run our armed services; they dominate our major sports and will continue to dominate politics for quite a while.

The achievement of equality of representation in the House of Commons is only part of the picture. My colleagues and I also want to see more fundamental changes in the wider society, to ensure that the experience of men and women is reflected and equality is sought.

What is so good about the Bill—and I might have liked it to be more prescriptive—is that it tries to find a way forward in which we can reach agreement across the House. Ultimately, political parties will have to choose how they want to address these issues.

The Labour party did not take the decision to have women-only shortlists lightly. It did not happen overnight. For many years, every conceivable way was tried to ensure that women got the chance to be selected. We have had the coaching, the makeovers, the training; we have had one woman on every shortlist. At the last round, we even had 50 per cent. of women on our shortlists. However, women candidates who got in touch with me have said that the male networks operated to try and put weaker women candidates on the shortlists, excluding some of the stronger ones. I say that without any problem, because women have different merits, and not all are as good as each other. We all have differing points of view, including political points of view.

The decision to ask constituents in marginal seats to choose women-only shortlists was a means to an end and was taken after much consideration. As some of my colleagues have said most eloquently, when we worked out the figures, we did not see how we would make any progress in our lifetime.

We like to believe that this mother of Parliaments is at the forefront of democracy, but that is not true. We are far behind some other European countries in terms of women's representation. Indeed, the agreement at Harare in 1991 to try and ensure that 30 per cent. of representatives in national Parliaments are women has been eagerly embraced by many countries in the developing world. I was fascinated when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development said today that in Pakistan 33 per cent. of those elected in recent council elections were women. We have fewer women representatives in England, Scotland and Wales, and it is ridiculous to suggest that we are leading the way.

The political parties have to consider how to operate. Let us consider the last two elections. Of those seats which raised our total gains in 1997 to 146—and from seats like my own, in which a new candidate replaced a retiring Member of Parliament—we added only another

[Caroline Flint]

10 women MPs. The women-only shortlist, where the outcome was at least 50 more women selected, was the main reason for the change. Little were we to know that the endorsement of new Labour would lead to us exceeding our expectations in terms of numbers of seats won, but in fact, it reverted to type without—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Lady has had her 10 minutes.

8.16 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) but sorry that we did not have the opportunity to hear more of her comments. In a sense, my starting point for the support that I wish to give my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) in not opposing the Bill derives from the same origins as the intention of the hon. Member for Don Valley in relation to the Labour party. However we debate the principles of these matters, there is a woefully poor representation of women in Parliament. That is especially true of my Benches, but it is also true of the Labour Benches, and it is important that we change it.

I will come on to why I think that the Bill does not necessarily suffer from some of the problems to which my right hon. Friends the Members for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) referred. Perhaps I can go further than my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead in hoping that the Conservative party might use the opportunities available in the Bill.

We need to do something about the situation. I suspect that in 1975, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald said, there would have been an expectation that, using the exception provided in the legislation for political parties from the application of sex discrimination legislation, political parties would, if anything, have been more active in pursuing positive discrimination and more successful in achieving the entry of women into Parliament than was the case for some of the other professions.

When one thinks of Parliament as a profession, one thinks of other professions and the extent to which we, as a Parliament, reflect the nature of the society that we serve. That is why we have to allow the opportunity for more positive action. We do not represent the society that we wish to serve, and we have to do so if we are to be successful as a Parliament. If we consider some of the professions in which women have been increasing their representation, we have clearly failed. In the medical profession, 31 per cent. of doctors are women, but so are 46 per cent. of senior house officers and 50 per cent. of house officers, while 60 per cent. of general practice trainees are women. Although only 19 per cent. of chartered accountants are women—not so many—45 per cent. of chartered accountant students have been women this year.

The law is often thought of as the profession from which so many parliamentarians have been and continue to be drawn. Of the 6,056 entrants to the profession up to July this year, 51 per cent. were women.

Something very serious is going on. For generations Parliament has been, broadly, a place to which people come from the law, medicine or other professions, but the composition of the House does not reflect the change that has occurred in society. We must do something about that. We have to allow positive action to be taken, but what sort of action?

The issue is whether we need this legislation to take such action. The problem—the Minister can no doubt explain this better than I—is that it is unclear whether positive action can be taken. We must make it clear. We should be able to take action to treat genders—and, for that matter, races and minorities—equally. The principles of equal treatment and positive action are not mutually exclusive.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald argued that positive discrimination is undesirable because it results in negative discrimination for others. I am through the gate, as it were, so I am perhaps less vulnerable, but men should not be chary of having to fight for reasonable representation on their merits while women do the same.

The issue is—my right hon. Friend raised this explicitly—whether, if a man regards himself as exceptionally well qualified to represent a particular constituency, given the nature of our electoral system, it would be grossly unfair for him not to be selected. That is why women-only shortlists are not the way to proceed. That is what my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead made clear from the Opposition Front Bench.

With all respect to the Secretary of State, when he answered my question, I think that he missed the point. The Labour party may wish to go down the path of women-only shortlists, but the question is not whether that is proportionate to the objective; the test will be whether, according to the European Court of Justice ruling on the Abrahamsson case, it will lead to a situation in which

> "it will be permissible to confer preference on a female candidate who possesses equivalent or substantially equivalent merits to a male competitor, provided that the candidatures are the subject of an objective assessment that takes account of the specific personal situations of the candidates."

There is a risk for the Labour party, but as political parties, we would do well to embrace this principle when using the powers under the Bill. We must ensure that where an objective assessment of the personal situation of candidates can be applied, there will always be an opportunity to override what might otherwise be giving priority of preference to remedying the gross under-representation overall.

I will confine my remaining remarks to the Conservative party. We should set out to arrive at a system that will rapidly amend the gross under- representation of women on our Benches, but which will allow individual constituencies to select candidates on the basis of their individual merits.

The sort of system that I advocate will operate on the basis that, until now, far too few women candidates who have been endorsed by Conservative central office have been on candidate lists. If we increase the proportion of women, broadly speaking, to 50 per cent., particularly for

constituencies that we hold or are most likely to win, we stand a good chance of requiring those constituencies to ensure that we end up with more women representatives.

Miss Widdecombe: Is the small percentage of women on the list the result of the procedures or of the fact that not enough women come forward in the first place?

Mr. Lansley: It is the result of both, but I will not go into the matter at great length. We need to reform procedures and we need to recruit far more women. We will only be successful in recruiting more—there are many women of obvious talent and merit in the Conservative party—if we have put in place a system that makes it much more obvious that they will not be discriminated against and that their chances of selection are at least as good as those of any man.

Stephen Hesford: If a list that is 50 per cent. male and 50 per cent. female is issued by central office and local associations must choose their candidates from it, might not the following happen? Those associations that select first might take the 50 per cent. of candidates that are male because they could choose from either part of the list, and the rest would have to take the women who were left.

Mr. Lansley: I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument. I think that the Conservative party should have something akin to a twinning system, but on a much larger scale, and in biddable and winnable constituencies. Individual constituencies can select candidates who live in their area, subject to the consent of Conservative central office. It is a process that will have to be actively managed by the Conservative party to produce the necessary results.

No one should be under any illusions. Under such a system, there is no question of candidates being selected who do not have obvious merit. We will be setting out to create a list of candidates, for winnable seats in particular, made up of people who do have such merits. That is why the Conservative party can use this legislation without fear of its being overturned. I fear that the Labour party may go down the path of women-only shortlists, undermine the case for positive action, and put itself at risk of further legal challenge as the equal treatment directive is amended.

8.26 pm

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Thank you for calling me to speak in this important debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am delighted to be here on this occasion.

On 2 March 1998, during my first year as a Member of this House, I moved an amendment to the Government of Wales Bill that would have exempted political parties from the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. Obviously, that amendment was not accepted by the Government. Information for the speech that I made then was provided by Val Feld, then director of the Equal Opportunities Commission for Wales, who until recently was the Assembly Member for Swansea East. Tragically, she died in July and I pay tribute to her for the endless work that she did for equal opportunities in Wales. She would have been delighted that this Bill is before the House today with the support of the Government and all the other parties.

I congratulate the Government on producing this Bill so swiftly in the new Parliament. The need for it is self-evident. As the Secretary of State said, the general election was the last straw. The failure to increase the number of women Members of Parliament firmly demonstrated that some mechanism is needed.

In Wales there has always been a problem in getting women selected as parliamentary candidates for any of the political parties. At present, women MPs—all Labour—represent only four of the 40 Welsh constituencies. The other political parties in Wales have no women MPs; indeed, the Tories hold no Welsh seats at all. Since women obtained the vote, only seven women have held Welsh seats, and six of them have been Labour Members.

Since I have been involved in politics in Wales, however, women have always been ready, willing and able to stand for parliamentary seats; they have simply not been selected. It is argued that women do not put themselves forward, but that is not true. In Wales, women have constantly sought selection for parliamentary seats, but they have not been chosen.

Women are not put off by the hours worked in the House or by its male image. They are not put off by the problems of caring for children or elderly relatives. They have constantly put themselves forward as candidates. Women have experience of juggling jobs and child care; they set up after-school clubs and run voluntary bodies. We women are used to doing myriad things as we juggle our various priorities.

Why have women not been selected in Wales, even though they always stand? I have no doubt that it is due to a bias against women at selection conferences, even though in many cases it may be an unconscious bias. In Wales, we overcame that bias by adopting the twinning mechanism for the Assembly elections. That resulted in a Labour group of 16 women and 12 men—a unique situation. Overall, 42 per cent. of Assembly Members are women. Thus, the Assembly has the best gender balance of all the UK bodies, followed closely by the Scottish Parliament where twinning was also used. That contrasts with the 17.9 per cent. of women MPs at Westminster—a drop since the previous general election.

The adoption of the twinning mechanism was extremely controversial. Argument raged while the procedure was being considered by the party. There was daily debate as to whether it was fair or right or whether it should be implemented. Pro and anti-twinners held demonstrations outside Labour's Cardiff headquarters. Those of us who supported twinning even had a song. It might have been rather banal, but we sang "We shall twin to win". The campaign lasted for several months, but it had the desired result.

After the excellent result achieved for women in the National Assembly, the general election was a huge disappointment in Wales. No more women were elected for Welsh seats. In my party all the seven seats held by retiring Members went to male candidates, despite all the advantages women had gained in the Assembly where they are highly visible and hold prominent positions. Women are in the majority in the Assembly's Cabinet, but as soon as the general election came along everything reverted to type and women did not get a look in.

Two years after that highly successful twinning campaign to get women into the National Assembly, all that effort came to nothing and we reverted to all-male

[Julie Morgan]

candidates. That makes the strongest possible case for a mechanism to ensure fair play in Westminster selections. That failure to make progress, or even to protect the progress that has been made, shows that equality in selecting candidates for the Westminster Parliament will not occur naturally.

Some of my hon. Friends have talked about the different mechanisms that have been used. Many methods have been tried in my party. We started off by saying that there should be a woman on every shortlist. At that time, there was certainly one woman on all the shortlists in Wales—sometimes more than one—but no progress was made. At the last general election, there were 50:50 shortlists, yet the result in Wales was that no women were selected for those seven seats, even though no one could claim that there were not able and committed women who could easily have come to the House and played a major role—women were simply not selected. It was not even that men won four or five of those seven selections; they got seven out of seven. That makes the case for the Bill. A mechanism is needed.

It is only through all-women shortlists that progress has actually been made. That mechanism contributed to the influx of Labour women MPs in 1997. Three of the four women who represent Welsh constituencies were selected from all-women shortlists.

I am proud to have been selected from an all-women shortlist. When I think of the selection process, I recall the other women who were on the shortlist, what they had to contribute and the range of skills that they had. They represented different sections of the Labour party and, as has been said, women are not a homogenous group. Party members were able to choose between different political positions. I completely reject the suggestion made by Conservative Members that there are two types of woman MP. That is a dangerous way to talk.

Proportional representation has been mentioned and I strongly support a fairer system of representation. The Equal Opportunities Commission research document on women in Parliament found that women are twice as likely to be elected under proportional representation as under the first-past-the-post system. However, PR will advance the position of women only if the political parties select women for winnable seats. Although PR under a list system may make it easier and may remove much of the stress and difficulty of choosing candidates, the parties must first have the political will to encourage the greater representation of women.

Twinning was a one-off and it will be difficult to repeat it, especially as there are many sitting incumbents. It is important to know the Bill's timetable and when it is likely to receive Royal Assent. I fear that that might be too late to influence the process of selection for the next round of National Assembly elections, but the fact that the Bill is going through Parliament may affect the way in which selection takes place.

If the Bill is passed, the Labour party—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.37 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I stand before the House a little wiser than I was 30 years ago. Then I believed that discrimination would disappear as more women were educated and joined the professions and commerce. I believed that they would be able to do anything to which they committed themselves and that, gradually, the numbers of women in senior positions in all organisations would increase. I was wrong.

In some walks of life women have been able to reach the top, on a par with men, but that is all too rare. This place is the supreme example of the failure on the part of a parliamentary democracy to achieve true representation of the people.

The reasons are many and complex. We hear that not enough women put themselves forward and, indeed, they do not. Why could that be? The perception of this place is that it is a male club That perception results from its adversarial nature and from the laughter at people's trivial mistakes as well as from long speeches that are designed—to do what? Little is done to convince the public that anything worth while takes place here.

In the debate on international terrorism held during the first recall of Parliament on 14 September one woman was called to speak. What was the subliminal message to anyone switching on their television that day? It was that, on an important subject of national and international significance, women had little part to play.

Worse is the impediment here to getting anything done. Local councils have been instructed by law to modernise, and decision making takes place more swiftly there than it does here. Here joined-up thinking appears not to have even started. No thought is given to the costs of debate, as we all oscillate around decisions for month after month.

I do not have great experience of Select Committees, but I am aware that they pass "difficult" topics such as child care provision for Members around like hot potatoes. Even a decision to do something as obviously sensible as opening the Line of Route in the summer recess has taken hour after expensive hour of everyone's time. I emphasise that I do not criticise right hon. and hon. Members, who do their best in the circumstances. It is the system that is impenetrable, and the culture allows that to happen.

Then there is the language. A young man at a meeting recently told me that when his black friends switched on the Parliamentary Channel nothing they saw had anything to do with them. Very little of it has anything to do with me. This place is an anachronism, a series of archaic procedures. The words "modern legislature" do not ring true, do they? No wonder some of our young colleagues could not stand the thought of another term of office.

It is also true that not enough women get through the selection procedures. Why not? It is because there is a mixture of direct discrimination and an inability to select anything that did not have a shave that morning. The male-shaped space wins almost every time in a winnable seat. So why am I here? It is very simple: no one thought I could win.

I used not to think like this, but years of having "Mum" metaphorically stamped on my forehead have changed my mind. Given the statistics, the best candidate does not always win the selection in a winnable seat. The person who has had the time to build the party networks and can be flexible because someone else is looking after the children has an in-built advantage.

The playing field is not even. If it were, many more women would be achieving office already. The Bill gives political parties the opportunity to implement measures to

give more women the chance of standing for Parliament and other political office. That process should not stop at elected office. Only a third of appointees to quangos are women.

The Bill is not without risk to political parties, a problem that was addressed by my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler).

Some European countries have taken positive measures to ensure more even representation by women. The most successful in terms of outcome have been those that combine proportional representation with a quota system. In the House, there is less than 18 per cent. representation by women. My party has nothing to crow about, with representation by women standing at less than 10 per cent. Women are under-represented in local government, as has been stated, and especially in senior local government positions, which are badly affected by the imbalance.

We need to stop blaming the victims for the problem and recognise that there will never be true representation in this country until we address the culture of our decision-making bodies. This policy is not about doing women a favour; it is about doing the country a favour.

It is wrong to regard the playing field as level. The country will continue to need, and should value, the caring role that is largely carried out by women. Most women's lives are not like most men's lives. We need to measure success by outcomes and not the processes used. This country will make no more significant decision this Parliament. We lag behind democracies across the world and action is needed now.

8.43 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I support the Bill because the requirement to improve the way in which democracy functions in Great Britain is important. Our democracy is deformed by the fact that women are inadequately represented in Parliament. There is clear evidence that the only way to change that is to introduce either electoral reform, which I support, or positive action measures such as those permitted in the Bill.

The policy gives rise to many anxieties, one of which was eloquently expressed by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who I am sorry to see is no longer in the Chamber. She said that men will have to move over to create opportunities for women, but it is not a new phenomenon for one sex to have to give way to another. Men in politics have long built their careers on women—their secretaries, their wives, their agents and the party volunteers who have helped their careers. Many of those women have sacrificed their own ambitions in the process. Now it is time for men to return the favour to help the political system as a whole to do a better job.

One cause of anxiety is that a system that provides direct assistance to women produces second-rate MPs. The leader of the Conservative party recently expressed that view, saying:

> "All-women shortlists have not been a success for Labour because instead of getting people who are high quality what we have actually got is people who have not really performed for the Labour party."

He produced no evidence to support that breath-taking observation, and I concluded that he probably did not know which Government Members had been selected from all-women shortlists. I do, so I decided to carry out some research and find the evidence about our performance.

That evidence shows that we are at least as good as our colleagues and above average in many respects. We are active participants in the Commons: more than 70 per cent. of the 35 MPs selected from all-women shortlists were in the top 50 per cent. in terms of participation in Commons Divisions during the 2000-01 Session. They ask an average number of questions and contribute powerfully in Select Committees. Two have successfully introduced private Members' Bills: my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) promoted the Protection of Children Act 1999; and the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) led directly to the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000. Only 18 private Members' Bills became law in the last Parliament.

Women MPs are persistent and, as the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions acknowledged, they have helped to ensure that Government policy reflects women's concerns. A parliamentary answer I received on 13 March stated that Budgets set during the last Parliament had improved the incomes of women on average by £440, and of men by £225—showing that we are doing our bit as a Government to ease the income gap between men and women.

Many MPs who were selected from all-women shortlists have been promoted since 1997, so clearly someone thinks we are doing a good job. Eight have been invited to become Ministers and seven have accepted the promotion; 16 have been Parliamentary Private Secretaries. A comparison with other Members elected at the same time reveals that the same proportion of both groups have become Ministers, and a rather larger proportion of MPs selected from women-only shortlists have become Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

Something close to the heart of every single Member of Parliament is elections. We have done especially well in that respect. Women selected from women-only shortlists have performed better than other Labour candidates. About a third of us increased our share of the vote, in common with about a third of Labour candidates; but candidates who had been selected from women-only shortlists achieved a higher than average share of the vote for Labour.

Why is all that relevant? MORI reported that only half of the female population expresses any interest in politics, compared with two thirds of men. Figures that are clearly connected to that suggest that 3 per cent. fewer women than men voted in the general election. Compelling research supports the assertion that women think that women politicians are more in touch with what they care about, their lives and their concerns. I think that a strong argument can be made that women in Parliament will help to re-engage women with politics.

There is compelling evidence that unless we take direct action—and take the brickbats of those who say that because we were selected from women-only shortlists we must be second-class MPs—we will not have more women in Parliament. We can disagree about the specific tactics required in individual parties, but we all know that the good intentions expressed by every party so far have failed. We need more than good intentions and half-hearted measures.

I think that we will pass the Bill tonight, but for many of us its enactment will mark only the start of our work. The next challenge will be to win support within our

[Fiona Mactaggart]

parties for the action that the Bill permits. It is unusual for politicians to stress the things that they have in common, but women in every party face the same problems. I have talked to women in other parties who, if the selection system was fair, would be in the House. I think of Jean Lucas, the formidable Tory agent in Wandsworth, and my sister who, I am quite glad, is not a Liberal Democrat MP. Women who read reports by the Bow Group or the Centre for Policy Studies about the struggles of women in the Conservative party to be selected, or who listen to accounts of what went on at the recent Liberal Democrat conference, will have twinges of painful recognition.

We have all been present when someone arrives in the middle of debate, not having heard what was said, and starts muttering critical remarks in a corner. That happens in our party meetings as well as the Chamber. Members on both sides of the House must discuss how they are going to achieve whatever system is right for the culture of their party and how they are going to get more women in Parliament. Unless we take positive action we will not be able to repair the fault in our democracy; at the moment, we have a men's democracy, not a people's democracy. The only way to repair that fault is for every party to design a system that will guarantee to increase the proportion of women standing on its behalf in elections. Frankly, we all know that if we do not, a phenomenon which I suspect worries everyone equally in the Chamber and was obvious in the poor participation in the last election, when only a small number of people bothered to vote, will become more serious. Democracy is democracy only when Members of Parliament genuinely represent their constituencies; we can represent them fully only if our constituents participate in the business of putting us here.

The Bill is about who the parties offer our constituents. We are equal as MPs because we are all chosen by the people who live in our constituencies, and we should all be proud of representing them. No one here is second-class, but until we get politics in the House of Commons that make sense to our constituents, we will fail the principle of democracy.

8.52 pm

Lady Hermon (North Down): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) is no longer in the Chamber, as I should have liked to thank her for her kind words about how active women are in communities in Northern Ireland. I want to add to her remarks by bringing a Northern Ireland perspective to our debate and registering the Ulster Unionist party's deep concern that the Bill may result in positive discrimination. We in Northern Ireland have just embarked on a form of positive discrimination that we find deeply divisive and counter-productive; I shall speak about that in due course.

I am one of only three women in Parliament who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland out of a total of 18 MPs in that part of the United Kingdom. Of course, that is a deeply unsatisfactory state of affairs, but it is a great improvement when one considers that for the last 30 years or so all our MPs were men. However, the House might also note—this gives me no pleasure—that the total of three is inflated, as the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Michelle Gildernew) achieved her 53-vote majority only with the aid of intimidatory tactics in a polling station. Those tactics were described only last Friday by Lord Chief Justice Carswell in an electoral court in his home town of Belfast as "extremely reprehensible".

There is little doubt that women are grossly under-represented in political life in Northern Ireland, particularly when compared to other regions of the United Kingdom. I understand that 42 per cent. of Members of the National Assembly for Wales are women. The figure falls to 37 per cent. for membership of the Scottish Parliament. Much worse is the figure for the new Northern Ireland Assembly, where just 13 per cent. of Members are women.

I am glad to see the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough back in her place, and I thank her.

Fortunately, the Belfast agreement was not silent about the role of women in public life. As a strong supporter of the agreement, I was pleased that it enshrined, among many things, a clear commitment by all the parties to

"the right of women to full and equal political participation".

That is a commitment which the Ulster Unionist party greatly welcomed and still does.

The agreement also included a provision whereby all the parties affirmed

"the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity".

Given the central themes of equality and non-discrimination which run through the Belfast agreement, which I repeat that I welcome, my party would be strongly opposed to any legislation that ran counter to those themes. We in the UUP are opposed to all forms of discrimination, including positive discrimination.

I alluded earlier to a recent example of positive discrimination. It relates to the recruitment process for the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. For the benefit of right hon. and hon. Members who might not be aware of the fact, I should explain that the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 incorporated a provision which legalised religious discrimination in recruitment, so that 50 per cent. of recruits would come from the Roman Catholic community and the other 50 per cent. would not. In practice, that means that Jewish, Protestant, Chinese, atheist and Muslim recruits who have made it through all the tests on merit may nevertheless be rejected on the grounds of their community background—their religion.

My party shares the desire to make the Police Service of Northern Ireland much more representative of the entire community, but we emphatically do not believe that the discriminatory recruitment policy is the way forward. We believe it to be counter-productive and divisive for the new Police Service, and that is not what I wish to see. Likewise, we believe that if the selection of political candidates were brought about by positive discrimination, it would be counter-productive and divisive.

I have listened carefully to the debate and the contributions from other right hon. and hon. Members. We need a much clearer understanding of the reasons behind the low numbers of women in political life throughout the United Kingdom. I therefore commend to the House the work of the recently established centre for the advancement of women into politics. I must declare that I sit on a voluntary basis as a member of its advisory board. The centre was launched last month,

on 28 September 2001. It is based in the school of politics in Queen's university, Belfast, and aims to foster an appreciation of women's contribution to politics, government and public decision making in the United Kingdom and Ireland. I believe it to be the only centre of its kind in Europe.

The centre considers women's political participation as having two important dimensions: the proportion of women in decision making, and the inclusion of women's perspectives in Government policies and programmes. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to its director, Yvonne Galligan, and also to the lady who opened the centre, who is no other than Mary McAleese, formerly of Queen's university and now the President of the Republic of Ireland. I think that President Mary McAleese's well-deserved rise to become her country's elected Head of State demonstrates that the correct blend of determination and ability can bring political dividends for a woman in these islands.

I appreciate that the Bill is permissive, as opposed to prescriptive. However, although the Ulster Unionist party will always support equality we shall not be persuaded to support positive discrimination.

9 pm

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): I am conscious of the fact that I may be the only male Back Bencher to contribute to this debate. In that respect, I bear a heavy responsibility. I hope not to speak for my 10 minutes, because I do not want to be accused of promoting male domination, especially as others who are present have much more relevant and serious experience of prejudice and loss, which they can eloquently bring to this debate.

I was going to start my speech with a quotation from Peter Riddell, the columnist on *The Times*, but when I heard the speech of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) I thought that it would be irrelevant. Fortunately, however, I was rescued by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe). I respectfully suggest that she represents more of what the Tories think about the Bill than the hon. Member for Maidenhead, however seriously and honourably she expresses her views. She shakes her head, but we may see in future weeks and months that that is a truism.

In 1993, Peter Riddell reviewed women's progress in Parliament up to the 1992 election. He wrote:

> "But, as in many other professions, there is a long way to go to redress the overall imbalance and the disadvantages which women face when in a career structure favouring men."

That was true then, and it is still true now. If there is any doubt about the argument—I shall come to some statistics in a moment—we must remember that that is the principle that we are debating. By giving the Bill its Second Reading and then enacting it, I hope that we will defeat it in this place—and not before time. We are considering an issue of principle, which, as other hon. Members have made clear, is about equity for that 51 per cent. of the population who are vastly under-represented in this place. It is also a question of the balanced representation that people who would otherwise be women MPs could bring to this place.

The Bill is short, but it will have a significant effect on our political body. Many people fear that change, even though they do not expressly say so. I am sorry to say that Labour Members do not come to the debate with clean hands in that respect. I hope that my colleagues will forgive me for saying that the fears that I describe are shared on the Labour Benches. We must grasp that reality.

Let me read some statistics on women's representation after the 2001 election. Eight per cent. of Conservative MPs were women, and women accounted for 23 per cent. of Labour MPs and 10 per cent. of Liberal Democrat MPs. The Government have done all they could to bring representation of women to the fore in this place by appointing them as Ministers, of whom 30 per cent. are women. In terms of the overall proportions, women are over-represented as Ministers.

I am pleased to see that that is the case. The Government have done as much as they could. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on looking to bring forward role models to say to the public that this place and this Government in particular are not as irrelevant to their lives as they sometimes perceive. Some 26 per cent. of Cabinet members are women, which is six people out of 23. I would enter a small caveat in relation to that figure, as it takes into account members of the other place. My point, however, is that if there is a political will within the party or parties, progress can be made.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union compared democracies around the world, and I am grateful to the House of Commons Library for providing this information. Of the 179 members of the IPU, Britain comes in a very sorry 39th in the list of democracies. To put that in stark relief, and with no disrespect to the countries that I am about to mention—in fact, in some ways I applaud them—we are behind Turkmenistan and Vietnam. We cannot look with equanimity on that fact.

There is a party political element to this issue. Although I welcome the agreement among the Front Benchers of both Opposition parties, one must look at the reality. The proportion of women Liberal Democrat candidates has fallen since 1992. I have to ask—perhaps rhetorically—whether, in the light of their recent conference decision, they come to this debate with entirely clean hands. However, I welcome their support, if support it is.

Dr. Evan Harris: I am not entirely sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making, and I am not entirely sure that he knows either. We have recognised that we have a problem, particularly with winnable seats. It is somewhat easier to put up women candidates in non-winnable seats. We focus on the winnable seats, and we have a numerical problem with that, given the electoral system. We recognise our problem and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that we bring that recognition to our support of the Bill.

Stephen Hesford: I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will forgive me if I simply move on.

In the 2001 election, 15 per cent. of the Conservative party's female candidates were successful—14 out of 92, its lowest successful proportion ever. So Conservatives cannot, come to the debate claiming that up-to-date statistics are glad tidings.

Mrs. May: We have said nothing of the sort. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my speech, he would have heard me say that my party needs to ensure that we, in particular, increase the representation of women on our Benches.

Stephen Hesford: I hear what the hon. Lady says. When the Labour party, struggling with this difficult issue

[Stephen Hesford]

before the 1997 general election, moved to all-women shortlists, there was almost unanimous derision from the Conservatives.

Mrs. Spelman *indicated dissent.*

Stephen Hesford: The hon. Lady shakes her head, but it is true. There was complete derision.

Mrs. May: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is trying to pick a fight, but I do not think that the need for a fight exists. Although I recognise that one or two speeches in the debate have taken a different course, it has been interesting to note the degree of agreement about the need to do something to increase the number of women in Parliament. It is right that members of my party have challenged the concept of all-women shortlists; indeed, I did so tonight. The important point about the Bill is that it will enable parties to do what they believe is right in terms of taking positive action—positive action of all kinds—and my party will take the action that we believe is necessary, which may well not involve all-women shortlists.

Stephen Hesford: We have heard the comments from the Conservatives. I have to say that the contribution of the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) was somewhat schizophrenic. She began by speaking in favour of the Bill, then seemed to argue herself out of that view by the end of her speech. The hon. Member for Maidenhead made the same kind of argument in a less obvious way. I submit that this is and remains a party political issue. The courage shown by the Government in introducing the Bill forces the issue, and I commend the ministerial team for that. I hope that the Bill receives a Second Reading.

Two arguments are put to me as a male Labour Member. One is that the legislation is not a doorstep issue. People ask, "Why are you bothering to bring the Bill before the House?" Introducing it is a point of principle, which is important in itself. If we cannot legislate on important points of principle, what good are we in this place?

The second argument is that the legislation is a doorstep issue for all those constituencies that are more than adequately represented by my female colleagues who were elected in 1997 on all-women shortlists. I am absolutely honoured—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Walter.

9.11 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I am delighted that there are two women on our Front Bench to represent the Opposition view—not two token women but two of the most effective women in Parliament. As well as speaking on women's issues, they hold key shadow Cabinet portfolios.

The Bill marks another milestone in the slow progress in western democracies towards political equality between men and women. The measure should be unnecessary, but alas the inbuilt prejudices that have existed throughout the battle for women's representation persist today. That battle extends back to the 19th century and even before, and I am reminded of it every morning. Hanging on the wall outside my bathroom is an item from the collection of political memorabilia owned by my wife, Barbara Gorna. She has campaigned for political equality for many years, as have many women Members, and she inspired me in that cause. She also stood for election to the House in 1997, albeit unsuccessfully.

I am reminded of the battle for women's representation by the bloodstained scarf worn by Emily Davison when she fell in front of the King's horse at the 1913 Derby. Hon. Members will remember that Emily Davison died in Epsom hospital on 8 June, but my wife has the telegram sent from Buckingham palace to the jockey on 7 June:

"Queen Alexandra was very sorry indeed to hear of your sad accident caused through the abominable conduct of a brutal lunatic woman. I telegraph now by Her Majesty's command to enquire how you are getting on and to express Her Majesty's sincere hope that you may soon be alright again."

Queen Alexandra would be at home on many parliamentary selection committees today.

Progress in the House began with the Reform Act 1832, which massively extended the franchise, although alas not to women. In 1867, the franchise was further extended and by 1869 a small group of female ratepayers gained the vote in municipal elections. At the time, a remark of particular relevance to today's debate was made. Benjamin Disraeli said:

"In the present age, and under the existing circumstances of the country, the best way to maintain and strengthen the character and functions of the House of Commons was to establish them on a broad, popular basis."

I do not have to remind hon. Members that it was not until 1918 that the House managed to extend the franchise to women over 30. In October that year, it gave women the right to sit in the House of Commons. The opposition then, and in 1928 when the franchise was finally extended to give women equality, was deep-seated, bigoted and misplaced. The hon. Member for Enfield, Colonel Applin, said:

"There are at least 75 per cent. of the people of this country who do not want this thing . . . I feel certain that I am right. It is not an equal franchise; it is an unequal franchise."

Colonel Applin calculated that there would be 2.2 million more women than men on the register. He went on:

"It will give the women the power over the finances of the country."

Then—in a fashion that might find some support among selection committees—he went on:

"It must mean taking on grave responsibilities, which would perhaps be too great a burden for women."

Colonel Applin was interrupted by at least one woman Member at that stage, but he ploughed on:

"Suppose a woman sat on that Bench as Chancellor of the Exchequer . . . Imagine her introducing her Budget, and in middle her speech a message coming in"—

he obviously had some foresight about pagers—

"'Your child is dangerously ill, come at once.'"

He concluded:

"It is obvious that, with a thousand cases like that, the whole system must break down".—[*Official Report*, 29 March 1928; Vol. 215, c. 1392-93.]

And so, today, we come to this Bill. Britain currently has one of the lowest levels of political representation of women in Europe. It has been argued that the best way in which to counter the trend is for parties to use positive action mechanisms. Encouragement, coercion and shame do not work; where positive action has been used, it has dramatically increased women's representation.

The last election saw 118 women elected to Parliament—less than in 1997. That represents progress at a rate of about 1.5 women per year in the 82 years since women have been eligible to sit here. Now we have gone into reverse: in the European Union, only Ireland and France have lower female representations.

Positive action, is needed not because women are not able to succeed on merit but because discrimination in the selection process means that they are rarely given an opportunity to try. Experience from across Europe has demonstrated that the use of positive action is a key factor in the determination of whether a country has high levels of female representation. Better training and support for potential female candidates are of course necessary, but they have not made a significant difference.

Today we have an opportunity to amend the Act that outlawed Labour's all-women shortlists. There are those who argue that candidates should be selected simply on merit—that the best candidate for the job should be selected, regardless of gender. In an ideal world, of course, those candidates should be selected on merit, but at present that does not happen. Opaque discrimination is inherent in the selection processes of all political parties. If a selection committee is determined to choose a male candidate, the woman candidate will not be selected no matter how good she is.

The predominantly elderly selectors tend to have a clear vision of their ideal candidate. In the Tory party he is married, 40-something, with a reasonable career in the City, the law or the Army. A bit of experience in local government helps, but the real clincher is the attractive wife, two smashing kids and a labrador.

Positive action is needed not because women cannot succeed on the basis of merit, but because discrimination means that all too often women are not given the opportunity to stand. There are those who say that discrimination should not be countered with more discrimination—discrimination against men. They say that two wrongs do not make a right. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) made that point. But positive action is not designed to discriminate against men as revenge for the discrimination suffered by women; it is designed to level the playing field, to allow women to compete for parliamentary selection on the same basis as men.

I have heard female colleagues suggest that it is patronising to women to suggest that they need this kind of help. There are clever party functionaries who say that the problem is not that women are being discriminated against but that not enough women are putting themselves forward. They would say, "Why bother?" But every political party contains talented women who have been trying for years to be selected to fight a safe or marginal parliamentary seat. Even in the Labour party, and I speak as no expert, half the aspiring candidates shortlisted for safe Labour party seats were women, yet only just over 10 per cent. of those seats went to women.

I have heard successful male candidates argue that women are coming forward but that they are not good women and that with positive action we end up with low-quality Members of Parliament—obviously, those without smashing kids, jam-making spouses and pedigree labradors. They suggest that women elected under Labour's all-women shortlists in 1997 are a prime example of that. I could make a cheap party point, but in all honesty there is no evidence to suggest that the women selected under all-women shortlists are any better or worse than the rest of their parliamentary colleagues.

The Bill is permissive. Political parties may take advantage of it if they wish. It will not force any political party to adopt positive action mechanisms. It is a desperate measure, but it is temporary. It is essential and it is timely.

9.21 pm

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): In the United Kingdom, the watershed for women parliamentarians was the election of the Labour Government in 1997 and the election of 101 Labour women to Parliament. Before that, women had never made up more than 10 per cent. of all UK Members of Parliament. But we cannot rest on our laurels. We have just 118 women MPs now. Less than one in five MPs are women, which is well below the record of our European neighbours.

I am particularly pleased that the Bill extends to local government because it is often at local level that women are most active—for example, as school governors, tenants, representatives or representatives of church organisations. It is a natural step for many women to stand for council and find a route to wider political involvement. However, that route to empowerment locally and nationally can be blocked for women. Only one quarter of local councillors across England are women, despite women's traditional involvement in grass-roots politics. I do not think that anyone in their right mind would suggest that that is because women are less able than existing male councillors.

Local government can be a valuable training ground for politicians, but my concern is that we are failing to attract young recruits, just as we are failing to enthuse young people about voting. I recently visited a sixth form in my constituency for a political debate. I was particularly impressed by the articulate and well-informed girls who quizzed me. A few years ago, when I visited schools as a local councillor, it was difficult to get girls to be vocal and to participate. Now there is no holding them back. It is the boys who are less forthcoming.

If my constituency is anything to go by, we have talented young women interested in politics, but how do we transform that interest into involvement? The Bill will do a lot to help, but we must do more. Putting citizenship on the curriculum is a step forward but democracy should be a real part of young people's lives. All schools should have school councils that mean something—not talking shops but forums to listen to pupils' views and to act upon them.

We must involve young people in their communities, giving them a stake in those communities. Then they will want to vote and to involve themselves in community politics. I know that that is easier said than done, but it has to happen if we are to have a healthy democracy. Let us be in absolutely no doubt: ensuring that women of

[Charlotte Atkins]

all ages are involved at every level of government is about building a healthy democracy. We cannot afford to exclude over 50 per cent. of our population from political representation, but that is what we have done. Since 1918, of Members who have served in the House of Commons, only 6 per cent. have been women. That is shameful.

The trade union movement is another traditional training ground for Labour Members. All too often, however, as Fawcett Society research has demonstrated, good intentions on women's representation are often sidelined in the desire to get favourite sons into safe or winnable seats.

My experience with Unison has been rather different from that. Prior to the 1997 general election, Unison created a parliamentary panel of 12 members, 10 of whom were women. It provided training, advice, support and assistance with printing, and four Unison women were elected. I am delighted that another woman from Unison, my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Anne Picking), joined us in 2001. Unison's use of a small panel enabled it to give support to women candidates which helped them to be selected. I believe that unions have a proud record in promoting women's rights in the work force, by training and by representation. If they have the political will they can do the same for women parliamentarians.

The selection process itself is central to the promotion of women candidates. It is vital that parties adopt rules that are clear and very much in black and white. Any perceived bias in the selection process must be eradicated if women are to believe that they have an equal chance of selection. There must be a level playing field for all applicants on access to membership information, the use of conduct rules, postal votes and contact with party members, and also concerning the types of information that candidates can circulate.

I support women-only shortlists because too many women have been put on shortlists simply to reach a 50 per cent. quota. Women-only shortlists helped to break the logjam back in 1997, and they can help us to make further progress now. They are not an insult to women.

In my selection, I defeated five men. In the mid-1960s, when my father was selected as a candidate for Preston, North, he was chosen from an all-male shortlist. However, he did not feel patronised because he was not taking on allcomers. At that time, women were not even considered for selections. No one batted an eyelid that he was selected from an all-male shortlist because it was traditional, old-fashioned sexual discrimination. It was not positive discrimination to secure a Parliament that properly reflects the experience and skills of the whole population.

9.27 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I shall keep my speech short.

It is a great pleasure to speak on behalf of Plaid Cymru—the party of Wales—and the Scottish National party on this very important and welcome Bill. It is a pleasure also to add another Welsh voice to the debate. As the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) said, we come from a country that has elected only seven women to this place from the more than 1,500 Members that we have returned here since the Act of Union. Now, however, in the excellent record of the National Assembly, Wales is leading the debate on structures of representation for women.

As we have heard today, the evidence shows overwhelmingly that the problem lies not with the voters—who are only too happy when given the opportunity to elect women Members—or with women, but with parties and institutions. That is the clear message that I am taking away from this debate. As we heard, many women find the culture of the political arena alien, unfriendly and sometimes even hostile. Consequently, many of them reject politics entirely. Other women face more practical obstacles in juggling personal and political commitments.

Despite the welcome changes in recent years, the sitting hours of the House and the parliamentary programme have still not been adjusted fully to take into account the dual burden carried by many women and also by many men. I draw hon. Members' attention to the family-friendly hours that are operated by the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. We could learn much on the issue from those institutions.

Lack of confidence is one of the key reasons for women's under-representation in formal political institutions, and this shows the importance of a supportive culture within parties and institutions in nurturing women's political self-confidence. In this regard, I pay tribute to the exemplary record of the Scottish National party, which has had a strong record over the years in terms of women's representation in this House. The party achieved a representation of 43 per cent.—17 women MSPs—in its Scottish parliamentary group without mechanisms. That shows the health and strength of that party's commitment to gender equality.

We as a party in this House do not have such a good record; that is why, in the 1990s, we instituted a gender balance commission and placed the women candidates for the National Assembly elections at the top of the regional lists. Together with the decision of the Labour party in Wales to operate twinning arrangements, that ensured the excellent result that women made up 41.6 per cent. of representation at the National Assembly for Wales. It should be noted that, throughout Europe, that level of representation is surpassed only by Sweden at 42.7 per cent; it is an excellent and creditable result.

It is because of the great advances achieved in the devolved Administrations in recent years that my party welcomes the legislation and urges the Government to ensure that the Bill receives Royal Assent as soon as possible, to facilitate still further the selection processes for the National Assembly for Wales. I am pleased to tell the House that our equal opportunities director is currently developing proposals on ensuring fairness and gender equality in the choice of candidates, and these are to be passed at a special constitutional conference in November.

We welcome and support the Bill, although, in passing, I should point out that the Labour Government might have saved some parliamentary time if they had had the courage to challenge the Jepson ruling, as the Equal Opportunities Commission asked. At least they have given us a valuable opportunity to have a necessary debate, and to look not just at the issue of representation but at the issue of culture and the attitudes that too often exclude people from the mainstream of modern politics.

9.32 pm

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): I want to concentrate my remarks on the Scottish Parliament, because I believe that its success in selecting women can teach us many things.

The sixth of May 1999 was an historic day for the political representation of women in Scotland with the first elections to the new Scottish Parliament when 48 women entered the Chamber as elected Members. The representation rate was over 37 per cent. and that broke all records for the representation of women in politics in Scotland at local, Westminster and European level. We were only beaten by Wales in that respect, although that was welcome. The significant difference between the parties in terms of the number of women MSPs is directly related to the action or inaction that the parties took to encourage women candidates, either in constituency seats or in the list.

The Scottish Labour party had a 50:50 gender balance; 28 female and 28 male MSPs were elected. Some 43 per cent. of the Scottish National party's MSPs were female; the figures for the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives were 17 per cent. and 12 per cent. respectively. The election results demonstrate that even with a newly elected Parliament—where there is no incumbency barrier—equal representation of women cannot be taken for granted. It can be argued that the results provide evidence that political campaigning and specific policies and mechanisms are essential to ensure that women are represented in significant numbers in political life.

The increase in the number of women elected to the Scottish Parliament is due in part to sustained campaigning by women's organisations and civic society in Scotland, and reflects the different approaches taken by the different political parties in Scotland. Prior to the election, all parties stated their concern to see more women in politics and their intention to encourage women to come forward for selection. But the Labour party was the only party to operate a specific mechanism to achieve that. Recognising that, under the additional member system, most Labour seats would be gained on a constituency basis, a scheme was devised to twin constituencies to allow both men and women to stand for election.

The Liberal Democrats signed the electoral agreement published in the Scottish Constitutional Convention's final publication, entitled "Scotland's Parliament, Scotland's Right". They committed the party in principle to gender equality in the new Parliament. They initially proposed a so-called "zipped" system to get women on the lists at a reasonable level. However, they later reneged, and the party, at its annual Scottish conference, voted against the proposal. The fact that nothing was done contributed to the fact that Liberal Democrat party has so few women in the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish National party also proposed a zipping system. Although its conference rejected that proposal, the party put women high on selection lists with the result that its level of women's representation has reached a respectable 40 per cent. However, I argue that the party's use of a specific mechanism—in this case not women-only shortlists, or twinning—was absolutely necessary to produce that outcome.

The Conservative party continued to express its opposition to special measures, saying that it would select people on merit. I make no comment about the Conservative men who are Members of the Scottish Parliament. I have beaten one of them twice in elections, but I welcome the apparent turnaround in the party's approach to these issues. I am surprised, and gratified by it. I hope that it will be reflected also in the Scottish Conservative party.

The Scottish Parliament proves that a specific positive measure is the only way to get more women into politics.

9.36 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Tonight's debate may have come as a surprise to some hon. Members, and it is possible that more than one speech anticipating opposition to the Bill from Conservative Front-Bench Members has had to be scrapped. I am delighted that some Labour Members have recognised the important change in my party's approach to this matter, which in fact was made just before the last general election. The turnaround is perhaps not as sudden as has been made out.

There is simple recognition among hon. Members of all parties that not enough progress has been made in getting women elected to Parliament. No one is against getting more women into Parliament and, although hon. Members differ about how to achieve it, that is the common point from which the debate begins. In that sense, the debate has not been party political. Those who have tried to make it so may have misjudged the mood of the House.

I hope that the Conservative party has demonstrated its lead on this issue by fielding a woman to open the debate and another to wind it up. We were also joined for much of the time by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait). For the record, 50 per cent. of female Conservative MPs sit on the Front Bench. That shows that those who get here get on.

I am sorry that the Secretary of State has not returned to his place, but he referred at the outset of his remarks to various initiatives that he has taken to help women in the workplace. He mentioned improved maternity benefits, support for low-paid women and better child care arrangements, but unfortunately, such measures are not likely to help in the context of Westminster, where there is no official maternity leave and no child care facilities, and where we MPs are not remotely able to describe ourselves as low paid.

I am glad to see that the Secretary of State has now returned, so I hope that one of his colleagues can advise him of the point that I have just made. My description of the House is not what puts women off. Women are put off by a strong and true perception that it is very difficult to get selected, and that, once here, the experience is not especially easy. No one aspiring to Parliament would expect an easy life, but good candidates are lost, or never get started, because of the poor perception of the House.

That perception is based on hard fact: 82 per cent. of MPs are male and, as several hon. Members have noted, that compares unfavourably with other Parliaments in Europe. Closer to home, greater progress has been made with the devolved Assemblies. My hon. Friends and I are especially keen to support the remarks made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson), and we, too, are keen for more female representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly. What is even more embarrassing for the mother of Parliaments is that many Parliaments in the developing world have achieved better female representation than we have.

[Mrs. Caroline Spelman]

We support the principle enshrined in the Bill which will allow political parties the freedom to choose from a range of measures to help increase the number of female Members of Parliament and return them to this place. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) said, we should not get hooked up on women-only shortlists, as they are only one of the measures that could be used. A range of measures are possible under the Bill, such as the additional training of candidates and selectors, or the scheme proposed by my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridgeshire, South (Mr. Lansley) and for Maidenhead. We believe that it should be for individual parties to decide on the best mechanism for selecting their candidates.

Not surprisingly, the hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) showed a hazy understanding of Conservative party selection procedure. We have massively enfranchised our grass roots, with each member of a local association having an equal say in choosing the candidate. It is highly democratic, but with those rights come responsibilities to choose the best candidate. Understanding what "best" means requires training, but as the law stands, that could be illegal. The change in the law would make it legal in the future.

I understand the sensitivity of women who claim that they feel patronised by the Bill. At the Liberal Democrat conference we saw the clash of views between the leadership advocating women-only shortlists and their candidates wearing T-shirts bearing the slogan, "I don't want to be a token woman". None of us wants to be a token woman, and I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) does not regard me or my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead as a token woman in any way. The correct form of positive action should be chosen to suit a party's culture, and it need not imply tokenism.

I received good advice from some Labour women MPs who told me that women-only shortlists have created a backlash at local level. We intend to learn from that. It is one of the reasons why I am not in favour of that measure. However, there is much we can do to improve the situation by changing our selection procedure, and several recommendations have already been made in our party to achieve that.

Dr. Evan Harris: Does the hon. Lady recognise that if the Conservative party rejects all-women shortlists, which it is perfectly entitled to do, and when the Tories eventually reject first past the post—as they will—new options under a more proportional system will be proposed, such as pooling or zipping?

Mrs. Spelman: With respect, I think that the real question tonight for the hon. Gentleman's party is to decide what it will do under the Bill.

There is no denying the fact that the use of women-only shortlists in the Labour party had a dramatic effect in the 1997 election. However, some of the euphoria of the system's proponents was deflated by the outcome of the successful challenge by a male candidate—the so-called Jepson case. At the time there was much debate about whether a change to the laws on sex discrimination would be compatible with European law. Those of us who support this change in British law make a strong plea to the Government not to get egg on their face a second time if there is a legal challenge regarding its compatibility with European law. That is the Government's job—they have the necessary resources and lawyers at their disposal. It is our job, as an Opposition, to ask whether European Union compliance has been exhaustively checked. I should be very grateful for the Minister's reassurance on that point tonight.

Conservative Front Benchers welcome the Bill's permissive nature and we will support this change in the law. However, I warn the Government that we may vote on the timetable motion on a point of principle. The Bill enables the parties to choose what will work for them. No country has significantly increased the representation of women in its Parliament without some form of positive action. There is no reason why the United Kingdom should be any different.

We should put tonight's decision in the context of falling electoral turnout and the female voters who tell us that they are turned off by the style of politics in this place, to which they cannot relate. We need to think how to make British politics more attractive and accessible, and tonight offers the opportunity to show our willingness to try something new which can make a difference.

9.45 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We have had a good debate with an encouragingly large number of speakers—20 in total, of whom, significantly, 17 were in favour of the legislation. I appreciate the support that we received from those on the Opposition and the Liberal Democrat Front Benches and from Plaid Cymru. We certainly intend to proceed on the basis of consensus to achieve an important change that will make a real difference in the representation of women, not only in Parliament but in democratic institutions throughout the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) supported the Bill and pointed out, fairly and forcefully, that the Conservative party in particular was losing out on opportunities from the reservoir of talent because of the way in which the selection processes operate. She showed some reluctance to answer the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock)—whether the Conservative party would set a target for increasing the representation of women in the party. I hope that the hon. Lady will think further about that.

The hon. Lady also asked about compatibility with European law, which is an important point. I must make it absolutely clear that the Government would not want any amendments to domestic law to be found to be in breach of Community law. I am confident that the Bill is compatible with EU treaty law and does not contravene the United Kingdom's international obligations. The Government's view is that the selection of candidates does not fall within the ambit of Community law, in particular the equal treatment directive. I hope that the hon. Lady finds that reassuring.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) made a powerful speech in favour of increasing the representation of women in this House, but not because specific women's issues required the attention of women—she made a strong case against

there being specific gender issues. She made the sound and sensible observation that Parliament should reflect the full range of talents and variety in our society and that it should be more representative of women in particular.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), speaking for the Liberal Democrats, tried to widen the debate to cover appointments to public bodies. I suspect that the motive might have been to draw attention away from his party's difficulties at its recent conference with affirmative measures to assist women's representation. His review of appointments to public bodies was a little selective.

We are the first to admit that there is an enormous way to go, but it does not do the House any service to paint an unduly gloomy picture. Looking at the record of our Department in government, I am pleased to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman of the real advances that have been made in the past four years.

I have three examples. In 1997, the Audit Commission comprised 38 per cent. women; now, 56 per cent. of its members are women. In 1997, only 18 per cent. of the board of the Housing Corporation were women; now it is 38 per cent., with a woman in the chair. When we came to office, the advisory panel on standards in the Planning Inspectorate had no women members. Now, four of the seven members are women—a majority. So there are good examples of cases where affirmative action has been taken and the position is improving.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall compared himself to Gladstone, as "an old man in a hurry."

The difference is that William Ewart Gladstone carried his party with him on most issues. The hon. Gentleman has not been able to carry his with him. His experience at the party conference must have been galling. How can he have felt when Jenny Willott, a representative of the Liberal Democrat party, said that Labour had won most of the female vote at the 1997 general election because it had women candidates in winnable seats? She said:

"They looked like a women-friendly party. Any woman who looks at the Lib-Dem parliamentary party now, no disrespect to any of them, but they don't exactly look a women-friendly bunch."

Mr. Tyler: May I tell the right hon. Gentleman that she voted for me?

Mr. Raynsford: I am delighted that someone feels that the hon. Gentleman at least is woman-friendly in that otherwise women-unfriendly bunch.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of European treaty law and the European convention on human rights. I hope that my response to the hon. Member for Maidenhead deals with that point. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the concerns expressed by Lord Lester as to the need for a regulatory impact assessment. We shall consider that and I am sure that it will be raised in the upper House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) gave an entirely apposite description of her experience when she first announced her intention to stand as a candidate for election and was greeted by incredulity in her own locality. That was a telling example of the problems faced by women wanting to stand for Parliament. My hon. Friend also spoke movingly of her experience in Northern Ireland, where she made an important contribution, liaising with women's groups to advance the peace process.

The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) was one of three Members who did not support the Bill. She referred specifically to public appointments and expressed concern about that field. I am pleased to be able to tell her that, since 1997, the number of women on health authorities has increased from 40 per cent. to 50 per cent. as a result of measures taken by the Government which I am sure she will support.

The right hon. Lady is confused in thinking that the Bill applies only to Members of Parliament. It applies to people seeking elected office in the United Kingdom—whether to Parliament, the devolved Assemblies, the European Parliament or local councils. The measure is comprehensive and covers the full range of elected posts.

The right hon. Lady raised the issue of ethnic minorities. That is a fair issue and an important one to consider. However, there are very different considerations. The right hon. Lady knows well that the distribution of ethnic minority groups around the country is varied; in many areas, they make up a relatively small proportion of the total population. It would thus be extremely difficult to set up a simple, national system of universal application to enable that particular discrimination to be tackled by legislative means. By contrast, we know that throughout the country, area by area, give or take about one percentage point, there is equal representation of men and women in every constituency.

Virginia Bottomley: The contrast that I was making is with teachers. Would a primary school with an all-female staff who felt that it would be right to appoint a male teacher because it was important for the children to have a male role model be prohibited from drawing up an all-male shortlist?

Mr. Raynsford: As an experienced Member of the House, the right hon. Lady knows that there is a fundamental difference between people who are appointed to paid employment and people who are selected as candidates and then stand for election. That is a fundamental distinction recognised in the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford, in an eloquent and moving speech, set out the strong case for the Bill and for ensuring more effective and extensive representation of women. I pay tribute to her for all the work that she has done to ensure that the issue has come before the House. She has been an assiduous and persistent campaigner for the measure.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald was the first person, predictably, to use the word "patronising", which she did at 8.03 pm, as forecast by some of my colleagues. She also referred to a phrase used by a member of her party in the past: "whingeing and whining". The fundamental problem that the right hon. Lady must face is that her recipe would leave the Conservative Benches continuing to be overwhelmingly occupied by males—91.6 per cent. to be precise.

The right hon. Lady suggested that she had other ways of dealing with the problem. She did not specify them but, given that she was in full flood as she put forward

[Mr. Raynsford]

that view, it reminded me of nothing less than King Lear. Towards the end of the tragedy, as his wits began to go, King Lear said:

"I will do such things—

What they are yet I know not—but they shall be

The terrors of the earth."

The right hon. Lady's ideas will be the terrors of those on the Opposition Front Bench.

My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) explained the impact of women-only shortlists in redressing the imbalance. Hers was an important contribution.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) supported the principles behind the Bill, but raised questions about compatibility with the equal treatment directive. He referred to the Abrahamsson case but—and he will be aware of the significance of this—that case was brought in relation to the appointment of a candidate for an academic post. There is an appointment distinction, which I have already made, between the appointments to paid posts and the selection of candidates who stand for election. That is why we are confident that the equal treatment directive will not apply.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) opened her speech by paying tribute to Val Feld for her important work on equal opportunities in Wales. I would like to add to that, because I worked closely with Val Feld when she represented Shelter in Wales many years ago. I knew of her sterling qualities. My hon. Friend also commented on the difficulties that women had encountered in being represented in Wales, and referred to the important advances that have been made recently.

The hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) referred to problems of the male club in the House of Commons, and my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) highlighted the important contributions that women have made as Members of the House, particularly in promoting private Members' Bills and as Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) was one of three Members who did not support the principles behind the Bill, but she conceded the difficulties that face the women in Northern Ireland who seek selection. I trust that, as she considers the Bill—it is a permissive one—she will realise that it moves in a direction which, I hope she will be able to support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) approved of the Bill, and the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) gave us an entertaining account of the past 150 years of history, including a reference to an obscure blimpish MP in the 1920s. The hon. Gentleman drew a veil over the party affiliation of that obscure military man, but I wager that he was not describing a member of the Labour party.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) gave a robust defence of all-women shortlists, and the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) referred to the proud record of the Welsh Assembly, where 41 per cent. of Members are women. That would not be the case, however, if more than 50 per cent. of the Labour Members in the Assembly were not women. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Sandra Osborne) made a parallel point about the important contribution that women have made in the Scottish Parliament.

We have had a very good debate. We have heard much about issues of representation and about the unacceptable levels of discrimination under current arrangements. A fundamental problem needs addressing, and most of us will agree that something must be done, and done soon. The Bill is permissive and aims to open up for political parties the options that are available. It will give them the flexibility to pursue options that will advance women's representation in the way that the parties think is most appropriate. In doing so, they will have to consider carefully how women and men are represented at all levels of government. Our proposals are proportionate and are designed to be appropriate to the problem that they seek to resolve.

The Bill will remove the excuse provided by the Jepson case for not facing up to our responsibilities. It will enable political parties to adopt appropriate measures. I believe that it will make an important contribution to improving our democracy. It is a short, simple and elegant solution, which will seek to redress a fundamental imbalance that has marred our Parliament for far too long. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

SEX DISCRIMINATION (ELECTION CANDIDATES) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

2. All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or any further messages from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in standing committee

3.—(1) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 8th November 2001.

(2) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4.—(1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement.

(2) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

The House divided: Ayes 322, Noes 70.

Division No. 42] [7.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malleber, Judy
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*

Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Mr. Fraser Kemp.

NOES

Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Swayne, Desmond
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Off-road Motor Cycles

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

10.12 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a problem that is causing great concern in Skelmersdale, the largest town in my constituency and the place where I live. I am even more grateful that it falls to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) to reply to the debate. He and I were two members of a notable band of brothers who were incarcerated in the Cloisters when we arrived in Parliament in 1992. At that time, my hon. Friend was our man in the south-west, now thankfully joined by several other colleagues in the region. He was, and probably still is, famed for the clarity and resonance of his voice. In my first six months or so in Parliament, I came to know more about Plymouth docks than I did about West Lancashire. This evening, I aim to return the favour; I am delighted that my hon. Friend is now a Minister, and trust that he will be so for a very long time indeed.

The new part of Skelmersdale was built for pedestrians and is a labyrinth of walkways, which were intended—admirably at that time—to separate pedestrians from traffic. Inside the estates, the pedestrian ways often pass right before front doors without intervening gardens. The estates are tunnelled by passageways which debouch unannounced on to further pedestrian ways. The town is characterised by a high proportion of young people; it is an extended playground for young children, and many hundreds of young mothers push prams and baby carriers about the place.

In recent years, many of the estates have been bedevilled by off-road motor bikes, both youngsters' bikes and adult trial bikes of the type usually associated with scrambling, a sport of which I strongly approve. My estimate, which can only be a rough estimate, is that there are about 100 off-road bikes being used inside the estates, mostly by teenagers, but sometimes by children as young as six or seven.

Residents have for some years complained bitterly about the noise nuisance, but in recent months increasingly about the physical danger presented by bikes roaring round their houses. The police are deeply concerned about the matter, but are severely handicapped by the impossibility of giving chase to the offenders. Given the structure of the estates, any chase would simply multiply the chances of a serious accident. We have seen many examples on our roads in recent years.

Two citizens in particular in Skelmersdale have given me vivid accounts of the activ .. bikers. Mr. John Gresty of Eavesdale has researched the problem and tells me that it is also common in inner Liverpool, which is not far away. Mr. Gordon Leather of Feltons describes how he was struck by a trial bike ridden by a 13-year-old on a footpath. Mr. Leather was catapulted over a garden wall and received injuries to his legs, back and shoulders, for which he has been receiving hospital treatment since March. He tried to pursue the matter to seek redress, only to be informed by solicitors from the Motor Insurers Bureau that he could not claim because the motor bike was on the pavement. In any case, he could never have identified the lad responsible for the accident.

I have a personal experience to record. While I was driving through one of my estates during the general election campaign, my car was struck by a young man aged about 17 on a trial bike, who shot out of the shrubbery and hit the front of my car. He went underneath the car. Fortunately, I was going very slowly, at about 10 mph. It was an election campaign and—my hon. Friend the Minister will be familiar with this—I was looking for a long-lost canvass team, buried somewhere in the estate. However, from the crunching noise, I honestly believed that I had run over the young man's head. I got out of the car, terrified and shaking. It turned out that he was not seriously hurt, but the bike was completely demolished, to his evident distress, as he said it was "a mate's". It had no identifying marks on it at all. I was so relieved at the outcome of the accident that I took no further action, especially as his bike fell to bits as he tried to pick it up, which was rather comical. In retrospect, I should have carted him off to the police, especially as about £300-worth of damage had been done to my car.

The police in Skelmersdale have taken the problem seriously and are close to prosecution in a number of cases, but they are frustrated by the fact that when they catch and deal with a young offender for dangerous driving or riding on the highway, the culprit, once he has been dealt with, returns to his bike. There are no powers to confiscate bikes, which would be a terrific sanction for the police to be able to employ.

I know that consideration of such powers is a matter for the Home Office, but I also know from my time as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Home Office that there are regular discussions between officials and Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Home Office on interface issues, particularly concerning sentencing for road offences. I ask my hon. Friend to ensure that the serious problem that I have described is included in those discussions as a matter of urgency. There is no doubt in my mind that there are deaths waiting to happen out there on the estates in Skelmersdale.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, about something that is a problem for many of his fellow Members of Parliament. The Doncaster crime and disorder partnership has identified motor bike nuisance as one of the issues that it intends to address. I concur with my hon. Friend on the fact that the police need powers to confiscate the bikes, but does he also agree that housing departments should consider seeking eviction if a family are conniving and encouraging their children to cause this nuisance?

Mr. Pickthall: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. I have been unable to ascertain the extent of the problem and it is interesting to know that it is happening in her constituency as well. I am a little uneasy about the idea of eviction sitting on the back of it, but that is another matter.

The police have dramatic evidence of the dangers that my hon. Friend and I have described, and they have shown it to me. Some weeks ago, the Lancashire police helicopter was in the vicinity of Skelmersdale and was asked to look at a motor cyclist who was riding dangerously through one of the estates. It captured on video many minutes of this 13-year-old, as he turned out to be, zooming past people's doors, along footpaths and through the ginnels. At one point—I have seen the tape—he shot through a group of people, striking a man and spinning him round. Fortunately, the man was not seriously injured. The rider spotted the helicopter and sought to shake it off, but he could not; it followed him and the chase ended when the lad got home. His mother came out of the house and hid the bike in the kitchen. I am reliably informed that many of the kids hide these bikes in their bedrooms, although how they get them upstairs, I do not know.

To my mind, the case for action against these characters is clear. I believe that it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that police have more powers to deal with them. However, there are other aspects of the problem that need to be addressed. A couple of weeks ago, I met two young 14-year-old bikers to discuss these problems. David McCullock and Karl Matthews told me that they wished to use their bikes legally—they were decent young lads and I believed them—but that that presented them with great difficulties as to how and where they could ride them in safety.

We must consider whether it is reasonable and safe to allow children to own motor bikes, which can be lethal weapons. No doubt, some parents believe that they are doing their children a great favour by buying them bikes, not taking into account the fact that their use almost inevitably involves riding on roads and thus breaking the law. They consider neither legality nor insurance responsibility. Having paid large sums for the bikes, they are then reluctant to prevent the children from using them.

I heard of one case in which the sale of a bike to a boy who is an epileptic was refused by the vendor, so his father turned up and bought it for him. In my opinion, that was very misplaced generosity. Parents have a huge responsibility. One of the boys to whom I spoke told me that he had possessed a motor bike since he was seven years old. David and Karl made the incontrovertible point that, as long as it is legal for them to own an off-road motor bike, it is reasonable for them to have somewhere to use it legally.

The police, youth service and council in West Lancashire are all keen to identify an area where bikes can be used without causing danger to pedestrians. I am very keen to help with that. We have tried to establish a site before, but people living close to the area that was identified made an enormous protest about the potential noise nuisance, which is always a problem in urban areas. Even in rural areas, where scrambling tracks are not uncommon, the noise can be ferocious and can carry a long way. I have a problem on the border of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner), where noise created at a track in one local authority and constituency area is causing nuisance in the neighbouring one, which is mine. Such cross-border problems are very difficult to deal with. We may be able to identify suitable areas in industrial estates, but we will then face the problem of ensuring that the off-road bikes get to the legal venues without riding on roads or using footpaths. The logistics could be very difficult, although that is matter for local agencies and councils to consider, alongside the many other demands on their resources.

I was uncertain as to how widespread the problem was. I raised the matter at a Lancashire police forum a couple of months ago and was told that, in Lancashire, it seemed to be confined to Skelmersdale. However, since then,

[Mr. Pickthall]

I have learned that it is a problem in inner Liverpool and in Doncaster. It may be that there is a particular problem in Skelmersdale because of the peculiar geography of the town.

In summary, I am certain that it is not right to place the onus on pedestrians in Skelmersdale to dodge these missiles. It is not right that the residents should be harassed by the persistent noise emanating from bikes roaring up and down the walkways just outside their homes, often in the early hours of the morning. That happens very frequently; it is not an odd occurrence. It is not right that a situation that clearly presents a risk to life and limb should be allowed to drift without an effective remedy.

I therefore ask my hon. Friend to use his ministerial authority to institute an examination of the whole issue of off-road motor bikes: the circumstances of their sale; the suitability or otherwise of young children's ownership of such bikes; the insurance requirements; and the powers of the authorities to prevent the abuse of these bikes and to protect citizens from the effects of their abuse. It is my duty as the MP representing Skelmersdale to do something about this menace before one of my constituents—one of my neighbours, indeed—is killed, rather than seeking to do something after a killing has happened.

10.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall). He and I first came to the House in 1992 and I remember those heady days in the Cloisters when we almost had to sit on each other's laps. It says a lot for the accommodation situation in this place that things have improved so much over the years. I remember my hon. Friend as a strong advocate for many causes, but, as we have heard tonight, he has most of all been a powerful voice in this place for his constituents.

I will ensure that the points that my hon. Friend has raised are dealt with in my Department's discussions with the Home Office. In the short time that I have this evening, I shall give some background to the issue and try to clarify the law as it stands at the moment. During my hon. Friend's contribution, I could not help thinking that, yes, the law is there to make sure that people are protected, but that there would be no need for the police or other agencies to intervene with these young children, some as young as seven, if parents were doing their job and making sure that their children were not causing the kind of nuisance that my hon. Friend so clearly described.

I am sorry to hear that my hon. Friend was the victim of such an incident; I know how distressing that can be. I was glad that neither the young man nor my hon. Friend was injured. I also hope that my hon. Friend's constituents who have been involved in these unfortunate incidents are making a rapid recovery.

I assure my hon. Friend that I appreciate his concern about the use of these vehicles in inappropriate places, and about the noise nuisance and safety problems that they cause. This debate gives me the opportunity to explain to the House my Department's current consideration of the ways in which we might better regulate their off-road use. I shall go into a little detail about that, and I shall outline the current position on the use of off-road motor cycles on the public highway and on the pavement.

When an off-road motor cycle, such as a scramble or trial bike, is used on the highway, it is considered to be a mechanically propelled vehicle. As such, it is subject to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, which requires such vehicles to have vehicle excise duty paid in respect of their use. It should also comply with the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 and the Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations 1989. These require that vehicles must be safely constructed in terms of lighting, braking, tyres and so on. Anyone riding an off-road machine on a road could be prosecuted for failing to comply with these regulations.

Riding or driving any vehicle on the pavement is an offence under section 72 of the Highway Act 1835, and the police are responsible for enforcing those provisions. That became a fixed-penalty notice offence on 1 August 1999, which has made enforcement somewhat easier. Before issuing a fixed-penalty notice, however, the police and traffic wardens must see the vehicle being driven on the pavement, as opposed to simply being parked there.

My hon. Friends the Members for West Lancashire and for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) suggest giving the police powers to confiscate vehicles. Although the police have no powers to confiscate vehicles used illegally off road—there are no plans to give them such powers—a general power exists for the courts to enable them to confiscate property used in the commission of crime, which includes vehicles when certain conditions are fulfilled. One is that an offence—perhaps, for example, drinking and driving, causing death by dangerous driving, an offence of manslaughter or wanton and furious driving—be imprisonable under the Road Traffic Act 1988.

Other powers are available that may be relevant to the situation described by my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire. For instance, charges may be brought for breach of the peace and causing a nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Part III of the Act, as amended by the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993, provides local authorities with the powers to prevent or abate noise nuisance from any vehicle, machinery or equipment on the street, premises or land.

Those powers could apply to the use of off-road motor cycles, but it would be for the local authority environmental health officer to judge whether a problem complained about could be deemed a statutory nuisance. If that were the case, the authority would have to serve an abatement notice on the person responsible for the vehicle. If the person responsible could be found, the notice could be fixed to the vehicle.

Other available powers are in the Road Traffic Act 1991, which allows for prosecution against dangerous driving and careless and inconsiderate driving of a mechanically propelled vehicle in a public place. They enable prosecutions to be brought for offences committed while driving vehicles in off-road areas to which the public have access. Under section 35 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861—the example of wanton or furious driving—a rider of any such vehicle causing death or bodily harm to any person whatever could be prosecuted by the police.

As scramble or trial bikes are classed as off-road vehicles, other statutory requirements relating to on-road motor cycles do not apply. That means that there is no minimum age restriction, nor is there any requirement to have a driving licence, hold insurance or wear a safety helmet.

The Motor Cycles (Protective Helmets) Regulations 1998 require riders and passengers on motor bikes to wear helmets when on a road. We currently have no plans to extend that to off-road use of bikes. The nature of off-road use, which tends to be infrequent, often on private land and usually over difficult terrain, means that effective enforcement would require many scarce police resources.

To ensure that every off-road motor cycle rider has a driving licence, a national registration scheme for all off-road motor cycles would have to be put in place, but it would be costly to set up and administer. It is doubtful whether those who occasionally use unlicensed off-road motor cycles would comply with the scheme and it would be difficult to enforce, which would add to the burden on the police.

I understand from the Association of Chief Police Officers that, in its view, the current legislation is sufficient to deal with the majority of off-road motor cyclists and it is not seeking the introduction of any additional offences or powers in that respect.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I do not want to contradict the police officers who advise my hon. Friend, but I must reinforce the point that this is a key issue. Apart from car dumping, it is the worst environmental crime in most of our constituencies. We cannot cope. Whatever advice has been provided to my hon. Friend we need changes in the law and it is critical that we tackle the issue. Lives are at risk on pavements, in public parks and elsewhere.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank my hon. Friend. Perhaps the following remarks will deal with the issues that are important to his area.

I shall now say something about what we have done to combat the problem of off-road motor cycles in public spaces and on land. Under section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, it is an offence to drive a motor vehicle without permission on to common land, moorland or land of any description that does not form part of a road. It is also an offence under that section to drive a motor vehicle on a footpath or bridleway.

The offences under section 34 did not extend to off-road vehicles, because a motor vehicle was defined in section 185 of the 1988 Act as

"a mechanically propelled vehicle intended or adapted for use on the roads".

As some motor cycles, for example scramble motor cycles, are classified as off-road vehicles, such vehicles were not covered by the prohibition in section 34. However, an amendment to section 34 was included in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which received Royal Assent on 30 November. That amendment had the effect of extending to off-road vehicles, the offence under section 34 of the 1988 Act, and came into force on 1 February 2001.

Another use of off-road motor cycles is for off-road motor-cycle racing. Under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, any land can be used for up to 14 days in any year for motor cycle racing, including trials of speed, without the need for an application for planning permission. The only exception is land within a site of special scientific interest, where express planning permission is always required.

The Government recognise that, although such activity is restricted to 14 days a year, local people can be significantly disturbed by the noise that it creates. Without the requirement for planning permission, a local planning authority has no opportunity to impose suitable conditions that could reduce the impact of such activity.

Last year we commissioned Baker Associates to conduct research including consideration of the temporary uses provisions. Its report was published in September this year. The researchers recommended that the "temporary uses" provisions should be withdrawn entirely, and that no temporary use should be allowed without express planning permission. That recommendation would apply to off-road motor cycle activities. I am sure that that comes as good news to my hon. Friends.

Before deciding whether to accept the researchers' recommendations, we will issue a public consultation paper early next year. It will include options for amending the "temporary uses" provisions. I hope that my hon. Friends' constituents who are affected will participate, and will make their views known either directly or through my hon. Friends.

Caroline Flint: Would my hon. Friend consider discussing with his counterparts in the Home Office how local authorities and the police can use antisocial behaviour orders to build a case against persistent harassment on estates when residents—independent witnesses—can give accounts to the police, so that those kids can be dealt with under the regulations and laws already provided by Government?

Mr. Jamieson: I think that in certain cases in which disturbances are extreme, it would be worth establishing whether they fell within the relevant part of the law. Tonight I have tried to refer to matters that are the responsibility of my Department; when we have finished our consultation, we will—rapidly, I hope—decide on the most appropriate way in which to proceed.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire for raising an issue that is important to many people in many constituencies. Such offences often affect the quality of life of the most vulnerable, such as younger children and the elderly. My hon. Friend spoke with his usual thoroughness and, as always, with great good sense.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 25 October 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Further Education

1. **Clive Efford** (Eltham): If she will make a statement on her plans to widen participation in further education. [6685]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): Further education is central to the provision of high-quality academic and vocational opportunities for learning. FE colleges make a great contribution to raising skill levels, improving basic skills, boosting employability and widening access to learning. More than 4 million people learn via FE each year. The Learning and Skills Council is examining the potential for FE to deliver further growth in adult participation.

Clive Efford: I thank my hon. Friend and take this opportunity to welcome him to the Dispatch Box, the first opportunity I have had to do so.

My hon. Friend will be aware of the widespread concern in FE colleges about the comments of Mr. John Harwood on the BBC's "Today" programme last week. Does he agree that if we are to deliver on our targets for participation in further education, Mr. Harwood will need the co-operation of people in further education colleges? Does he accept that his statement conflicts with the findings of the chief inspector of the Further Education Funding Council, who found that, in 1999-2000, 93 per cent. of colleges were satisfactory or above? Does he agree that if we are going to deliver on our programme to improve education, we do not need to repeat in the FE sector the mistakes that were made in Ofsted, where officers made inflammatory and unfounded statements through the media?

John Healey: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The range of people who learn through FE and the range of courses that they can follow is second to none anywhere in the education system. I have seen some excellent provision. Co-operation will be the key, but we cannot get away from the fact that the variation in quality and performance between courses and colleges is too wide. That is why we place so much importance on the standards fund, which we have doubled this year, the new inspection regime, and the Learning and Skills Council working with FE colleges to raise standards.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I too genuinely welcome the Minister to his new post. Does he not recognise that further education colleges feel extremely battered—a combination perhaps of financial pressures, curriculum pressures on staff and worries about falling student numbers? Given the perhaps compressed reports by the chief inspectors following their initial inspections, and the remarks of Mr. John Harwood, which may have been distorted in transit, will the Minister take this opportunity to affirm clearly that the great majority of further education provision is satisfactory or indeed positively good, and provides a foundation on which improvements can be made?

John Healey: The majority of provision is good, but we want it to be better. I understand the pressure that is felt in the sector, but the sort of resources for which the sector has been crying out for years are starting to go into FE. A total of £527 million extra via the LSC has been earmarked for FE this year. A real-terms increase of 3 per cent. is due next year. The hon. Gentleman has been a strong champion of the FE sector. He may regard those resources as overdue, but he cannot deny that they are going in.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): I welcome my hon. Friend to his position and endorse what has been said about raising the morale of staff whom we expect to deliver higher quality for all people who use further education, but does he agree about the importance of the education maintenance grant in widening access? It is pivotal to getting people from non-traditional backgrounds into higher education. I welcome the long-overdue review of student finance, but if there is money around, please let us not forget further education, an important part of the equation in expanding education post-16.

John Healey: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments about the education maintenance grant. We are looking carefully at the impact that it has had in the pilot areas. As part of the new spending review, we are reviewing funding and support for adult learners across the board. What is certainly true—it is a point powerfully made—is that achieving our ambition for students in higher education by the end of the decade turns centrally on the ability of further education to play a part.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I too welcome the Minister to his position. We share his aspirations for a vibrant and high-quality further education sector. He will be aware that individual learning accounts were used by further education colleges markedly to widen participation in learning. How does he think yesterday's announcement of the sudden closure of the scheme will affect those aspirations? How long has he known of the problem of fraud and abuse? Is it true that 5,200 complaints were received before any action was taken? How much money is involved? How many people

have been affected? What form will an inquiry take? All things considered, does he not think that he should be here making a statement?

John Healey: First, I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his position on the Front Bench and look forward to debating with him. He is right to say that individual learning accounts have been widely used by further education colleges, which are among the 1,600 public sector learning providers registered under the ILA scheme, out of a total of 8,500. The scheme exceeded our expectations and expanded beyond its capacity. We hit the target of 1 million ILA accounts one year early. The scheme has helped many individuals to take up new learning, including through further education. However, it recently became clear that the scheme was open to exploitation. Despite the changes that we made to its administration, the problem was not stamped out. We have not taken this step lightly, but my right hon. Friend and I have decided to suspend the operation of the scheme. We feel that it is the right thing to do because it affords protection for individual learners who were paying for their learning through individual learning accounts, as well as protecting public finances.

Educational Standards

2. **Mr. Tony Colman** (Putney): By what means her Department will ensure that educational standards are maintained when the private sector is involved in school management. [6687]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): Lines of accountability will not change. Local authorities, school governors and head teachers will retain their current responsibilities for school improvement, and Ofsted will continue to inspect. External partners will be subject to an agreement setting clear and demanding performance targets.

Mr. Colman: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will she confirm again that local education authorities that perform well will continue to be responsible for ensuring school improvement and holding schools accountable?

Estelle Morris: Yes, absolutely. I am happy to go further than that and say to my hon. Friend that our best local authorities are needed to support our weaker local authorities. I take the pragmatic view that the education of children is too important to waste and we must use whatever source from whatever sector, as long as it is good quality, to raise standards in our schools. Yesterday I was in Leeds, where an external partner is helping to raise standards. Next week I am going to celebrate the connection between Warwickshire and Doncaster. Warwickshire, which is very strong, has helped Doncaster, which is less strong. In both cases, the Ofsted report shows that progress is being made.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I assure the Secretary of State at the outset of our exchanges that when the Government genuinely promote excellence, discipline and diversity in schools she will receive support from the Opposition, and when they do not we shall want to know why. In that regard, can she clear up the contradictory messages that she sends about using the private sector to drive up standards in some schools? Her White Paper has warm words about this, but her article this month in *The Parliamentary Monitor*, which presumably is meant to be read by many of her right hon. and hon. Friends, is much less keen on the private sector. Can she tell the House whether she regards the private sector as a last resort, or will she allow it to play a widespread positive role in enhancing standards?

Estelle Morris: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment and look forward to our exchanges across the Dispatch Box. I also congratulate his whole team, in case I do not get the chance to do so later.

We are quite clear that the private sector is not a last resort, but there will be cases when all else has failed and we look to private sector expertise to help us raise standards in schools. For many years now, I have invited good schools and local authorities voluntarily to seek partnership with the private sector if they think that it is in their interests. There may be cases where individual schools and local authorities seek to do so as a last resort, but in those instances we may call in another public sector partner.

I note the hon. Gentleman's comments about the Opposition's willingness to use the private sector. I remind him and his party that this Government freed up the law to enable schools to use whatever sources they need to raise standards. In 18 years, the Conservatives made no move in that direction. We are guided by very simple principles: what works for children is what we want in our schools. However, there is a clear line of public accountability for the expenditure of public money. Whether we spend that money in the private sector or the public sector, the Government will hold to those clear lines of public accountability.

Mr. Green: The right hon. Lady has not entirely cleared up the contradiction. She said that the private sector was not a last resort and then in the next sentence said that it could be used when all else had failed, which sounds to me like the last resort. So we have to explore that contradiction further. If the right hon. Lady is as keen as the last part of her answer suggested, can she explain why, consistently throughout the Government's term of office, Labour local education authorities have blocked the use of this option for improving schools? Indeed, the only place where it has been fully utilised is Conservative Surrey. Does she not agree with me that at a time of teacher shortages, a crisis in school discipline and falling standards in maths among 11-year-olds, a sensible Government would force their party to take any opportunity to help schools in difficulty and not reject one option because of an old-fashioned ideology that still lives on in the Labour party?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman will do better in his post if he learns to read and listen. I clearly put it on record that the private sector can be used as a last resort, but it will not always be used as a last resort. That is as clear as it gets, and if the hon. Gentleman does not understand that answer I fear for the leadership of the Conservative education team.

Let me take up the hon. Gentleman's point about the performance in maths among 11-year-olds, which is a real success story. I pay tribute to the teachers and classroom

assistants and all those who have worked in our schools to bring that about. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not going to take an approach that damns teachers when they do well and that fails to acknowledge achievement and progress. I am incredibly proud of our key stage 2 results and I wish that the hon. Gentleman were too.

It is quite clear that we will use whatever we can to raise standards. The Government have actively promoted partnerships between schools and local authorities. We have learned from local authorities that get it right. In developing our policy in Whitehall, we listened to what happened in Guildford, Liverpool and elsewhere. I will never apologise for that—for the Government learning from what local authorities and schools do well.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am going to make an appeal. I am trying to get down the Order Paper, so short, sharp questions and answers would be very much appreciated.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): On privatisation, the National Assembly for Wales said in its recent White Paper that it saw real risks in a shift to what it described as

"untested measures delivered . . . through the private sector."

Does the Secretary of State agree?

Estelle Morris: All I say to that is, "Long live diversity."

Postgraduate Students

3. **Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What support her Department gives to postgraduate students. [6688]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): My Department provides financial support for postgraduates through research councils and the Arts and Humanities Research Board, bursaries for PGCE teacher training students and awards for disabled postgraduate students.

Brian White: During the recess I spoke to a number of my constituents who are doing postgraduate research at Cranfield or through the Open university. Apart from commercial sponsorship of the sexy subjects, they consider that there is a real problem in respect of bread and butter research. Postgraduates cannot get access to student loan schemes and, although they are on low wages, they cannot get access to passported benefits. Will my right hon. Friend assure my constituents that her Department will examine and review these issues?

Estelle Morris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. Postgraduate research is immensely important. There has been a 13 per cent. increase in the number of full and part-time students studying at that level and we have increased the funding that is available. By 2003 the grant will be some £9,000, which is a sizeable increase. I take my hon. Friend's comments seriously. It is a matter that my Department will continue to monitor and we will make sure that we take whatever action is appropriate at the appropriate time.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): In terms of postgraduates, will the right hon. Lady explain why the Under-Secretary with responsibility for adult skills has written to all hon. Members about individual learning accounts to explain why the Government have closed down this scheme? The letter seems incredibly unfrank and lacking in any candour. It talks about closing the scheme because it

"has exceeded the Government's expectations in encouraging very large numbers of people to take new interest in learning"

but it makes no mention of fraud or of the fact that the police are investigating 279 providers. May we have a bit of frankness and candour rather than spin?

Estelle Morris: I think that we have been exceptionally candid about this. In the Education and Skills Select Committee yesterday, I made it clear that there were two reasons why we were withdrawing the scheme. First, it had exceeded its capacity early, with 2.5 million people benefiting from ILAs who might not otherwise have done so. Secondly, as I said in a parliamentary answer yesterday and as my ministerial colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey), made clear today, we have received complaints and we are not entirely happy that all the money that has been paid out has gone to top-quality schemes. It is entirely responsible to act as we have done: to give those who have ILAs four to six weeks to draw them down, and then to withdraw the scheme, making it absolutely clear that our commitment to good-quality adult education is cast iron and that we will introduce a further scheme.

PFI Contracts (Capital Return)

4. **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): What her estimate is of the rate of return of capital in schools funded wholly or partly by PFI contracts. [6689]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer that he received on 16 October, at column 1182W. The rate of return to a private sector contractor in a schools PFI contract is fixed as part of the annual payment made by a local education authority for delivery of the services specified in the contract, and as such is a matter between the local education authority and its private sector partner. All PFI contracts in schools have to demonstrate better value for money than public sector traditional procurement.

Jeremy Corbyn: Does not the Minister accept that the traditional form of public sector funding of capital development in education is both cheaper and more accountable than PFIs? The evidence collected by the Treasury Committee on health PFIs, for example, shows that in many of them there is up to an 18 per cent. return on capital. Nothing like that rate of return has ever been paid by traditional funding methods in the public sector.

Is not it better for education to fund new developments directly through taxation, rather than bringing in the private sector to make money out of it?

John Healey: No, I do not accept that private sector financing has no part to play. I remind my hon. Friend that PFI contracts can proceed only if the value for money is better than that of public procurement comparators. Payments to private sector contractors must be linked to levels of service. That brings benefits to the public sector in terms of new buildings and guaranteed high levels of maintenance.

You would not expect me to answer about the health service, Mr. Speaker, but we have no evidence of profiteering in the education sector. If my hon. Friend has, I would like to see it.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I support the gist of the Minister's answer, but I invite him to go slightly further and explain that the value of PFI contracts comes from the private sector not only building the capital assets but running them. Surrey county council has done that for schools in Surrey. Why do the Government need legislation to force Labour authorities to go down the same road?

John Healey: Nobody needs legislation to encourage authorities, under whatever political leadership, to apply for PFI schemes: 90 out of 150 local education authorities have shown an interest in applying. Part of the benefit is that the risk over the long term of the contract period is transferred to the private sector. There are also benefits in freeing up head teachers from having to manage buildings and allowing them to concentrate on the curriculum. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that in one PFI contract the contractor's pay is directly linked to exam results.

Class Sizes

5. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What assessment she has made of the relationship between class size and examination results. [6690]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): My Department and local education authorities have jointly commissioned the university of London's Institute of Education to research the effect of smaller class sizes. The preliminary findings suggest that smaller classes, particularly reception classes, are indeed beneficial.

Dr. Lewis: That research, if accurate, contradicts the findings of other recent research, which suggests that there is little significant correlation between class sizes and academic performance, and examination results in particular. Given that there is such a contradiction, why will not the Government take up the eminently practical suggestion, made time and again, that when league tables are published showing examination results, the class sizes should be shown alongside, so that people can assess whether there is a correlation?

Mr. Timms: The evidence is that, in reception classes in particular, smaller class sizes are very beneficial. That of course is why we have focused our work in this area on infant classes. The average infant class size is now 25.2, compared with nearly 27 in 1997. In the hon. Gentleman's constituency, the fall in infant class sizes has been significant, from 27.5 to 25.4. I hope that he will welcome that progress and the resulting improvements. Of course there are many other factors at play, but the evidence to which I have referred shows pretty clearly that the progress we have been able to make in reducing class sizes has made an important contribution to raising standards in those infant classes.

Junior class sizes are also falling, and secondary class sizes have fallen for the first time in 10 years. All those improvements have made an important contribution to the dramatic rise in standards that this Government have brought about.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Are the real improvements in standards in key stages 2 and 1 down to reduced class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds or to the increased number of classroom assistants being employed and the massive investment in early years education? I believe that in 2004 all three-year-olds will have access to a free nursery place.

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to those great improvements as further important factors in bringing about the dramatic improvement to which she referred. Let us acknowledge, too, the great importance of the numeracy and literacy strategies delivered so successfully by teachers over the past four years, which have also had a decisive beneficial effect.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): The Minister will be interested in the new Tory policy of larger class sizes. That is one for the House to note. Does he accept that, irrespective of class sizes, what drives up standards is good-quality teachers? Will he comment on the fact that his Department has spent £9.2 million on recruiting 111 fast-track teachers, and assure the House that every one of them will go into so-called failing schools so that they can reap the benefit? Given the Secretary of State's comments earlier, does he feel that the £83,000 per teacher given to the private sector to recruit those teachers represents good value for money for the taxpayer?

Mr. Timms: The Conservative policy is not a new one: class sizes were rising for many years under the previous Government.

It is true that the quality of teaching is vital to raising standards. The fact that teaching quality has improved is undoubtedly a major part of the explanation for the dramatic improvements in standards. Fast-track teachers will indeed spend some of their time in schools facing challenging circumstances. I commend to the hon. Gentleman the benefits of the energetic approach that we are taking to bring new and able people into the teaching profession, increasing the number of teachers, because we need more able teachers to be able to maintain the pace of improvement that we have achieved.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Considerable progress has been made at key stage 1 in reducing class sizes and improving standards, but does the Minister share my concerns about the large class sizes, sometimes

approaching 40, not only in Nottinghamshire but throughout the country at key stage 2? Should not our priority now be to get those class sizes down?

Mr. Timms: We have of course made progress at other key stages, too. Junior class sizes have now fallen for two consecutive years, and we have allocated more than £36 million this year to schools that increased their intake to help meet the infant class size limit and ensure that infants transferring to junior classes continue to benefit from smaller classes. That will certainly help, but it is important that we keep the matter under review and maintain the pace of progress that we have seen in recent years, so that we can continue the dramatic improvement in standards in junior classes.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): In spite of a fall in numeracy levels at age 11 this year, in a written answer the Minister confirmed the targets of 75 per cent. for next year and proposed increased targets of 85 per cent. for literacy and numeracy by 2004. He said:

"We are confident that these challenging targets can be achieved."—[*Official Report*, 16 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 1187W.]

If the Government are so confident, why was the Secretary of State backsliding yesterday by telling the Education and Skills Select Committee that it will not matter if targets are missed, and why are she and her Ministers afraid to put their jobs on the line as her predecessor would?

Mr. Timms: I warmly welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post, but I hope that in his future contributions to our debates he will want to celebrate the dramatic improvements in key stage 2 results in our junior schools in numeracy and literacy. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reaffirmed our commitment yesterday to the targets that have been set and it is important that the hon. Gentleman and others contribute to a celebration of the great progress that has been made.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Minister agree that smaller class sizes enable teachers to give more individual attention to individual pupils? Does he also agree that if more diagnostic testing was done in the early years to identify the weaknesses that children experience and the help that they need, later results would be better?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman makes some important points. The evidence that the Institute of Education has provided supports the benefits of smaller class sizes in the early years. The work of the early years partnerships is also helping to identify problems early in a child's school life so that appropriate support can be provided. He is right to say that that is important.

A-level Results

7. **Mr. Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich, West): If she will make a statement on this year's A-level results. [6693]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): The A-level results published on 16 August 2001 are provisional. A copy of those provisional results has been placed in the Library and final figures for this year's results will be published in November.

Mr. Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. My local authority of Sandwell saw a further improvement in A-level results this year, but I was concerned by some of the public comments about a dilution of standards. Will my hon. Friend confirm that no such dilution has taken place, and does he agree that such ill-informed comments are grossly demoralising and insulting to the thousands of hard-working pupils and teachers throughout the country?

Mr. Lewis: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. It is about time that we started to celebrate the achievements of our young people and pay tribute to the support of the teachers, governors and parents in our education institutions. A-level results this year demonstrated that pass rates for grades A to E were up by 0.7 per cent., and A to C pass rates increased by 1.1 per cent. on last year. Some of the comments made have been investigated objectively and found to be absolute nonsense. The basis of the suggestions that standards have been undermined are flawed. When our young people do well, we should be positive, support them and draw attention to their achievements, not talk them down and make them feel that they are in a no-win situation. The Government are proud of having raised standards in all areas of education, and we continue to subscribe to that commitment.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Will the Minister share his knowledge of the A-level results in non-selective and selective schools and compare that with the evidence of the National Federation for Educational Research report, published last week, which—taking social class and other factors into account—showed how well pupils in selective schools were doing at A-level? Will he welcome the fact that the Government's attempts to allow selective schools to be driven out of the system seem to have ground to a halt?

Mr. Lewis: The Government would expect children selected at 11 to perform well, but we want to pay tribute to the achievement of all children in all schools.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I welcome and celebrate good A-level results, but will my hon. Friend comment on this country's continuing obsessive belief that A-levels and GCSEs are the only worthy qualifications for young people to have? We need to consider vocational qualifications, which would be more motivating for many young people, instead of the GCSEs and A-levels for which they get poor grades.

Mr. Lewis: I agree with my hon. Friend's comments. One of the Government's challenges is to create parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications. We start from a low base, but we will review the entire 14 to 19-year-old phase of education for that reason. We want to create an education system that is diverse and plays to the strengths and aspirations of every young person. For some young people, that will mean an

exclusively academic route and for others it will mean a high status vocational route. For others, it will mean a mixture of the two. The key is an education system that is tailored to the needs of the individual young person. When we publish our proposals on 14 to 19-year-old education in January, we will begin to demonstrate what we mean by that vision.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): My education authority of Poole has the lowest sixth form funding but excellent A-level results are achieved. In order to ensure the improvements that we all desire, will the Minister ensure that when the new funding arrangements start in April, the lowest funded authorities will be considered carefully and brought up to parity with other authorities?

Mr. Lewis: I am sympathetic to the point that the hon. Lady makes, but it is relevant to consider the baseline figure that her local authority chose to spend on those establishments. We have made it clear that the Government are committed to a real-terms guarantee on sixth form funding. When responsibility moves to the Learning and Skills Council, that commitment will be maintained. We are working on the baseline figures for 2000-01 for the start of those new funding arrangements.

Sixth Form Colleges

8. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What plans she has to establish more sixth form colleges. [6694]

Sheffield has—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should allow the Minister to answer the question first.

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): That has saved my brilliant answer.

All young people need access to high-quality education and training in an environment where their needs for pastoral support can be met. Sixth form colleges, sixth form centres in general further education colleges, and school sixth forms provide that. Individual proposals for new sixth form colleges will be considered on their own merits and in the light of local circumstance.

Helen Jackson: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. [*Laughter.*] But, as I was going to explain, I believe that Sheffield is probably the most socially polarised city in the country. That is underpinned by the yawning gap in post-16 provision in the city.

The proposed sixth form campus for Hillsborough will be a state-of-the-art facility, providing top-class A-level provision, enhanced by engineering courses and top-level vocational courses. It will operate under Sheffield college, but work with the schools in the city. Will my hon. Friend ensure that it fulfils the high hopes and expectations of everyone in the north of Sheffield and Stocksbridge, Chapeltown and High Green, and that the yawning gap in provision starts to reduce?

Margaret Hodge: I thank my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to give my original answer. Having put energy into preparing it, lots of my officials would be upset had I been unable to give it.

I understand that there are on-going discussions between the stakeholders in Sheffield about how best to respond to the need that my hon. Friend has correctly identified, particularly in the north of the city. I hope that the decision will lead to a local agreement among the partners and I look forward to receiving proposals from the learning and skills council.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Is the Minister aware of the concern in many sixth forms and among head teachers about the future financing of those institutions following the introduction of the learning and skills council? Will she give a guarantee that the ring-fenced arrangements for financing school sixth forms will not be removed in the event of a small fall in the sixth form roll?

Margaret Hodge: I am aware of the concerns—change is always difficult. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that our promise to maintain real-terms funding for school sixth forms will be kept. I hope that all schools will get their initial allocations in December.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the important thing for post-16 education is quality, and that it is crucial that the resources for that sector are shared throughout it? Likewise, it is important that the level of parochialism governing who provides what is also reduced. If there were a fairer division of resources throughout our constituencies, our 16 to 18-year-olds who plan to go to university would get a better education.

Margaret Hodge: There is good quality across all providers of post-16 education in all local education authority areas and we wish to build on that. I hope that the reviews of that provision across the country will help stakeholders plan together to ensure that the needs of all individuals within communities are best met.

Teacher Shortages

9. **Mr. Richard Allan** (Sheffield, Hallam): What assessment she has made of teaching staff shortages in *(a)* further and *(b)* higher education. [6695]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): Both further and higher education report recruitment difficulties arising from competition from other institutions and the wider economy. In further education, there are teaching staff shortages in information technology, engineering, science and construction. In higher education, the main shortage subjects are information and communication technology, business studies and engineering.

Mr. Allan: I hope that the Minister will agree that British students, including those from both north and south Sheffield, deserve the best possible opportunities to study information technology in further and higher education. On information technology, does she agree that the word "crisis" can be used accurately to describe the shortage of academic staff and, crucially, support staff, whom we simply cannot recruit? What measures will the Government take to increase recruitment and retention in the IT sector in further and higher education?

Margaret Hodge: There are difficulties, but I would not call it a crisis. We are taking steps to overcome those

difficulties by working with schools and national training organisations, and by giving additional money to FE and HE to support development and pay for teachers in shortage subjects. All that should help over time, and should prove to be of benefit to all those learners who depend on skilled teachers.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Where staff vacancies are filled by temporary contract-holders, will my hon. Friend ensure that standards in FE are monitored closely by the Department so that the quality of teaching is maintained?

Margaret Hodge: Standards in FE are being monitored and the new inspection regime involving Ofsted and the adult learning inspectorate is closely examining the quality of teaching in the FE sector. The £300 million that we have set aside in our settlement for FE will support the improvement of standards and we will monitor that closely.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Gregory Barker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Does the Minister accept that, in respect of her comments on the crisis in education recruitment, the intolerable burden of bureaucracy and directives on teachers in the classroom is as much a factor as teachers' pay?

Margaret Hodge: I see that the hon. Gentleman has difficulty in recognising his name.

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister must now answer and the hon. Gentleman must listen.

Margaret Hodge: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman wanted to tell me that he does know his name, but he certainly has some difficulty in recognising the question under debate. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) referred to particular shortages in particular subjects, which I acknowledged. We have taken steps to address those problems. To suggest that we are not addressing properly the work load of teachers, or that we are not looking to recruit a sufficient number of teachers to provide high quality-education, is just wrong.

ConneXions Service

10. **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): If she will make a statement on the Connexions service for young people. [6696]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): ConneXions is already helping young people in 15 areas of the country. It will be available across England by 2003. Early surveys of young people helped by personal advisers show that they feel ConneXions has made a real difference to their prospects.

Valerie Davey: Previous organisations that have set out to help this age group have only been good in part; that is to say, it depended on which part of the country young people lived in. Can the Minister assure the House that, as ConneXions is extended through the country, the quality of the advisers, who are key to improving opportunities for young people, will be maintained at the highest standard?

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The success of ConneXions will depend ultimately on the quality and training of the front-line staff. That is why we have introduced the diploma specifically for ConneXions advisers and why, in all the guidance and support we give to partnerships as they roll out, we emphasise the importance of high-quality training. We will build on the expertise and the specialisms that some of the advisers will bring from their existing professions, whether those are social work, youth work or the careers service. We will build on that expertise and develop those skills to ensure that young people have access to a new and high-quality range of support that makes a difference to their participation and attainment within the education system.

Specialist Schools

12. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): What impact she expects the expansion of the specialist school scheme to have on the standards of those schools that remain outside the scheme. [6700]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): Specialist schools represent resources for other secondary schools and, through sharing equipment and expertise and drawing on the community element of the additional funding they receive, they will help to enhance standards of teaching and learning in the schools with which they work. Over time we want all those schools that wish to and are ready to become specialist schools.

David Taylor: This month's Ofsted report on specialist schools found that half of the non-sports colleges were not fulfilling the requirement to share resources, good practice and expertise with local schools. Does not that give sustenance to those who consider that specialist schools create a two-tier system that is divisive, incoherent and unfair? By 2006, 50 per cent. of secondary schools will be non-specialist, with lower status, fewer resources and poorer prospects. Will my hon. Friend say how on earth they will be able to drive up standards in the way that he hopes?

Mr. Timms: I commend the Ofsted report to my hon. Friend. It states:

"The majority of specialist schools are meeting the aims of the programme in large measure, making good use of the advantages that it brings."

The report explains how schools are extending opportunities and introducing imaginative strategies to raise standards. It explains how attainment is improving faster and how those schools are taking pride in their status. It is a very positive assessment of the benefits of the specialist schools programme.

However, the Government want more secondary schools to benefit from specialist status. My hon. Friend made the point that nearly half of secondary schools will have done so by 2005, but other schools will be able to work towards achieving specialists status. The Department will set a clear

direction and provide support to help them achieve that ambition. The specialist school programme is a powerful lever for raising standards across the whole secondary system, and I encourage my hon. Friend to work with schools in his constituency to move in that direction.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

Youth Justice Pledge

31. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): What assessment she has made of the success of the efforts of the CPS in implementing the youth justice pledge. [6719]

33. **Ms Oona King** (Bethnal Green and Bow): What progress has been made towards the Government's target of bringing persistent young offenders before court more speedily. [6721]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): The Crown Prosecution Service has cut down the time taken in prosecuting persistent young offenders. It has done that by recruiting more lawyers and case workers, by tracking and chasing up cases through its own system, and by working closely with the police and the courts.

Linda Gilroy: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. She will know that Devon was one of the first areas to cut significantly the amount of time taken to bring young offenders to court. Will she join me in congratulating the staff in Plymouth and across Devon who have achieved that? Will she also thank them on behalf of my constituents, whose communities it is hoped will have fewer hardened criminals in future as a result of the Government's determination to deal with young offenders?

The Solicitor-General: I thank my hon. Friend for her generous remarks about the CPS in Devon and Cornwall. I spoke this week to the chief Crown prosecutor in that area, Andrew Cresswell, about the situation in the county, and the service has made a great deal of progress. In 1997, it took 109 days to bring a young offender to justice in Devon and Cornwall. That has been reduced substantially, as my hon. Friend has said, to somewhere between 59 and 60 days. However, there is no complacency about what is still a major problem. We must get young offenders before the courts quickly, to ensure that they take matters seriously. It is demoralising for police, magistrates and victims if justice is not done swiftly.

Ms Oona King: I welcome the Government's efforts and their success in reducing the overall amount of time that it takes to get young offenders before the court, but will my right hon. and learned Friend say what will be done about the problem in London? My constituents want me to impress on the Government very strongly how much plague and misery has been heaped on Tower Hamlets, for example, because it is taking too long to get young offenders before the courts. What measures will she take to deal with that?

The Solicitor-General: I understand very well the issues that my hon. Friend raises. They are very much the same in my own constituency of Camberwell and Peckham. I was talking recently to a magistrate, who described how demoralising it was to find that an offence could sometimes be more than a year old by the time that it came to court. We must sort that out.

There have been particular problems in London, although the London prosecuting service has made substantial progress. The average time has been cut from 175 days to 92, but more work remains to be done. More resources have been put in, and there has been a substantial and justifiable pay increase for lawyers, case workers and others in the London service.

We know what a problem youth crime is. We want the young people themselves to understand that society takes the matter seriously. There is no let-up on the problem.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Surely the success in implementing the youth justice pledge depends on the CPS having adequate resources, personnel and morale to cope with the task. On morale, will the Solicitor-General give the House her views on the Denman report, which was published during the summer recess? What is her opinion of the impact of that report on the CPS? Which of the recommendations in that report will the Government implement?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the question of morale in ensuring that we have an effective prosecution system. The Denman report found that there was not equality of opportunity for ethnic minority staff in the CPS, and that there was institutional racism. The report has been accepted by the Director of Public Prosecutions, by the Attorney-General, and by me. Sylvia Denman made various recommendations to ensure equality in the service, that targets are set and positive action is taken to achieve them, and that grievances are dealt with promptly, and steps are being taken to put them into effect. It is important for any public sector employer to be an equal opportunity employer, but that is especially important in the criminal justice system. If the CPS is to command the confidence of the multicultural communities that it serves, it must abide by fairness. We will continue to keep a very close eye on the matter.

Victims of Crime

32. **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): When she expects to introduce legislation to allow courts to take account of the views of the victims of crime. [6720]

The Solicitor-General: The courts do now take into account the views of the victims of a crime of the effect of the crime on them. Victim personal statements have been introduced in a scheme that started on 1 October. The personal statement will stay with the case file throughout the prosecution, and will be taken into account in sentencing. A practice direction was issued by the Lord Chief Justice to that effect.

It is important that victims are clear that the effect of the crime on them is very much in the minds of judges when sentencing

Andrew Mackinlay: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Will she introduce legislation at an early opportunity that will place a duty on the police and the CPS to ensure that victims are kept abreast of the progress being made in regard to the crime perpetrated against them? I know that that is good practice, but the approach is not adopted consistently by the police or the CPS across the country. It is time for the problem to be addressed. People have a right to know whether progress is being made and, if not, why not.

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend is right. It is important that victims of crime know what is happening with their cases, and that they are not just left in the dark. It is especially important that victims are told and given an explanation if charges are to be downgraded or dropped. We have introduced a new scheme, which is being rolled out now, under which different ways are being piloted to ensure the very best of communication with victims throughout the prosecution process. I am glad that my hon. Friend is concerned about victims and know that he will remain so, but we should see how the new schemes—the victim personal statements and the new ways of communicating with victims—work out. By changing custom and practice, we may not need legislation. However, if that does not work, we should legislate.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the Solicitor-General tell the House what has happened to the enforceable Bill of Rights announced a few months ago by the present Foreign Secretary when he was Home Secretary? It was intended to provide for victims of crime, and was going to establish an ombudsman to deal with matters relating to complaints about the CPS and the probation service. What has happened to that proposed legislation?

The Solicitor-General: First, may I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment and welcome him to his position on the Front Bench? I genuinely look forward to working with him on the many issues that are my responsibility that do not have party political or, I hope, European implications.

As for the matter that the hon. Gentleman raised, it is very important that all the bits of the machinery are working together. He made particular mention of complaints. The CPS does issue a complaints leaflet, and—without the service knowing—I have personally telephoned the complaints line to see whether the telephone was answered and whether there was someone there ready to help with complaints. I am sure that more can be done.

The hon. Gentleman raised some other matters, and I shall look into them in detail.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot have two bites today.

Domestic Violence

34. **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): What plans she has for the CPS to work in partnership with other agencies to combat domestic violence. [6722]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has just reviewed its guidance to prosecutors to give effect to its full commitment to working with the police, the courts, the voluntary sector and local government to combat domestic violence. The CPS has consulted widely with the public and voluntary sector at both national and local level as part of this review. The responses have shaped the changed guidance that is to be launched next month on behalf of the CPS by Cherie Booth, QC.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) for her work as chair of her local domestic violence forum. She has always been a champion in these issues and has made a real difference at local level.

Julie Morgan: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for her reply. How have the agencies involved in the Cardiff domestic violence forum been consulted about the new guidelines on domestic violence? As well as the CPS, which plays a full and active role in the forum, other agencies include the police, the health service, local authority services, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, women's aid, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and the court services. Multi-agency work is difficult and delicate, and it is important for all those agencies to be involved.

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend asks how and whom we consulted. I think that most of the organisations that she lists were involved in the consultation. Because of her expertise and long-standing commitment on this issue, I have raised with her what the guidance would include.

It is important to recognise that the guidance, which is designed to guide Crown prosecutors in their decision making, is not written on tablets of stone. It will be published next month and, after further discussion, people may want to propose changes about certain issues. The CPS is accountable and answerable, and it will take such proposals into account. Because this will be on the internet, we will be able to make those changes quickly.

Previously, the guidance has been secret. The CPS is coming out into the open; it is more accountable and transparent. It is not making decisions according to secret guidance; instead it publishes them and is prepared to discuss with partners at local and national level whether the guidance is right.

Business of the House

12.32 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 29 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Adoption and Children Bill.

TUESDAY 30 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Proceeds of Crime Bill.

WEDNESDAY 31 OCTOBER—Motion to approve the first report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Remaining stages of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill.

THURSDAY 1 NOVEMBER—Debate on coalition against international terrorism on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 2 NOVEMBER—Private Members' Bills. The provisional business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 5 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill *[Lords]*

Motion to approve the special educational needs code of practice.

TUESDAY 6 NOVEMBER—Opposition Day [4th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 7 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the International Development Bill *[Lords]*

THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the Export Control Bill.

FRIDAY 9 NOVEMBER—Debate on drugs strategy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House may also welcome notice that I hope by the end of next week to be in a position to table a resolution to set up the Liaison Committee.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving us notice of the business. When might we expect the Chancellor's autumn statement? The sooner the House is made aware of that, the better.

What on earth is going on in terms of Ministers failing to come to the House to give statements on important matters, so that the House cannot question them? There are a number of examples, the foremost of which has arisen today, regarding the scandalous news from the Audit Commission about accident and emergency units. It is one thing for Ministers to go on the radio in the morning, as is their habit, but why, even if that were to happen first—which it should not—cannot Ministers come to the House of Commons to answer questions, not from the Humphrys and Naughties of this world, but from Members of Parliament?

The same applies to the letter that we have all had today from the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for adult skills, the hon. Member for Wentworth (John Healey), about something called the individual learning account programme. The hon. Gentleman says that

"some people are being pressed to sign up for low value, poor quality learning"—

that is presumably what the programme has been about—

"and I have decided to act quickly to protect the interests of individual learners and proper use of public funds."

I do not know what the hon. Gentleman was hinting at there, but it sounds ominous. Why can we not have a statement on that? Instead, a letter has been sent to Members of Parliament saying,

"Estelle Morris has this afternoon answered a written question in the House."

Are we supposed to be satisfied with that? Giving a written answer or appearing on the radio appears to be the way in which the Government regularly sneak out these announcements,

I read in a newspaper today that an announcement about terminal 5 may be about to be sneaked out under the cover of our ground troops going into Afghanistan. We have been through this so many times in the recent past. I want a guarantee from the Leader of the House that we will have a proper statement on terminal 5 before anyone else hears about it in any other way so that the many people directly affected by the issue can be properly represented in this House by their Members of Parliament asking questions of a Minister following a statement.

Will the Leader please set an example? Will he give us a lead? Will he give a guarantee that we will not only be the first to hear about these matters but that we will have the opportunity properly to question Ministers about them?

Mr. Cook: I am delighted to tell the right hon. Gentleman that I can give a guarantee that there will be an oral statement in the House on terminal 5. No decision has yet been taken, but when it is, it will be announced in the House by means of an oral statement. The right hon. Gentleman knows the rules—no Minister will speak to the press or anyone else until there has been an oral statement in the House. I am grateful for the opportunity to make the right hon. Gentleman happy. He asked for a guarantee and he has got one. What he wants will happen and I would appreciate his welcome for that.

As for the autumn statement, it will be made in the autumn, which is, in terms of the House, liberally interpreted, although I anticipate that it will be before we rise for the next recess.

On accident and emergency departments, it is worth remembering that the figures announced today by the Audit Commission are 18 months old. In the past 12 months, the period for very long stays has halved. Today we have made it clear that we are not satisfied with the position. We want to do better—that is why we are investing in another 600 nurses for training in accident and emergency departments. It will take us time to reach our target of a maximum wait of four hours in accident and emergency departments. However, I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we will get there a lot faster than the 18 years it took the previous Government to ruin the national health service.

On the individual learning account, I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman was not present for Education and Skills questions, when the subject was raised orally. I welcome the fact that he has drawn attention to it because we are in difficulty entirely because we have wildly exceeded our target. We set a target of 1 million, and 2.5 million people have come forward to take advantage of the new ILA.

I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman has recognised that we have exceeded our target. We have more than doubled the figures we were aiming at. I shall try to ensure that we have more statements so that, when we exceed our targets, the House is fully aware of that fact and the right hon. Gentleman can welcome it.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, which will be debated tomorrow, and press him to consider reforming the way in which private Members' Bills are dealt with? The Bill has widespread support from conservation groups, and wide cross-party support in the House, yet after a lot of work has gone into its preparation it is now rumoured that the Government Whips may intend to sabotage it because the wind power lobby has managed to nobble someone. Would it not be better to have a proper Second Reading tomorrow, get the Bill into Committee and have the small details properly scrutinised, rather than having Government Whips sabotaging private Members' Bills?

Mr. Cook: If my hon. Friend has evidence of sabotage by the Whips, I shall be very pleased if he shares it with me. *[Laughter.]* I honestly do not see what is hilarious about that. If my hon. Friend has evidence for a serious allegation I will, of course, pursue it. I do not see anything particularly hilarious in the Leader of the House wishing to pursue such a serious allegation. *[Interruption.]* It would assist my hon. Friend if Opposition Members took the matter as seriously as he does.

The Government will, of course, express a view in the debate tomorrow; a Minister will take part, as is normally the case with private Members' business. A number of concerns must be addressed if the Bill is to become an Act. They are wide ranging, and cover access to wrecks, the development of water sports and a range of economic interests such as wind farms, access to ports, and shipping. The House can consider all those issues tomorrow, and come to a considered and balanced view.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I suspect that you, Mr. Speaker, may share my delight, amazement and surprise that the Leader of the House has been able to promise us that no statement will be made to the House that has already been pre-empted by a media appearance. Has the right hon. Gentleman checked that out with Mr. Jim Naughtie and Mr. John Humphrys—because I suspect that he has now cancelled the "Today" programme for the foreseeable future?

May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that the statement made on the radio this morning by the Secretary of State for Health about the Audit Commission report was far from full, and was certainly not subjected to the sort of inquisition that he would have received in the House had he decided to make a statement here? The Secretary of State referred to bed blocking, which he said had been dealt with in a statement earlier this month. That statement, too, was made outside the House, a few days before we resumed after the summer recess.

May we have a statement by the Secretary of State for Health no later than Monday? Clearly there are wide concerns about accident and emergency departments, which are not improving as fast as has been suggested either here this afternoon or on the radio this morning. The announcement about bed blocking that was made just before the House resumed does not deal with some of the problems, so can we be assured that we will get that statement?

When does the Leader of the House expect to introduce, and in what form, the legislation to deal with media moguls? He may have noticed that there was a serious escalation this morning in the hostilities between *The Mirror* and *The Sun*. Will he—having served in the Foreign Office so long—use his best endeavours to try to prevent hostilities being resumed on that front? Does he believe that his intervention through the new legislation will deal with that problem as well?

Mr. Cook: It does not lie within my power to cancel the "Today" programme—and it would probably be unwise to disclose what I would do with that power if I had it.

On the question of statements to the House, the House has to retain some perspective. In the past week we have had three major statements from Ministers, and I am sure that next week we will also have major statements, and we will continue to make sure that major developments in policy come before the House. At the same time, the House has other business, and we have to ensure that we achieve a balance. The hon. Gentleman would be among the first to complain if the net result were to reduce significantly the time available for the scrutiny of legislation in the House.

As for the hon. Gentleman's last point, it would take a braver man than me to try to end hostilities between *The Sun* and *The Mirror*.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): Will my right hon. Friend make available dedicated time within oral questions—I suggest 10 minutes—during which Members could question the Minister for Women, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry? If a Member wishes to put a question at present, that has to be done within DTI questions. Responsibility for women is a big, important area, and if we wish to put a question on trade and industry we cannot also put one to my right hon. Friend on her duties as Minister for Women. There is an issue of accountability here, so will the Leader of the House consider making time available, in much the same way as we have just seen for questions to the Solicitor-General?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a point that has been raised by a number of Members, and we are considering the issue. It is not entirely straightforward because, of course, the effect would be to diminish the rest of the time during which the Secretary of State is accountable. We shall certainly consider the idea, and I hope that we will be able to reach a satisfactory solution.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): The Leader of the House will probably welcome the fact that my question

[Peter Bottomley]

about the need for a debate on pedestrian-friendly vehicle fronts—an issue that will come up in Coreper—has been tabled for written answer. However, as this is specific to the House, I ask him now whether we can have the opportunity to debate whether the House of Commons Commission is inadvertently breaking any of the guidance from the Commissioner for Public Appointments by the way in which it is handling the possible replacement of the present Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Elizabeth Filkin?

Mr. Cook: I would be fairly confident that we were not, because we received full advice before proceeding as we are doing. I stress to the House that—contrary to what I have seen in the press—Mrs. Filkin has not been sacked or dismissed. She has been given an undertaking that should she decide to apply for the next contract, she will be placed on the shortlist. As a Commission, we have taken the decision that it would be right to proceed by open competition. I hope that all those in the House who have argued for greater openness and transparency would want us to use an open and transparent system, rather than make a closed reappointment.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I welcome the undertaking by the Leader of the House that there will be a full statement if and when a decision is taken on terminal 5. May I urge him to lean on his right hon. and hon. Friends not to hurry with that decision, because there are changed circumstances, both in the market for aviation and in the security implications, of which cognisance was not taken at the time of the inquiry? I urge him to persuade his colleagues to reflect long and hard before granting permission for terminal 5. The decision will raise a number of issues about the disproportionate clout and influence of the big battalions in this country, such as BAA and British Airways, to influence key decisions in their interests, in contrast to the little influence of the ordinary simple objector.

Mr. Cook: I am sure that the factors to which my hon. Friend has referred will be taken into account by my colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. He is right to say that such issues raise questions about decisions that may have been taken before 11 September. However, I am sure that my colleagues will have adequate time to reflect on that, which will be reflected in the statement made when they reach their decision. I stress to the House that no decision has yet been reached.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Does the Leader of the House share my concern about the article in this month's issue of *The Parliamentary Monitor* entitled, "Labour Blows Cold on Scots' Reduction", questioning the implementation of the boundary commission's proposals for Scotland? Does he share my concern at the blatant gerrymandering in the print and broadcast media by his colleagues at the Treasury and the Scotland Office? Given his personal interest in the matter, will he arrange for an early ministerial statement on how and when the Government will complete the changes in constituency boundaries that will be required by the Scotland Act 1998?

Mr. Cook: I advise the hon. Gentleman not to believe everything he reads in the papers. The fact is that the boundary commission for Scotland has commenced its review of boundaries, and has indicated that it intends to report early in 2002. The result will be subject to the usual process of appeal, discussion and consultation, and we will make all speed thereafter. There is no decision, no suggestion, no idea and no intention of preventing the boundary commission from proceeding. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am in a position to know, because, as a Scottish Member of Parliament who has a personal interest in the matter, I take a close interest.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): May we have an early debate on regional government? That would give us an opportunity to consider the implications of a statement made recently by the Deputy Prime Minister of his determination that there should be a referendum during this Parliament, at least in the north-east, and perhaps for other regions that required it.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to tell my right hon. Friend that the Deputy Prime Minister is working on a White Paper on regional government and I anticipate that it will be published in the near future. At that time, the House will of course want to ensure that it, too, has an opportunity to participate in the national debate that we expect the White Paper to spark.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I am tempted to ask for an early debate on what constitutes autumn.

Does the Leader of the House agree that it is wholly inappropriate for the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to make an announcement on what the new Railtrack will be—namely, a company limited by guarantee—in a written answer to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on a day when that Department answered both oral questions and an Opposition-day debate on such subjects?

Mr. Cook: It merely confirms how active my right hon. Friend was on that day. The answer stated that my right hon. Friend proposed setting up a company limited by guarantee and I have heard him say that at least half a dozen times at the Dispatch Box. Of course it is important that Ministers should make major statements to the House and it is also important that the House should have adequate opportunity—as it did twice on that day—to put questions and comments to the Secretary of State, but the House is becoming a bit precious when it suggests Government business cannot be done through written answers and that the technical details of strategic statements should not be followed through by written answers.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask my right hon. Friend a question of which I gave his office notice this morning? May we have an assurance next week that no weapons, such as land mines, that would be banned by convention for use by British forces are being used by the US or the British in the campaign from British bases, in particular Diego Garcia? May we have a statement on

the use of Gator anti-personnel weapons systems and cluster bombs? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Halo Trust and others who have undertaken brave, long, hard and sustained work over years in Afghanistan to clear existing mines are extremely concerned about the amount of unexploded ordnance raining down?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks: no weapons will be used by British forces, or approved for use from British territory, that break any of the international conventions to which we are a party. No land mines have been dropped during the present military campaign, and those cluster bombs that have been used against military targets—one against an al-Qaeda training camp and four against Taliban military installations—were all designed to explode on impact and not for delayed action.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his announcement today that he intends at an early date to table a motion to set up the Liaison Committee—a most important Committee of the House. It is essential that it begins its work as quickly as possible.

My question relates to the statement yesterday by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Although the conscience of the House is very much on the campaign against international terrorism, does the Leader of the House agree that it would be appropriate to hold a full debate in the House on the implications of the Secretary of State's statement. Northern Ireland is an important part of the United Kingdom and many people think that the decommissioning statement by the IRA is merely about a transfer of weapons from the IRA to Continuity IRA and the Real IRA. There are severe implications for the security of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cook: The rules drawn up by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, supervised by General de Chastelain, are quite explicit: the weapons have to be put beyond future use. The commission has stated that it has seen that happen in the case of ammunition, weapons and explosive. There is no question of any of that material being handed over to any terrorist organisation. To that extent, I want the House to appreciate that there has been real destruction of weapons under the rules provided by the decommissioning body.

As to a debate in the House, I appreciate that there is considerable interest in the matter both in the House and in the country at large. I am sure that the House will have adequate opportunities to explore it. After all, there was an historic statement on the issue this week and I am sure that the whole House welcomes the progress that the Government and our friends are making in moving forward the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): May I refer the Leader of the House back to the subject of next Thursday's debate—international terrorism? He will fully understand that millions of people in this country are deeply uneasy about the continued bombing of Afghanistan and his confirmation of the reported use of cluster bombs by United States forces in that country? Does he agree that many people in this country find it incomprehensible that British military forces should be involved, and that we should endorse an American-led operation, with no vote in the British Parliament? Does he not think that, in the interests of democracy, the Government should table a substantive, amendable and debatable motion so that Members of Parliament are required to take a position on whether they think Britain should be involved in this military action against Afghanistan?

Mr. Cook: I have sat through many of the debates that we have held on this matter. We should recall that the Government have ensured that the House has had adequate opportunity to debate the international coalition against terrorism. There were three recalls and a further debate will be held next week. There have been plenty of such opportunities for the House to debate and explore the issue and to question Ministers.

In the course of those debates—to much of which I listened—I was impressed by the degree of support throughout the House for the action being taken by the Government. It is unreasonable for my hon. Friend to pretend that the House has not had an opportunity to express a view, or that the House has not made its will clear during those debates. It is of course open to the small number of Members of Parliament who disagree with that action to express their view, and my hon. Friend has done so, but he cannot deny that the clear will of the House is to support the action.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Given the likely and necessary changes to the Government's legislative programme in the light of the events of 11 September, does the Leader of the House think that a Bill to ban tobacco advertising is likely or unlikely? If it is on the unlikely end of the spectrum, what would be his view and that of the Government if the Scottish Parliament were to introduce such legislation so that the practice could at least be banned in Scotland?

Mr. Cook: The Scottish Executive and the Government share the same view: it would not make practical sense to try to ban advertising in one part of Britain and not in another. We share the view that our policy is to take forward a tobacco ban and that it should take place at the same time throughout the whole United Kingdom. That is what we shall seek to do at an appropriate time.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, despite his reply, disquiet remains about the position of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, who is not to be reappointed as a matter of course? Indeed, frankly, it is unlikely that in the circumstances she would be reappointed if she applied. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a feeling—perhaps not shared by everyone—on both sides of the House that the commissioner has carried out her duties in an impartial, conscientious manner? Indeed, it is because she was so conscientious that she was told, in effect—in the words used in an earlier exchange—that she should not continue her present duties. That was a deplorable decision and I hope that it can be reconsidered.

Mr. Cook: I put it to my hon. Friend that there is no provision for the commissioner, as he suggests, to be reappointed—I think I use his words advisedly—"as a matter of course". Ms Filkin was appointed on a fixed-term contract—*[Interruption.]* No, she was

[Mr. Cook]

appointed on a fixed-term contract. Moreover, that fixed-term contract was for precisely the same period—the same term of office—as was held by her predecessor. No commitment was given that she would be, as my hon. Friend put it "reappointed as a matter of course". I deprecate my hon. Friend's comment that she was told that she cannot be appointed. That is most certainly not the case and I hope that Ms Filkin will not believe that. She will be considered on merit, along with other candidates, and if she is the best candidate she will be appointed.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I draw attention to early-day motion 248.

[That this House notes with dismay the unethical behaviour of Jo Moore, a ministerial special adviser, in seeking to exploit the terrorist atrocities in America to 'bury' news stories damaging to the Government; agrees with Charlie Whelan, the former aide to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that her action was 'sickening'; and calls on the Right honourable Member for North Tyneside to remove her from his staff forthwith.]

That motion, signed by many hon. Members, concerns the exploitation of terrorist atrocities by new Labour spin doctors.

I had intended to ask for a debate on the motion, but as we have recently held such a debate in Opposition time, may I ask instead for a statement from the Secretary of State for Health or the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on the availability of counselling services for civil servants receiving e-mails from obnoxious special advisers, and for Labour Back-Bench Members following interviews with the Government Chief Whip?

Mr. Cook: That is the least persuasive bid for a statement that I have heard all afternoon.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will know that last week Michelin announced its closure in Burnley, losing about 450 jobs. Since then, we seem to have had redundancies every day in the aerospace industries or other industries dependent on aerospace. My right hon. Friend will recognise that the situation in the industry has changed greatly since 11 September. Does he feel that it is time to hold a debate on the Government's approach to manufacturing, which I know the Government believe to be a crucial part of the national economy as well as of the local economy in places such as Burnley?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a very serious issue—the fact that the impact of 11 September on the aviation industry and on the aerospace industry has been substantial. No one in the Government—

Mr. Forth: Tough.

Mr. Cook: No, I would never dream of treating redundancies in that way. Redundancies are a serious matter, in whoever's constituency they arise. The Government will certainly continue the work that we are doing to try to restore faith and confidence in and business for the aviation industry. That is why today the Minister responsible for aviation—the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson)—is visiting four of the major airports in order to restore the confidence of the travelling public in their security arrangements. In restoring that confidence lies the best hope of a way forward for the aerospace industry.

In the meantime, through our regional development agencies—which the Conservatives opposed—and through the Government offices we are doing all that we can to cope with the impact of redundancies on local communities.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall last week giving sympathetic consideration to the suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) for a debate on farming and the countryside? Will he now regard that as a matter of urgency, given the continuing and deepening crisis in agriculture and in the rural economy and, coupled with that, the conduct of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs?

The Department increasingly appears to have turned its back on agriculture, refuses to answer letters from hon. Members and does not answer parliamentary questions. I tabled a written question for a named-day response on 15 October that, two weeks later, is still not answered despite being a crucial matter for people in my constituency. May I tell the right hon. Gentleman frankly that the Department is increasingly losing any confidence that may have resided in it among people who live in rural areas and those who represent them in this place?

Mr. Cook: I shall take up with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about parliamentary answers and see whether we can get an answer to his specific question. On the issue of the debate, I would be surprised if, sometime in the near future, we did not hold a debate involving that Department. He will understand that I have many conflicting demands to balance, but I know that the Department is keen to have a debate on the countryside.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): What action is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that legislation is properly scrutinised before it goes to the House of Lords?

Mr. Forth: He's doing the opposite.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman says that I am doing the opposite. I was surprised, given his commitment to scrutiny, that his memorandum to his leader suggested that they should ensure that Bills left this place imperfectly scrutinised, in order to discredit the Government.

I will ensure that there is adequate time for the scrutiny of Bills in the House. I hope that the Opposition will take that opportunity. If they choose instead to conspire to leave Bills imperfectly scrutinised, it is not us but themselves whom they will discredit.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): May I press the Leader of the House further for a debate on the crisis in

our care homes? He rather brushed aside the issue when it was raised a few minutes ago. Will he ensure that that debate not only takes account of the inadequacy of the ministerial press release about the funding for care homes, but considers the catastrophic effects that there would be if the Government's proposed changes to the way in which care homes are managed come into effect next spring, which would make the situation even worse?

Mr. Cook: I am not aware of having brushed aside a question on care homes; indeed, I am not aware of having been asked a question on care homes this afternoon. However, I fully understand the importance of the role that they play; I said as much last week. Only this month the Government have taken action to ensure that everyone is entitled to free nursing care. We shall certainly do all that we can to ensure that care homes can play a full part. We need them to play a full part, to ensure that hospitals can focus on those acute cases that require hospital intervention.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): May I raise with my right hon. Friend a matter that requires urgent parliamentary attention? It concerns the role of some, if not all, landlords, especially across northern cities where there are areas of very low demand for property. Those landlords, by failing to take any responsibility for their properties and the tenants whom they move in, are having a very serious impact on the quality of life and, of course, on the asset value of the properties of other owners in the area.

The Government have consulted on the need for a licensing system for private landlords. May I urge my right hon. Friend to tell the House that we can move forward on that licensing, which would have the impact of allowing local authorities to take away access to housing benefit for those landlords who will not act as good citizens?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an issue of concern to the Government. That is why we have issued a consultation document on the selective licensing of private landlords. It was issued as recently as this week and it will obviously be some time before we are able to give a considered response, but we hope that it will enable us to deal with some of the problems that my hon. Friend has identified.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Leader of the House said that the Government would shortly introduce legislation to deal with matters of terrorism and extradition. Will he ensure that it encompasses a situation where British nationals leave these shores to participate in military action against this country and our allies, and the consequential action that will be needed if they then seek to re-enter this country?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Lady raises an issue that I wrestled with in the Foreign Office in a previous role in relation to a previous conflict. The legal issues involved are extremely difficult, but I understand the point that she raises and I am sure that my colleagues at the Home Office will consider it.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate, or at least a statement, on the treatment of deaf and hard of hearing people in the national health service? I have particular concerns about the availability of digital hearing aids, which constitute a major technical advance but the availability of which is very patchy. There are long waiting lists in my area, among others, and I have many constituents who are waiting desperately for a digital hearing aid.

Mr. Cook: I cannot promise my hon. Friend a statement, but I will draw his observations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and ensure that he receives a response from the Department.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the Leader of the House further consider granting an emergency debate on British Airways' decision to withdraw its Belfast-London Heathrow service? A debate on that matter would enable us all to consider the options, and especially the slots vacated by British Airways and the possibility that one of several other carriers might use them. Thousands of people from Northern Ireland, who work and live in London, expect a good service, and they are already concerned about arrangements to enable them to get home to their families over the Christmas period.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the great importance of the matter to Northern Ireland, and to those in Britain who wish to visit and travel to Northern Ireland. There is a wider debate about what happens to slots that are vacated in the present difficult times for the aviation industry. That issue, in its generality, is receiving close attention from my colleagues, which is why the aviation Minister is today on a tour of four airports in Britain. I will draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to his attention so that he may consider this point.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the publication on 12 September of the long-awaited Government Green Paper on the management of radioactive waste? Given the enormous costs involved in the management of our existing stockpiles of radioactive waste, which now exceed £85 billion according to an answer given last week by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, given the increasing concern about terrorist access to fissile material, and given that the Green Paper calls for a wide-ranging public debate on the very complicated issues involved in the management of that waste, will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on that subject in the very near future?

Mr. Cook: I cannot promise a debate, but some of those issues will be reflected in the forthcoming emergency legislation, which is likely to provide increased scope for the actions by Atomic Energy Authority police. I am sure that some of the issues that my hon. Friend raised could be ventilated in the course of debate.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): *The Independent* reported this morning that the news about terminal 5 will be announced

"at the very moment when Britain appears to be about to join a land war against the Taliban".

[Mr. Paul Goodman]

How on earth is that statement compatible with the answer that the right hon. Gentleman gave earlier? Will he now give a firm guarantee, which he failed to give to the shadow Leader of the House, that an announcement on terminal 5 will be made to the House before any news of it is released to my former colleagues in the media?

Mr. Cook: Of course that statement will be made to the House. Indeed, I said precisely that to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). The hon. Gentleman seems to suggest that the decision and the announcement should be delayed until a time that he regards as appropriate. The longer that it is delayed, the more probable it is that any decision will be leaked by one means or another—not necessarily by ministerial action, as it is not only Ministers who will be privy to such a decision. Frankly, it is in the interests of the House that that statement comes as soon as possible after the decision is taken. We have to recognise that we cannot put on hold all the important decisions that need to be taken for the running of Britain because we are engaged in a very important struggle against international terrorism.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Further to my right hon. Friend's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) on the reorganisation of Department of Trade and Industry questions, will he look at the official record for the Session 1997-98? He will find that the then Secretary of State for Social Security, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), and I regularly answered questions about women during Social Security questions. We had the time, but it was not for the convenience of the House and it interrupted the good flow of questions and debate. I strongly recommend that my right hon. Friend considers allocating a separate 10-minute slot. Perhaps he could tell us when he might report on that matter.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her advice and I will certainly take it into account when making my decision.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I appreciate that not every hon. Member considers Solicitor-General's questions the most riveting event that takes place. Nevertheless, with 10 minutes we get through only two or three questions. Will the Leader of the House restore Solicitor-General's questions to its former glory of a quarter of an hour?

I also wish to endorse the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). We not only have outrageous delays from DEFRA on parliamentary answers; there are also delays with correspondence from Ministers to Members. It is just not good enough and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will make the appropriate point to the Minister concerned. We must have swifter replies to Members' questions from DEFRA.

Mr. Cook: I shall certainly ensure that DEFRA is aware of the comments that have been made. In saying that, I in no way necessarily endorse the criticisms of the Department.

I commend the hon. Gentleman for his enthusiasm and interest in Solicitor-General's questions. He makes a modest bid for five minutes more. It sounds modest when it is an add-on to those questions, but I am not sure that it will necessarily appear quite so modest when it is taken out of someone else's time.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Government are consulting on the Budd report on gambling. It could have a far-reaching impact on many constituencies, and on mine in particular because several hundred people are employed making penny fall machines, of which he may be aware from his visits to the seaside. Some of the recommendations threaten the sale of those machines.

I have been trying to secure an Adjournment debate on the subject—so far without success, but I will continue. Will my right hon. Friend consider the possibility of a debate on the report in Government time, possibly in Westminster Hall one afternoon?

Mr. Cook: One of the regrets of no longer visiting the Winter Gardens is missing out on the opportunity to play the penny fall machines. The allocation of Adjournment debates goes beyond my remit, but I am sure that my hon. Friend's observations will have been heard by those who have control over them.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): May we have a debate on the ploy whereby Cabinet Ministers who do not want to answer oral questions simply shuffle them off to be written answers given by colleagues? The Cabinet Office guide to ministerial responsibilities clearly states that the Deputy Prime Minister has responsibility on behalf of the Prime Minister for negotiations on climate change. Indeed, as recently as 24 September the Deputy Prime Minister opened the international panel on climate change conference here in London—yet when I successfully tabled an oral question on the subject to him, he simply shuffled it off to be answered as a written question by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Does the Deputy Prime Minister have responsibility for climate change negotiations? If he does, should he not be accountable to the House for those responsibilities?

Mr. Cook: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has responsibility for our contribution towards meeting our targets on climate change. The Minister for the Environment is fully engaged in that process and is perfectly competent to answer questions. I know from the work that I used to do at the Foreign Office of the excellent work done by the Deputy Prime Minister and the high respect in which he is held throughout the world for it. He should be held in the same high respect in the country on whose behalf he speaks.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Can my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the services provided by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service? As I understand it, the director of operations left two months after the new service was set up earlier this year and the chief executive is away sick. A judicial review recently ruled that CAFCASS acted unlawfully in the way it gave contracts to the children's guardians. I also understand that a large number of managers have left throughout the country.

As someone who managed a guardian ad litem team, I am aware of the very important work that children's guardians do in helping to advise courts about the future of vulnerable children. I would be grateful if he could find time for that important issue to be discussed.

Mr. Cook: I cannot promise a debate, but I read with interest the early-day motion on the subject, which expresses views similar to those of my hon. Friend. I will be happy to draw it to the attention of the Lord Chancellor's Department in the hope that it will alert it to the widespread and understandable concern among hon. Members about the impact of the service in their constituencies.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Flooding is of particular pertinence in my constituency and those of other hon. Members. In Bishop's Stortford and the surrounding villages there has been a severe crisis this week. My worry and that of other hon. Members is that we hear comments by Ministers on the issue and occasionally, if we are lucky, get letters from them, but we do not have statements in the House. It is important, particularly at this point in the autumn, to know exactly where the Government stand. Will the Leader of the House ensure that we have an early statement on the issue?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman cannot complain that sufficient attempts have not been made to show where the Government stand. We have increased investment in flood defences and greatly increased the number of residential properties covered by flood warnings. We will continue to give that matter priority. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), is active on that matter today.

I think that I have received seven demands for statements—possibly more, but certainly not less—and unless the Chamber is to become a place for the receipt of statements it will be impossible to meet all those requirements. The House must recognise that it is important that strategic and major policy announcements are made on the Floor of the Chamber, but if everything is announced here, we will do nothing else.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Has not manufacturing industry been traditionally denied its fair share of attention by the House, in spite of the fact that it still contributes 20 per cent. to the English economy and 27 per cent. to the Welsh economy? The events of 11 September have resulted in a serious crisis in the steel and aluminium industries, which is likely to have grave repercussions in my constituency. May we have a debate on manufacturing industry?

Mr. Cook: I share my hon. Friend's recognition of the importance of manufacturing industry and its significance for the whole economy. That is why we are pleased that manufacturing exports have increased by 25 per cent. since 1997. I assure him that the Government remain fully committed to building on that success.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): Following on from the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), may I urge the Leader of the House to seek from the Chancellor a firm date for the autumn statement, given the £5 billion black hole in the Chancellor's spending plans found by the Institute of Fiscal Studies and the Home Secretary's announcement on the "Today" programme on Monday that things look bleak on the spending front?

Mr. Cook: In fairness to the IFS, the hon. Gentleman would wish me to tell the House that, of course, we are dealing with figures that can only possibly arise in 2003, and even then we would dispute them. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will, of course, make an autumn statement during this parliamentary term.

Mr. Prisk: When?

Mr. Cook: I cannot recall us having an autumn statement before November, and we are not yet into November.

Mr. Forth: No?

Mr. Cook: If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to dispute that fact and to hold a debate on it, I cannot promise that a ministerial statement will be made, but I do not think that we are into November. When the appropriate times comes, there will be a statement.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The Leader of the House may remember that on 5 July hon. Members voted to allow survivors' benefits to be payable to unmarried couples, whether straight or gay. Indeed, he and his Front-Bench colleagues voted for that measure, and I expressed my gratitude to them the last time that we spoke about the issue. However, is he aware that the hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) sought to extend those benefits through civil partnership to non-Members of Parliament under a private Member's Bill that she introduced yesterday, but that no Minister, whom we assume would be given a free vote, voted for that measure?

Does the right hon. Gentleman think it seemly for Ministers and other Members to be seen to grab benefits for themselves and their unmarried partners, but not to agree that the wider population should have them? In the light of that, will he consider providing Government time for that private Member's Bill, or will the Government introduce their own policy to end the discrimination against people who are not married or who cannot be married?

Mr. Cook: First, by convention, Ministers do not take part in ten-minute Bill Divisions for the very reason that the hon. Gentleman suggests—it is important that Government approval, or disapproval, is not read into the actions of individual Ministers. On the other issue that he raises, perhaps in a spirit of humility, I gently remind him that it was his amendment that extended to Members of Parliament the right to pensions for their unmarried partners, and it does not lie well with him to accuse the rest of us of having double standards now.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): May I ask the Leader of the House for a debate this autumn on the principle of ballistic missile defence? He will remember that in

[Mr. George Osborne]

response to a question asked yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), the Prime Minister said:

"I do not agree with those who are opposed to it."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 273.]

The Leader of the House will be aware that a large number of Labour Members have signed early-day motion 23, which opposes ballistic missile defence.

[That this House expresses concern at President Bush's intention to move beyond the constraints of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in developing missile defence; and endorses the unanimous conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, which recommended that the Government voice the grave doubts about NMD in the UK, questioned whether US plans to deploy NMD represent an appropriate response to the proliferation problems faced by the international community and recommended that the Government encourage the USA to explore all ways of reducing the threat it perceives.]

May we have such debate so that those Government Back Benchers can put their views to those on the Government Front Bench, and those of us who, on this issue, support the Prime Minister—indeed, we would like him to go further—can express our views, too?

Mr. Cook: I am sure that my hon. Friends will be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his solicitude in suggesting that they should have an opportunity to express their views. May I remind him that no decision on the matter has been taken, that no decision can be taken until a question is asked of us and that, in those circumstances, it would be rather odd for us to debate it?

Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY—FIRST PART]

Student Finance

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the main business—the first part of the third allotted Opposition day. I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

1.24 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the best possible education of its citizens is both a principal duty of, and an immeasurable benefit to, any civilised society, and therefore deplores the rising levels of student debt and the resulting disincentive to continue in education post-school; condemns the failure of the Government to invest in Higher Education all the extra resources provided by the abolition of maintenance grants and the introduction of tuition fees; regrets that the conclusions drawn from reviews of student finance in Scotland and Wales have been ignored in Westminster; congratulates the Scottish Executive on abolishing tuition fees and restoring grants for students from low income backgrounds; believes that part-time students and students in Further Education should be treated fairly in comparison with full-time students in Higher Education; notes the recent decision by the Government to review student finance more widely; and calls upon the Government to abolish tuition fees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and to put in place a fully funded support system, which will encourage more students, particularly those from low income backgrounds, to go into higher education.

May I begin by saying how pleased I am that my right hon. and hon. Friends have chosen to debate student finance today and that they have asked me to move the motion in our names? May I make it plain that I have nothing to gain personally from the abolition of tuition fees, although I do have considerable personal experience of paying them? I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), and, I understand, with the previous Secretary of State, the experience of having a child who was, unfortunately, involved in the first year of tuition fees. I have another son at university now, and my youngest son hopes to go to university in 2003, which, if all goes well, should be the last year of tuition fees.

So it is not for reasons of personal benefit that I am pleased that my party has given this issue the highest priority for debate today; rather it is because in June this year two issues stood out as being uniquely Liberal Democrat issues: free long-term care for the elderly and the abolition of tuition fees. We received massive support from the public on both issues, and they represent the two greatest errors that the Labour Government made in their first term in office. We said that tuition fees were "a tax on education", and we were right.

A sensible Government choose to tax things that they want less of; they avoid taxing things that they want more of. Liberal Democrats believe in education. We believe that education is one of the cornerstones of a civilised society. We believe that the best possible education for each individual in our nation is valuable not just for that individual, but for society as a whole. We also believe that education is not just about equipping the individual with the knowledge and skills that he or she needs for the

jobs of the modern world, but about giving that individual the opportunity to make the most of his or her natural talents and abilities in every aspect of his or her life.

However, the student support system acts as a barrier to young people who want to go to university, particularly for the poorest students. First, there is the upfront payment of tuition fees—the tax on education. The Government have tried to argue that tuition fees are no disincentive. After all, they say, the poorest 50 per cent. or so of students will not have to pay them. But, of course, it is really nothing to do with whether the student is rich or poor. Almost all students are poor, and if it was only rich students who paid tuition fees, they would never have been worth collecting. No, the means testing is done, not on the student, but on the parent.

Some parents pay, but many see no reason why they should continue to subsidise their adult offspring, just because those offspring happen to be intelligent enough to be offered a place at a university. So the sons and daughters of comparatively well-off parents usually end up paying the tuition fees. Often such students end up even more deeply in debt than other students whose parents happen to be less well-off.

Where is the logic in a student finance system in which a graduate who enters a comparatively low-paid but socially useful job may have to pay off greater debts than a graduate who earns hundreds of thousands of pounds in the City, but whose parents happen to have been in less well-paid jobs? What is fair about that? Let there be no doubt that worries about debt are very real. Students can now expect to graduate with an average debt of £10,000, and often more. Of course, tuition fees make up only a part of that debt, and it is true that many students will not have to pay tuition fees.

I must confess that I too was at first taken in by the seductive argument that tuition fees cannot possibly be a disincentive to those who will not have to pay them. However, I visited Durham university recently, and there I spoke to a first-year student who had come up only a month or so before. She described herself as coming from a working-class background. She told me that no less than four of her friends had decided not to go to university because they did not want to get into debt. They had heard about tuition fees, and they were frightened.

It does not matter whether the fear of debt is soundly based; it is the fear itself that produces the disincentive. So will the Government now finally admit that tuition fees and the perception of tuition fees constitute a barrier to young people who want to go to university? How long before the Government stop monitoring and wake up to the crisis in our higher education system? Students are fed up with monitoring—they want tuition fees to be abolished. A sensible Government levy taxes for education and not on education.

Tuition fees are of course only a part of the debt problem. Students must also maintain themselves. The Government fought the election saying that there was not a problem. They apparently saw no contradiction between their target of 50 per cent. participation and the system of student support that they introduced in 1998. During the campaign, however, the Prime Minister apparently woke up to the fact that young people and their parents do see a problem.

In the review of student funding announced at the Labour party conference, one stated objective was to

"tackle the problems of debt and the perception of debt".

The Secretary of State has explicitly recognised that debt is a barrier to access. On 4 October, she was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying:

"I recognise that for many low income families fear of debt is a real worry and could act as a barrier to higher education. I want to make sure that our future reform tackles this problem."

The following day, the Chancellor was quoted in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* as follows:

"As we examine the financing of universities and the problems of student loans and fees, the test will be to break down the barriers that hold people back, so that all, and not just those who can afford it, have the chance to make the most of themselves and their talents."

I suggest to the Minister for Lifelong Learning that if she has the Chancellor's backing, she has a much better chance than most of getting some extra finance into the system.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): If there is a direct relationship between cost and access, will the hon. Gentleman explain why, during the long period when there were no tuition fees and there was a 100 per cent. grants system, the proportion of young people from working-class backgrounds going to university did not increase? When such education was free, working-class people still did not go to university. Why was that?

Mr. Rendel: I am delighted to answer that intervention, because the hon. Gentleman raises an important problem. There are clearly reasons other than the fear of debt that influence the question—one of which is the number of children who go on to post-16 education. That is a particular problem for the sort of children to whom he referred. I am sure that the fear of debt and especially of having to pay tuition fees—even if, in practice, such students will not have to do so—are at least part of the important problem that we face.

The facts speak for themselves. According to the Barclays student debt survey, since the 1998 reforms, average student debt has roughly doubled from about £3,000 to about £6,000, and average debt on graduation is expected to rise from £6,500 in 2000 to around £10,000 in 2001. The National Union of Students estimates that that figure is more in the region of £12,000. It points to a recent debt survey by the University College London student union, in which only 12 per cent. of respondents expected to be debt-free on graduation. Of those expecting to be in debt, 38 per cent. expected to owe up to £10,000, 50 per cent. between £10,000 and £20,000, and 12 per cent. more than £20,000. Of those surveyed, 18 per cent. had considered dropping out altogether as a result of financial difficulties.

Even before the new arrangements were introduced, the student income and expenditure survey for 1998–99 found that 87 per cent. of full-time students experienced financial difficulties, and that 60 per cent. thought that such difficulties had damaged their academic performance. So why has it taken the Government so long to reach the conclusion that debt and the perception of debt represent a barrier to access?

At least we Liberal Democrats can now welcome the Government's decision to conduct a review—and we do. At last the Government have recognised that a disincentive is

[Mr. Rendel]

built into the system. Until now, they have maintained that there was no disincentive. Students, they say, can look forward to higher incomes later, but many students never receive those higher incomes. Even for those who do so, the costs are up front, while the benefits are three or four years down the line.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the review of student finance—we all would—but does he share my substantial concern and surprise that the review is being conducted entirely internally and cross-departmentally, so the very people who devised the system about which we are all complaining are devising the new one, too?

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I certainly share that concern, and I shall make a small offer in relation to it in a moment.

It is not just those who see themselves going into low-paid jobs who fear mounting debts. A recent British Academy report of graduate studies in the humanities and social sciences made two points. First, the United Kingdom is failing to attract sufficient numbers of the best British students to take PhDs in the arts, humanities and social sciences, and, secondly, debt is a major deterrent to potential PhD students.

Sadly, debt causes damage not only as a disincentive. It is clear that student finance has an impact on the quality of the university experience. The experience is valuable not just because it improves career prospects, but because it offers wider educational benefits—the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the coming together of people from different backgrounds, exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking and, of course, the gaining of greater personal independence and freedom.

So what are the implications of the fact that close to two thirds of students take up part-time work to help fund their way through university, or of a growing number of students opting to live at home because it is cheaper? Clearly, those trends mean less time to engage in the wider experience of university life, with all the extra benefits that that can bring.

The central problem is that the Government are committed to expansion but not to providing the money to pay for it. If they are serious about widening participation, they must address the funding issue. We know that that can be done. How do we know that? We know because it has been done. In Scotland, tuition fees have been abolished; grants for students from poorer backgrounds have been reintroduced. We Liberal Democrats are delighted that our Scottish colleagues were able to persuade the Scottish Executive to make those changes. The Liberal Democrats and the Labour party in Scotland have jointly proved that a better system is possible and can be afforded.

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rendel: I shall give way in a moment.

The Scottish system is not the only possible way of financing students. Indeed, it may not even be the best one. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches are not dogmatic about that.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Well, give way then.

Mr. Rendel: If the Government wish as part of their review to discuss alternative proposals with us, we shall be happy to do so. I make that offer freely.

Diana Organ: The hon. Gentleman referred to the value of higher education and the Government's desire to increase participation in and access to it. Do he and his party agree, therefore, with the target of 50 per cent. of young people having access to higher education? Is he committed to that, as his party should be?

Mr. Rendel: The important issue is that students must have a quality university experience. There is no point in a target that results in more and more people going to university if the Government fail to meet the need to maintain unit funding for those students. If funding can be maintained, we would of course like the maximum number of students to go through university—if possible, even more than 50 per cent. of young people. If they can derive some value from their university experience, let us do that. However, without such valuable experience, doing so would be a waste of money.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Rendel: I have taken enough interventions for the time being.

In replying to the debate, perhaps the Minister will take the opportunity to confirm or deny the rumours that the following options are under consideration in her review: first, the abolition of tuition fees; secondly, a graduate tax; thirdly, the restoration of maintenance grants, at least for students from less well-off backgrounds; and, fourthly, whether student loans will still be made available.

I hope that the Minister will also assure us that universities will not receive less money if extra resources are to be directed towards student support. The Government delude themselves if they believe that they can expand student numbers and deliver a world-class higher education system without a substantial boost in funding

The Secretary of State rightly said in her speech on 22 October:

"Universities are not a birthright for the middle classes."

However, wider access to a bargain basement higher education system would be a betrayal of the young people the Government say they want to support. Just as higher education should not be a birthright of the middle classes, we must ensure that quality is available to all.

Our country needs a world-class system of higher education; our students deserve it. We need to provide grants, at least for students from less well-off backgrounds. However, tuition fees have no part to play in such a system.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I call Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Has the hon. Gentleman given way or has he finished his speech?

Mr. Rendel: I have finished.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I apologise. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was giving way.

1.41 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the approach the Government has taken to higher education since 1997, particularly the extra investment the Government is making in Higher Education, meaning an extra £1.7 billion of publicly planned funding in the six years to 2003–04; further welcomes the Government's commitment to widening participation so that half of under-30 year olds will benefit from the opportunities of higher education by the end of the decade; supports the Government's reforms of student support, introduced in 1998, which have increased the resources available to higher education establishments; agrees with the principle, underlying these reforms, that those who benefit from the considerable advantages that higher education can offer are asked to contribute when they can afford to; recognises that the Government has always been committed to monitor and to review the impact of these reforms; and further welcomes the Secretary of State for Education and Skills' recent announcement of this review.'.

I am not surprised that hon. Members were not sure whether the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) had given way. It was not clear whether he had finished his contribution or, indeed, what he was talking about. However, I am delighted that the Liberal Democrats have given us the opportunity today to engage in a short debate on higher education. It gives me the opportunity, early in the lifetime of the Parliament, to set out the Government's vision for expanding higher education.

I shall have to ignore much of the Liberal Democrat contribution because, in my simple little way, I do not understand the difference between a Scottish graduate endowment of £2,000 and payment towards the cost of education in a tuition fee. They may be called different names but they are the same.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Will the Minister give way?

Margaret Hodge: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall make my second attack.

It was interesting that the Liberal Democrats did not make a commitment to widening participation in and access to higher education. That is the basis for everything on our agenda for universities.

Mr. Willis: What is the difference between paying an endowment at the end of an undergraduate's course of study and a graduate tax, which would be paid into the same pot?

Margaret Hodge: All the systems reflect a contribution from the student—as a student or a graduate; directly or through the family—towards the cost of higher education. That principle is accepted by all parties.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, unlike the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). Does she agree that it is disingenuous of a party that campaigned on honesty in taxation to talk about getting rid of student tuition fees without mentioning the fact that the policy was to be financed through graduate endowment payments? Where is the honesty in taxation in that policy?

Margaret Hodge: I completely concur with my hon. Friend's views. Liberal Democrat policies show little honesty, rigour or ability to add up.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The Minister clearly does not understand the system in Scotland. It is therefore vital to place on record the fact that the money that students in Scotland pay after they have graduated is used as a contribution to increase maintenance support for students. It is not used to pay for tuition.

Margaret Hodge: With great respect, the hon. Gentleman is being rather too clever. Students are worried about the total cost of their education, which comprises tuition and maintenance: simply renaming the contribution from individuals before or after they have graduated is beside the point.

I should like to set out our ambitions to try to give the debate some coherence. We have said that by the end of the decade we want half of our young people to have the opportunity to benefit from higher education by the time they reach the age of 30. That is a tough and challenging ambition, but that target is part of our wider policies for higher education. It encapsulates many of the values that underpin our general approach to government. If we are to maintain and enhance capability and competitiveness in our economy, we need to improve the skills and capabilities of individuals in the labour market.

Expanding higher education is not, as has been suggested by some, about dumbing down degree standards. Far from it; it is about raising attainment and qualifications levels so that we enjoy the appropriate and necessary skills that we need in the labour market to boost growth and prosperity. Indeed, it has been calculated that a 10 per cent. increase in the proportion of the labour force in higher education would raise the gross domestic product per person by about 3.3 per cent.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The Government reformed the student finance system only three or four years ago. Why, therefore, does the Prime Minister feel the need for a review?

Margaret Hodge: I can answer that easily. The hon. Gentleman focuses on one element of a much broader policy, which I shall discuss. Any sensible Government would monitor their policies to ensure that they work precisely as they envisaged. I believe that the Liberal Democrats agree that it is appropriate for students or their families to make a contribution towards the cost of higher education because of the benefits that they gain through it. That did not happen before we introduced our reforms.

Our economic goal is closely linked with our social objective. We do not perceive economic prosperity and social inclusion as competing ambitions. On the contrary, we shall achieve our economic objectives only if we ensure opportunity for all our young people to develop their full potential. Nowhere is exclusion a harsher reality than in higher education. The facts make grim and stark reading.

[Margaret Hodge]

Despite the rapid expansion in student numbers in the past decade, the proportion of young people from lower-income backgrounds who go to university has remained stubbornly low. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) rightly made that point earlier. Those whose parents come from an unskilled or manual working background have just over a one in 10 chance of getting to university. Those whose parents happen to prosper in the professional classes have a three in four chance of getting to university. It is a 13 per cent. chance for those who are less well-off, but a 73 per cent. chance for those who are better off. That is the measure of the challenge that we face and the inequality that we are considering. That is the enormity of the gap in opportunity that we are trying to tackle.

Closing that gap is at the heart of our determination to widen participation. Our aim must be to challenge all the barriers that inhibit access to higher education and to create an intellectual élite, who have access to higher education through their ability.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Does not evidence show that removing the maintenance grant has had a greater impact than the abolition of tuition fees on less well-off students? The National Union of Students has produced evidence to show that the average debt for less well-off students has increased from £6,000 in 1997 to £12,000 in 2000.

Margaret Hodge: The proportion of people from lower-income backgrounds who participate in higher education has not altered since the introduction of the new student arrangements. I wish that the matter was as simple as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

We must deal with every barrier that prevents children from lower-income backgrounds from enjoying the experience and benefits of higher education.

That challenge is particularly important to me. I know from my constituency how huge a mountain we have to climb. In Barking, only 3.5 per cent. of my adult constituents have a degree or equivalent qualification. The constituency has a lower participation rate than any other constituency in the country. I therefore understand how difficult it is to tackle the complex barriers that inhibit participation.

I also know, however, what a difference higher education can make to the lives of individuals, as well as to their communities and the economy. A degree does buy a better income. Indeed, all the evidence shows that, despite a rapid growth in the number of graduates, the graduate premium in earnings has been maintained. A graduate will, on average, earn 35 per cent. more than the work force as a whole. A graduate is half as likely to be unemployed as someone without a degree. Moreover, a graduate is likely to stay healthy for longer than a non-graduate.

Diana Organ: I am delighted to hear that we are keen to ensure that those who formerly encountered barriers are given an opportunity to enter higher education, but are not good further education sectors particularly important in that regard?

Margaret Hodge: Further education can certainly make an important contribution to ensuring that young people obtain prior qualifications, and, perhaps, spend the first years of their higher education in an environment to which they are accustomed. As we expand higher education, much of it is indeed being delivered through further education.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Liberal Democrats are delighted to learn that the Government are to conduct a review of student finance. What perceived deficiencies in the existing system will it seek to remedy?

Margaret Hodge: As I told the hon. Member for Newbury, it is sensible and good practice to review whether one's policies are working properly.

Mr. Laws *rose—*

Margaret Hodge: I must get on with my speech. If the hon. Gentleman has a new point to make, no doubt it will arise later.

Higher education remains a very good investment for students, which brings me to an important principle that we have already discussed today. Given the personal financial benefits that accrue to graduates, it must be right for them to contribute to the cost of their higher education. That principle was courageously established by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) when he introduced his radical reforms of student funding and support in 1998. We will not shift from it as we conduct our review—properly and responsibly—to establish whether the reforms are working effectively.

It might be helpful to recall the context of the 1998 reforms. In 1997, when Labour took office, there had been a massive 36 per cent. cut in unit funding for students; the previous Conservative Government—whose members are not listening very carefully at the moment—had imposed a cap on student numbers; and our universities had been starved of proper resources for their infrastructure, teaching and research.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Will the Minister acknowledge that, over the 18 years of Conservative government, the opportunities to attend university that she considers so important expanded dramatically? In 1979, only about 10 per cent. of young people went to university; by the time Labour took office, the figure had risen to about a third.

Margaret Hodge: I acknowledge that there was a rapid expansion of student numbers under the Conservative Government. My point is that that expansion was appallingly funded, which has created difficulties in regard to the quality of education. The last Government caused their own difficulties by capping student numbers.

I pay huge tribute to the higher education sector. Despite that enormous underfunding, it managed to expand numbers while maintaining quality. We are still punching well above our weight in terms of research, and the university sector is in good health.

Mr. Willis: Will the Minister also acknowledge that, if we subtract the Wellcome Foundation's investment in

research, the unit of funding per higher education student during this Government's lifetime has continued to fall year on year, and is now less than it was in 1995?

Margaret Hodge: I do not accept that. I do accept that unit funding declined until, during the last comprehensive spending review, we injected a further £1.7 million of publicly planned resources into the higher education sector. That has enabled us to achieve a 1 per cent. increase this year, for the first time in more than a decade.

Mr. Chaytor: During the last Parliament, did not the amount given to primary and secondary education increase dramatically, thereby enabling far more young people to go to university after leaving school?

Margaret Hodge: Indeed—and what underlies that is the fact that, during our first term in government, we focused additional resources on schools in particular. It was important to get that right.

Our reforms of student funding enabled us to start tackling the unholy mess that we had inherited. We have lifted the cap on student numbers, and every individual capable of undertaking higher education now has the opportunity to do so. We are investing an extra £1.7 million of publicly planned expenditure—18 per cent. in real terms. For the first time in a decade, we have financed a 1 per cent. increase in the funding of each student, and, together with the Wellcome Foundation, we have invested £1 billion on the research infrastructure in our universities.

That investment is supporting our participation agenda. This year's figures continue to show a buoyant demand for places. The latest figures from the Universities and Colleges Admission Service show a 5.5 per cent. increase in the number of people allocated a university place this year, and a particularly pleasing increase of more than 10 per cent. in the number of mature students who have managed to enter higher education. Having achieved those considerable advances in the first term of a Labour Government, we are considering what further action we need to tackle all the existing barriers.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I applaud the Government's focus on higher education and the increase in participation rates, but is it not important for the review to examine the possibility of more up-front support for students with less advantageous socio-economic backgrounds?

Margaret Hodge: Support for students throughout post-compulsory education is crucial. We have introduced an education maintenance allowance, albeit on a pilot basis applying to only 30 per cent. of the country. That is a very good way of increasing participation. I accept, however, that we must bear in mind the link between the perception of debt and lower-income families.

Let me now deal with what I consider to be equally important issues. Perhaps our most important and difficult task is to increase the number of young people who obtain level 3—A-level—qualifications. At present, nine out of 10 of those who obtain A-levels go on to university. Our challenge is to stop the haemorrhage of young people who leave school at 16 after their GCSEs, and to increase the number who remain in full-time education. That is what our secondary school reform proposals are about, and that is what will be addressed by the strategy on 14 to 19-year-olds that we will publish in the new year. That is why we have introduced the education maintenance allowances, which have achieved a dramatic increase, and that is why we are introducing the ConneXions service. That is our key task.

Equally challenging is the task of raising aspirations among young people.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Does my hon. Friend agree that year 8 is a particularly important year? It is the year before students take their GCSE options, and a year in which universities and secondary schools could work much more closely together to ensure that students' aspirations are raised. I commend the work that Staffordshire university does in terms of widening access and working with local schools.

Margaret Hodge: I completely agree with my hon. Friend about ensuring that we raise students' aspirations at an early enough age. There has, possibly, been a tradition of thinking that if we can capture students at 15 or 16, before they take their GCSEs, we will achieve that increased participation. I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to reach them at a much younger age. Again, access to the 14 to 19-year-old agenda is all about ensuring those raised aspirations.

One of the most shocking statistics that I discovered when I first took over this portfolio was that 44 per cent. of children from the lower socio-economic groups—nearly half—never hear about the opportunities of higher education during their school years. Abandoning such a huge number of potentially talented young people cannot be right. That is why we are funding a range of programmes to widen participation among non-traditional groups of students. Our £190 million excellence challenge will work with children from the age of 13 in excellence in cities areas and education action zones to raise their aspirations.

Adam Price: The Minister has referred to arrangements in Scotland. Is she aware of the Rees report on student finance, which also examined the issue of support for further education students? It suggested introducing a maintenance grant in Wales for further education and higher education students. Will the Government allow diversity to flourish in FE and HE, as they claim to do in other areas?

Margaret Hodge: The hon. Gentleman will be happy to note that that is entirely a matter for the Assembly in Wales.

Let us look at what we are trying to do. We are introducing programmes to do more, with mentoring, out-of-school support and master classes. We are introducing programmes to get universities and further education colleges to do more, with access courses and summer schools. We are also encouraging them to look at how they recruit their students, because we want to tackle the disadvantage faced by children from schools in disadvantaged areas in gaining access to our best universities. We are introducing foundation degrees, which are both relevant to the labour market and attractive to the uncertain student, for whom we hope they will provide a passport to a job.

[Margaret Hodge]

We are introducing programmes to encourage universities to change the way in which they work, to form closer links between further and higher education, so that they can give support to students from schools in disadvantaged areas. We are introducing programmes to target support on those for whom the financial burden is the greatest, with our opportunity bursary scheme, our child care support programme, our support for students with dependants and our support for disabled students. All those crucial initiatives should support our objective of widening access.

Mr. Laws: In the light of the review, can the Minister think of a single problem with access to higher education created by the existing system of student finance?

Margaret Hodge: The Government are now reviewing the system of student finance. The hon. Gentleman presses me again on an issue on which I have given endless replies, and which his party is patently not addressing properly. If all his solutions are going to come out of the 1p that his party wants to put on income tax, that 1p will have to stretch a long, long way. I was trying to stress that the issue of widening participation is much more complicated than the hon. Gentleman suggests, and that if the Liberal Democrats will not address that wider agenda they will fail to achieve the basic purpose of a student funding system, or anything else.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): One of the issues that I believe affects participation is the visual aspect of having a university within a community. Has any research been carried out into whether the location of a university in a deprived area has an impact on the community, not necessarily in terms of young people going to the university on their doorstep, but of their at least thinking about universities elsewhere? In South Yorkshire, I believe that there is a case for building on the great higher education developments that we have achieved and having a university in Doncaster.

Margaret Hodge: As we widen participation, no doubt we shall want to extend access for students right across the country.

I strongly believe that if we can get more young children to go into a university at a young age, just to get a feel of what life there would be like, it would be one way of raising their aspirations. We shall experiment with that through our excellence challenge programme.

I turn to the way in which we are monitoring and evaluating our student funding reforms. The principle that the beneficiaries should contribute to the cost of higher education was right when we introduced the reforms and it remains right now. Having said that, it is worth remembering that not all full-time undergraduates pay a contribution to their tuition fees. Fully half of those students have all their fees paid by the taxpayer, and only one third pay the full fee. We must also remember that the fee covers only about a quarter of the full cost of providing tuition.

I accept that some real issues have emerged from the reform. The system is extremely complex and difficult to understand. There are concerns about the up-front payment of a fee. There is some evidence, although it is not extensive, that debt and the perception of debt are deterring people from lower-income backgrounds from going to university and might be having an impact on students staying the course once they get to university. We have established the review of student funding to examine these issues.

We are, quite sensibly, working across government to look at whether we have got the balance right, and properly profiled, between contributions from the student, their family and the state. The review is now in place, but at this stage it would obviously be absurd to speculate on the outcome. Nothing has been ruled in or ruled out.

What is clear is our aim. For too long, access to higher education has been a privilege for the few. We are determined to make access an opportunity for the many, because it is socially just and economically sensible. At the same time, we want to nurture and enhance the excellence that exists in so many of our universities—an excellence that enhances our productivity agenda, enriches our lives and strengthens our communities. Our ambitions for higher education reflect our ambitions for Britain: delivering on those ambitions is the task that we face in our team. That is precisely what we are doing.

2.8 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I am grateful to have the opportunity to contribute to this debate on student financing. The debate was ably begun by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). I am not quite sure how many Liberal Democrat education spokesmen are present. I can count two or three. We are having a short debate, which may be shorter because I am not sure how many Liberal Democrat Members wish to speak. It would be strange if few did speak. We will wait to see how many catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is a great pleasure to shadow the Minister for Lifelong Learning, whose work I observed when she was Minister with responsibility for disabled people during the previous Parliament. Where she is working genuinely to expand opportunities for young people, to encourage and to inspire them to achieve more, she will find me a friend and colleague. Many of those aspirations are shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House. However, I shall look critically at some of the things that she does, one or two of which may come up during my remarks. I am not sure whether the rosy picture that she paints, particularly of the university sector, would necessarily be accepted in every campus, but perhaps we can come to some of the details later.

Conservative Members welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on student finance. Our record on higher education is strong. It was a Conservative Government who between 1979 and 1997 drove forward wider access to higher education: from one in eight to one in three of the population—no quota, no fuss, just progress. Nor was that expansion confined to an elite of traditionally higher educated families. The number of school leavers from poorer families entering higher education roughly doubled in the 10 years to 1997, although sadly, as the Minister pointed out, it has remained somewhat static since. UCAS figures quoted in a recent Select Committee report on access show that the number of students in higher education from less well-off backgrounds fell between 1997 and 1999.

Kenneth Baker, now Lord Baker of Dorking, whose Parliamentary Private Secretary I was proud to be, ended the divide between polytechnics and universities, recognising the thrust and energy in the poly sector. He was one of the first to appreciate the need to match wider access to a change in student funding, realising that a redrawing of the balance between student and taxpayer had to take place. That debate was not easy. It remains a difficult area for politicians, in which the easy answer is not likely to be a serious one, but I will come back to the Liberal Democrats in a moment.

Let us be in no doubt why we are here. The Government's review of student finance—the prompt for today's debate and the first U-turn of the new Parliament—has an undistinguished parentage. The first promise reneged upon, at the very beginning of the previous Parliament in 1997, was that by Labour politicians not to introduce tuition fees. The Prime Minister, the title we used to know him by before he was elevated beyond normal politics, had said clearly during the election campaign that

"Labour has no plans to introduce tuition fees".

Within months, that promise to students, their parents and families was conveniently forgotten.

Both arrogance and complacency, with which the country is becoming wearily familiar, characterised the next announcement, which was to reject almost out of hand and extremely rapidly the conclusions of the Dearing committee. To remind the House, Dearing recommended the continuation of means-tested grants in order to ease access for students from a low-income background, and recommended against the introduction of means-tested fees. The then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), chose to do the opposite to Dearing in both cases. Replying to an Opposition day debate on 4 November 1997, he claimed that he was offering not Dearing but "Dearing-plus". It is now clear what the plus means—increased hardship, increased debt, less access and more dropout. Accordingly, the essence of the Government's embarrassment, which we have already witnessed today, is that the crisis in student finance is almost entirely of their own making, born of deception, clothed in presumption but now sunk by their own failings.

That is not the only crisis in the sector, to remind the Minister of things that she may have forgotten while she was at the Dispatch Box. Universities acknowledge the impact that the crisis in student finance has on access and retention, but they have concerns in other directions. They are irked at being required to succumb to greater and greater regulation—it is estimated that quality assessment alone costs some £250 million—while expecting less and less financial support from Government. They are worried about a crisis in their own funding. They estimate that a gap now exists of some £900 million a year in respect of delivering as they would wish on their students' expectations. They are worried about the demographics of their teaching staff, which foresee them being remarkably short of lecturers in a handful of years. They are worried about recruiting their replacements and attracting students to do PhDs.

The crisis in student funding may not be the only one, but it has the most immediate impact on students of all ages and their families. If it was unexpected by the current Home Secretary and his party in 1997, it was not unexpected by others. It was not long before evidence of it began to accumulate. The Select Committee on Education and Employment published two reports earlier this year examining higher education: on access and on student retention. In both, student finance came under scrutiny, resulting from the growing perception that not only fear of debt but real hardship beyond the usual tolerance long experienced by students were having an influence on choices and destinations.

Professor Claire Callender co-authored a report for the DFEE entitled "Changing Student Finance" that was published in December 2000. She said that certain groups of students experienced severe financial hardship and her report found that one in 10 of full and part-time students had thought about dropping out for financial reasons.

Professor Diana Green of Sheffield Hallam university told the Select Committee that the number of student exclusions for debt had risen by 17 per cent. between 1997 and 1999. The NUS student hardship survey in 1999 showed that up to a third of full-time students had considered dropping out of studies at least occasionally.

Margaret Hodge: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that we have the second best retention rate of students among all OECD comparator countries? Does he further accept that there has been no change in our position since the introduction of the reforms in student support?

Alistair Burt: My point is that we want to preserve and protect our very good retention rate. The evidence to the Select Committee shows that the Government's student financing package is putting that at risk. Even if the figures have not yet started to drop away, my quotations from those who are close to students show that it is a real danger. They are starting to see evidence of exactly what the Minister fears.

Joan Ryan: I am astonished to hear that. I understand that since 1993 participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds has remained pretty constant at 26 per cent. Perhaps one reason why it has not improved is the fact that the Conservatives cut funding per student by 36 per cent. We are trying to regain that position and improve it.

Alistair Burt: I have two points in answer to the hon. Lady's comments. First, as I said earlier, the number of school leavers from poorer families entering higher education approximately doubled in the 10 years to 1997, which include the years that she mentioned. That information is from table 1.1 on page 6 of the Dearing report. Secondly, the hon. Lady referred to the change in unit funding. She is quite correct, but unit funding was going down as the number of people in higher education increased considerably, at no loss of quality whatever, as the Dearing report commented.

We want more people to experience good-quality higher education. That was the record of the Conservative party when it left office.

Margaret Hodge: The key figure is not the number, but the proportion of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who enter higher education. That has not changed. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the mortgage-style loan scheme introduced by the

[Margaret Hodge]

Conservative Government was less inhibiting of students from lower income groups than ours, which is entirely income contingent?

Alistair Burt: I did not say that we are content with the proportion of those from non-traditional backgrounds who enter higher education now. However, we did change it and the numbers were increasing under the Conservative Government. The rapid stop appears to have come round about 1997. Therefore, I am simply asking the hon. Lady to acknowledge that, just possibly, it might have something to do with the new financing arrangements that she introduced.

Mr. Chaytor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way on this point. Given the Conservative party's new-found concern about increasing participation in higher education—*[Interruption.]* In the period 1992–97 when the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues were responsible for the system, I was one of those responsible for making it work, and our recollection of what happened is not quite the same as his. Does he not share the Government's target of 50 per cent. of young people going into higher education by 2010?

Alistair Burt: It is a pleasure to have given way to the hon. Gentleman, who, as the House knows, took my seat in 1997, but who has subsequently made some kind remarks about me, both in the House and outside, which I much appreciate. He certainly knows his education, too. I am a little disturbed that he should say that our appreciation of people going into higher education is newly found. I will not restate the figures yet again, but my point is that things improved markedly when we were in office, and the present Government should seek to continue that progress.

On targets, I have already said that we improved from one in eight to one in three, without quota, without target. The Minister's aspiration is much narrower: to go from one in three to one in two. I am a little puzzled about what might constitute higher education, following the Secretary of State's remarks yesterday in the Education and Skills Committee. She is reported to have said that one may not need a degree to qualify for what she called the "higher education experience", but that all would become clear. I do not know what criteria the Government will use to meet the target: taking a degree, visiting the university for a course, or driving past on a wet Tuesday afternoon. When we know that, perhaps we can talk figures.

Margaret Hodge: There is no change in the calculations. The Conservative Government also used to count a whole range of qualifications at sub-degree level—HNDs, HNCs—and we have the new foundation degrees, but we will not double-count, as the Conservatives did.

Alistair Burt: I am grateful for that clarification. Yesterday, the Secretary of State said:

"The nature of higher education has changed and I think people will go there at different parts of their lives to access that."

That is good. She continued:

"One of the things we are doing at the moment is looking at the length of courses and qualifications, at the out-turn.

When we've worked that out with the sector, we will want to tell you as well."

When asked how the Government would define the target as being met, she replied:

"It will be based on a good quality higher education experience".

That is what has puzzled people, but no doubt we will find out in due course precisely what she meant.

The impact of not completing a course of study is high. Least important, we all may think, is the financial cost, which some estimate to be about £200 million a year. Of greater significance, as we would all agree, is the cost in self-esteem to the undergraduate, who will have struggled to reach university, sometimes overcoming substantial obstacles in life, only to have to deal with a particular form of rejection.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman put his finger on one of the most crucial issues, which is dropout. In the United Kingdom, uniquely, we do not credit students for what they have achieved. For students to be able to go through the system and gain their qualifications should be an aspiration for us all. Does he agree that, rather than talking about dropouts, we should regard people as having taken one step on the ladder towards achieving their degree or other success? I welcome him to his post.

Alistair Burt: That is kind of the hon. Gentleman. Yes, I agree. I have read the debate that is taking place about what may constitute a credit for the degree or period of study, and I know that there is some concern about the current system. We need to find a new arrangement. I hope to explore that in my discussions with universities over the next few months.

The rejection felt when a course is not completed can be communicated to others, rebuilding barriers to education that we all want to dismantle. For every person who has failed to graduate as a result of Labour's failure to understand the problem, the Labour promise of a better tomorrow has, sadly, been broken.

Charlotte Atkins: Do not dropouts frequently occur for reasons other than student finance: for example, choosing the wrong course or not getting the right quality of teaching? I was a member of the Committee that produced the report to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Students told us that their main concern—although of course they were concerned about finance, as I was when I was a student—was the quality of teaching. We are doing a lot to improve that by putting extra investment into universities.

Alistair Burt: The hon. Lady is correct: several factors may contribute to a student failing to complete a course. I am strongly of the opinion—as I know is the Minister—that more information needs to be provided by schools for those who enter at that stage. I have cited the quotations from those close to universities because I wish to query the impact of the new financial arrangements on the decisions that students make on whether to complete a course. The changed nature of the financial circumstances since 1997 has led to the fears that university representatives—and students—have mentioned.

Universities UK told the Committee that perceptions of debt are critical to students' decisions to enter and remain in higher education, especially for students from poorer backgrounds and those without a tradition of higher education in their families. It seems common sense that the level of debt, rather than the simple existence of any sum owing, must be the crucial factor in perception of debt as it applies to access to higher education. Therein lies the biggest error in the Government's calculations. Professing an aim to widen access not only to bring more students into higher education but to ensure that they came from a wider social spectrum, the Government hit unerringly on the single most likely barrier to those students' entry. Families for whom significant debt had often meant real hardship and fear had little likelihood of coming to terms with the new arrangements, when all too often there was confusion about the precise financial repayment arrangements.

In the midst of the evidence that was building up from universities and others, Ministers either did not know what was going on or could not easily admit that they had got it wrong. In February 2001, Baroness Blackstone, then Minister with responsibility for higher education, told the Committee:

"I know of no evidence to suggest that more students have dropped out as a result of the changes in the student support system that we have introduced."

One wonders where the noble Lady was looking, because the evidence was all around her. The signature dish of this Government is high-handed arrogance and bare-faced denial of error. In those few words of Baroness Blackstone, it was set before us again.

In contrast, the signature dish of the Liberal Democrats is promising the earth in the knowledge that they will not inherit it. In this debate, they have taken full advantage of the fact that nobody ever bothers to ask where they would find the money to fund their policies. A hefty price tag is certainly attached to the measures advocated by the hon. Member for Newbury. A reply to a written question has shown, for example, that the abolition of tuition fees would cost the Exchequer some £270 million every year, even before the cost of restoring maintenance grants.

There is a proper debate to be had about the balance of contributions between the state and the student in further and higher education. However, it must be an honest debate. It is wrong to give students the impression that all their problems could be solved without talking about finance or through the now infamous 1p on income tax, about which we have heard so often.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Would the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that in Scotland, where tuition fees have been abolished, finance has been put in place to accommodate that change? Therefore, our proposal is financially solid and not unrealistic.

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate the difference between the jurisdictions in Scotland and England. It is not all roses in Scotland, because the threshold at which students begin paying the graduate tax is low—about £10,000—and the package of reforms introduced as a result of Cubie involved the reduction of loan entitlement for many students while they were studying, leading to greater hardship. Whatever the financing arrangements in Scotland, they do not begin to equate to the number of students in the rest of the country and we have heard nothing about financing from the Liberal Democrats today.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Is not it astonishing that the Liberal Democrats can talk about this issue without saying where they will get the money, secure in the knowledge that the Scottish arrangements discriminate against English students? Those arrangements discriminate against students from the Isle of Wight, while taxpayers from the Isle of Wight and other parts of England pay for Scottish students to get a better deal—because of the Liberal Democrats.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend makes his point extremely well.

Mr. Rendel: The hon. Gentleman challenged me on the point that we did not raise the financial issue. It is clear that, in practice, we have managed to make the new arrangements in Scotland work, in agreement with the Labour party, without resorting to any increase in income tax. In our last manifesto, we allocated a small part of the extra £3 billion that would be raised by a penny on income tax to the abolition of tuition fees. The figure that the hon. Gentleman himself has given demonstrates that only a small part of the £3 billion would be needed.

Alistair Burt: Do you remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, a wonderful game some years ago in which a child would ask a magic robot questions and it moved around to point at the answer? One might try to confuse it, but the magic robot always spun round to give the answer. I suspect that, upstairs in the Liberal Democrats' room, there is a magic robot and they ask it a different question every time. "How can we pay for improvements to the health service?" Unerringly, the magic robot replies, "A penny on income tax." "How can we pay for improvements to schools?" "A penny on income tax." "How do we pay for improvements to our universities?" "A penny on income tax." The remarkable way in which that one penny can be used so many times pays great testament to the number of times that the Liberal Democrats must play that game upstairs in their room.

Mr. Rendel: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alistair Burt: No, I must make some progress.

It is vital that, as far as possible, we draw on the knowledge and expertise of those involved in higher education when we start to make decisions on changes to student finance. For that reason, I was particularly surprised that the Secretary of State said that she was reviewing the policy purely internally. She has disappeared back to the Department to produce another system devised by the same people who created the one about which we are all complaining.

I read this morning in *The Guardian*—my newspaper of choice—a number of things that No. 10 and the Treasury are concocting to foist upon the Department. I appreciate that the Minister will not comment on unsubstantiated newspaper stories, but this one has worried us all and has the ring of truth about it. We will look carefully at what comes out of the review, but it is disappointing that the public's participation in the

[Alistair Burt]

Government's review of student financing is through the pages of the newspapers, rather than through a more open process.

That will not be the Conservative way. Over the coming months and years, we will go out and talk to organisations such as the National Union of Students, the Association of Colleges, Universities UK and others, and we will draw on the experiences of university vice-chancellors, lecturers and students. We will listen to the views of the people who matter in our universities and FE institutions.

Certain core principles will inform our policy-making process. First, we agree with bodies such as Universities UK that there is a real need to ensure that any system of student support focuses on those potential students from less well-off backgrounds. It is vital that we make a university education a realistic goal for every talented young person. It is also vital that young people from less well-off backgrounds are reassured that the financial cost of getting a degree does not put that beyond their reach. Access must not be prevented by cost.

Secondly, any additional provision for students must not come at the expense of university funding. There is a real funding crisis in our universities and they cannot be expected to bear the additional burden of bailing out the Government on student support. The Government must look at ways of giving universities more freedom and allowing them greater scope to harness funds from the private sector. Development must be helped and not hindered by any state involvement.

Finally, it is vital when looking at the entire sector that we do not become focused on higher education to the detriment of further education. The FE sector provides the kind of education that young people and employers want. Some of the more exciting and innovative courses, particularly vocational courses, are being offered by FE students. We must not allow FE to be squeezed out by the university sector, and the current crisis in teaching and recruitment—as revealed in this week's survey by the Association of Colleges—suggests another fine mess for the Minister to uncover to add to her burdens.

In entering post-school education, whether straight from school or later, prospective students deserve the fullest knowledge of what courses are available. They need to know where and how good the courses are, the true value of the qualifications and what society thinks of them, what financial support is available, and when that support needs to be repaid. In that way, they will make their choices on the basis of what is right and appropriate for them in a culture where there is parity of esteem between the vocational and the academic, and where their choice of course, place and sector will enable them to reach their highest potential and not simply to fulfil Government quota or the financial necessity of an institution.

The House knows that, with the best of intentions, any Government can go wrong. The alarms could not have been ringing louder in higher education over the past few years. The Government have ignored too many of them, at the cost of misery and disappointment to students and their families. It is time to listen and maybe—just maybe—to say sorry.

2.36 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I am in two minds about the debate. I welcome the fact that the Liberal Democrats have chosen this subject. The motion includes the important reference to student support outside higher education, although it is unfortunate that the focus so far has been almost entirely on the university sector. However, the issue has been presented in a way that exemplifies the worst forms of Liberal Democrat opportunism and hypocrisy. As long as Liberal Democrat Members continue to argue that there should be a massive expansion in the money available for student support without committing themselves in their spending plans to finding that money, the party's credibility will be zero.

Earlier, I discussed with my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) the Liberal Democrats' latest use of their proposed 1p increase in income tax. The Liberal Democrats have committed themselves to a radical increase in support for students in higher education, and the motion implicitly commits the party to some sort of expansion in support for students in further education. However, my hon. Friend told me that as recently as Friday the Liberal Democrat social services spokesman put in a bid for the 1p on income tax to fund in full the cost of residential social care.

Where will all the money come from? I have to agree with the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) that the proposition is no longer credible.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Gentleman consider that the commitment given by the partnership Government in Wales to £40 million in education maintenance bursaries and financial contingency benefits next year is opportunism, or that it will benefit Welsh young people from poorer homes by giving them the opportunity to enter further or higher education?

Mr. Chaytor: I welcome that commitment, although I am not familiar with the details. The hon. Gentleman had to consult his notes as he asked the question, which suggests that he is not entirely familiar with them either. However, we are talking about a comprehensive programme of reform of student finance, which must apply to students aged 16 and upwards. Whatever proposals the Government make will be funded, so whatever proposals other parties make must also be funded. The experience of the five years since 1997 is that the other parties will not say how that funding will be managed. Liberal Democrat Members believe that, one day, their party will be the second party in the House. I very much hope that that might happen, but I suspect that it will not as long as the Liberal Democrat party continues to promise the earth without putting its money where its mouth is.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman knows that I normally have great respect for what he has to say, but will he accept that we provided the British electorate with a costed list of all our proposals at the last election? If he does accept that, will he apologise to Liberal Democrat Members for his scurrilous remarks about uncosted proposals?

Mr. Chaytor: What the Liberal Democrats are arguing for now is not what they were arguing for on 7 June. If the

hon. Gentleman gives me a revised version of the costed proposals, I may reconsider my remarks. *[Interruption.]* Their position shifts as the months go by.

Dr. Pugh: If there is a clear distinction, will the hon. Gentleman explain in what respect it exists? Will he give us figures and details? He cannot simply allege that there is one.

Mr. Chaytor: The Liberal Democrats originally supported the Government's recommendations on reforming student support. Their only point of difference was on student fees, and they fought the election on the abolition of such fees. As the months go by, they are gradually shifting their position and calling for a more radical transformation of student finance. I am in favour of a radical transformation of student finance, but I am prepared to argue for it, as are the Government, only when the money goes with it.

There is no doubt that the Government's move in the last Parliament to grasp the nettle of student finance in the United Kingdom was brave and courageous. With the abolition of mortgage interest tax relief and the reform of company car taxation, the Government showed enormous courage in tackling the central planks of what is traditionally called the middle-class welfare state. They deserve credit for introducing their important policies to extend and redistribute opportunities for people in the United Kingdom.

A number of parents and students have written to me and visited me in my surgery over the past four and a half years, and although there is concern about the level of debt in which some students find themselves, I have also detected a complete understanding of the importance of the general principle that those who benefit from a university education ought to contribute to it. I am not surprised at the comparatively low level of objection to the fundamentals of the system.

Adam Price: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me, a fellow socialist, that the easiest way to enact that principle would be through a progressive system of income tax?

Mr. Chaytor: There are many ways of enacting that principle. One difficulty with progressive income tax is that those who ought to have the greatest liability for income tax find it the easiest to avoid. There are deficiencies in an income tax system, however progressive it may be on paper.

There are many ways whereby the system can become more progressive and fairer and reduce yet further the barriers to participation that many young people experience. I am sure that the Government will explore all of them. I completely support what they have done. It is important that in the review we do not abandon the central principle that those who gain the benefit contribute their fair share.

We should focus on the details of the system. It is true that the perception of tuition fees has been a problem. However, 50 per cent. of university students do not pay tuition fees, and 15 per cent. pay only a part fee. That is not widely understood, so one of the details that needs to come out of the review is better communication regarding eligibility for tuition fees.

I find it incredible that people recommend abandoning the tuition fee. I cannot see how anyone who is concerned about equality and redistribution of opportunity in education can justify a system whereby every group of post-18-year-old students has to pay a tuition fee for their course, or is eligible to do so, whereas full-time undergraduates—the group that has the greatest benefit from their education—are not eligible. If young people who achieved zero GCSEs at school go to night school at 19 or 20 to improve themselves, they pay a tuition fee. If people in their 30s or 40s who work full time or look after a family do an Open university degree, they pay a tuition fee. How can it possibly be right that undergraduates, who, to have got where they are, have by definition had the greatest benefit from, and the highest investment in, their primary and secondary education, should not pay tuition fees?

That is the key principle behind the payment—or rather, the contribution to the payment. Let us remember that the £1,075—I think that that is right; I have just written the cheque for my youngest daughter, who is starting her second year at university—represents about 25 per cent. of the average cost of providing the course, so we are not asking people to pay the full fee.

Let us focus on the details in the review—information for parents, for example. The Government have taken heroic steps to mitigate some of the potential problems and perceptions among young people going to university for the first time; have introduced all kinds of new systems of support—for child care and transport, for instance—and have expanded the access funds in universities. There is now a plethora of additional forms of support. There is too much confusion and not enough information about the various special schemes that have been introduced.

The system needs reforming and streamlining, so that any additional support that may come through can be focused on the needs of those whom we loosely term non-traditional students, or students from working-class backgrounds. The key criterion, surely, is that a student has non-graduate parents, and is the first to go to university in his or her family. That is the barrier that we have to break through. The prospect of someone whose parents did not go to university going to university themselves is far less likely than for those with graduate parents. I therefore hope that, in addition to better communication about the realities of the system of support, there will be clarification and streamlining of the various forms of support that already exist.

I have praised the Liberal Democrats for including in their motion a reference to the support of post-16s in further education. The Government, and possibly the Welsh Assembly, are to be congratulated on having taken steps towards a form of education maintenance allowance for 16 to 19-year-olds. We have pilot schemes in the United Kingdom, and the evidence is variable, but by and large the schemes work and achieve participation.

We know that rolling out education maintenance allowances nationally will be hugely expensive, but I urge the Government to think carefully and not to back off from a national scheme of support for 16 to 19-year-olds. As was said earlier, one of the key factors in participation is not so much the cost of going to university, so long as the cost is reasonable and students perceive that the higher

[Mr. Chaytor]

earnings in their subsequent careers will cover the initial costs. The key factor is not having the right qualifications at the age of 16 or 18.

Caroline Flint: The education maintenance allowances in Doncaster have had a profound effect in the short time that they have been operational; staying-on rates have increased by 6 per cent. I agree with my hon. Friend that despite the financial issues that they raise, EMAs are a crucial way in which to roll out the programme to encourage more young people to stay on, and give them the chance to achieve the qualifications to get into university.

Mr. Chaytor: I am delighted to hear that. I only wish that we had EMAs in my constituency. They have them in Rochdale, Bolton, Manchester and Salford. Indeed, one of the problems with the pilot schemes is that we now find that students taking the same course at the same college are funded in different ways.

If we are to roll out EMAs nationally, we must consider the relationship with child benefit. The Government deserve enormous credit for grasping the nettle of reforming student finance in the last Parliament, and there is perhaps an even pricklier nettle to be grasped in this Parliament: the relationship between EMAs and child benefit. There are so many anomalies in the way in which our existing welfare state funds 16 to 19-year-olds, in and out of education. I make a plea for the extension of the definition of student financial support away from HE to include FE.

I also ask for some special consideration for students attending London universities and colleges. Normally, I am wholly opposed to any enhancement of educational investment in London as, by and large, it is at the expense of poorer, northern, metropolitan districts such as mine—*[Interruption.]*—and those in other parts of the country. I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning to early-day motion 308, which I tabled this morning and which refers to London weighting. There is no doubt in my mind that living costs for students in London are far in excess of the current weighting provided in student support. Given that students from all over the country attend London universities, the issue must be tackled.

I hope that the Government will stick firmly to the principles. I hope that they will listen to the comments made by the Conservatives. I welcome the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt)—my former adversary—to the Opposition Front Bench. I congratulate him on his appointment and hope that he will bring a new approach to the Conservative party and wish him well on his tour of United Kingdom universities to find out what people have to say. He did not say that he was making a European tour to learn from European capitals what should be done to improve public services in Britain. When those Members of the shadow Cabinet who are going to Europe have their interviews with Mr. Jospin and Chancellor Schröder and ask why British public services are often poorer than those in western Europe, the answer will be simple: "We did not have 20 years of Tory Government." That is the obvious message that the shadow Cabinet will receive on their European tour. However, I am sure that the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire will bring a constructive and reasonable approach to the formulation of Conservative post-16 policy.

The key point is that we must focus on the detail. We must consider London weighting. We must give better information to parents to get rid of the fear factor—that is urgent. We must streamline the existing additional support schemes so that extra effort is directed towards the needs of poor students, especially those who are going to university for the first time.

2.52 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. The subject is of great importance and the House should address it. This is the second Opposition day that has been devoted to a discussion of education. That marks the importance attached to education by Members on both sides of the House.

During the past four years, we have seen the flawed introduction of a new approach to financial support for our students. Even the Secretary of State, in her decision to review the steps taken four years ago and to reconsider the whole system of student finance, has admitted that what was done was not right; that it caused genuine hardship for far too many students; and that, increasingly, it provides a disincentive for students from less well-off backgrounds to enter further education—as my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) pointed out. The Government made a wrong decision and I hope that the current review will result in a more workable and acceptable system that is more attractive to would-be students.

None the less, in choosing this subject for debate, the Liberal Democrats are chasing headlines, while failing to address the real issues relating to student finance. The problem for students, and the one that causes so many financial difficulties, is not tuition fees. To call for the scrapping of tuition fees just makes a cheap headline. It is not tuition fees alone, or even in large measure, that build up debts of between £10,000 and £15,000, but the huge repayment burdens—the burden of cost-of-living expenses built up over a three-year course, or four years in Scotland. That debt burden remains with students through the early years of, and often well into, their professional life. It is that debt burden, far more than tuition fees, that causes the fears that have been discussed.

Twenty years ago, in the days when we had full grants and when I was a student, it was generally estimated that a student needed a little over £2,000 a year for living expenses in London—about £1,500 elsewhere. Obviously, given the changes in the cost of living, those amounts are hugely greater today, yet it is worth noting that the maximum amount available under the student loan system is only £4,000 a year. Today, students are left with huge debts. We need to address that issue for today's students, not tomorrow's.

Caroline Flint: We could have a huge debate about how student finance should be constructed, but will the hon. Gentleman at least concede that, after the student loans system had been introduced under a Conservative Administration, when Labour came to power in 1997 it introduced ways in which the burden of debt could be

paid over a longer period, starting at a higher rate of earnings than was relevant under the Conservative Administration?

Chris Grayling: I am interested in the issue for today's students, and the reality is that, whatever the history of student finance, today's students face a debt burden that is a disincentive and a huge problem for many of them. It is right and proper that the House, the Government and all parties with an interest in the area should be addressing that issue today.

For that reason, at the general election the Conservative party said that our first priority should be to change the burden on today's students, to make it possible for students leaving education and entering their first jobs not to face a huge burden in their pay packets from day one—and a burden it is. A newly qualified nurse earns £15,355 a year. A newly qualified house officer—a young doctor—earns £17,935 a year. A newly qualified teacher earns a little more than £17,000 a year. Newly qualified social workers and other public servants all earn similar amounts.

Currently, that newly qualified nurse, on £15,355 a year, must pay £481 a year in repayments from day one. Even if the proposals put forward by the Liberal Democrats at the general election were implemented, that nurse would pay more than £200 a year in debt repayments. That is why the Conservative party said, at the general election, that we needed a quantum leap in the threshold for repayments. We should not be looking to young, newly qualified public servants to start paying their debts until they have reached a reasonable salary level and start to have the cash that will enable them to afford those repayments.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Did not the manifesto also say that that loan would be repayable at market rates of interest?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady obviously did not read the detail in the manifesto. It said that market rates of interest would be offset by tax allowances that would enable us to securitise the student loan book to provide a significant cash investment in our universities, while ensuring that students paid no more money in repayments. That would have made a huge and real difference to our universities.

Mr. Willis: We cannot let the hon. Gentleman get away with that, because the policy of the previous Government, when they left office, was to sell the student loan portfolio, and the Minister and her colleagues had to pick up that problem. No one would buy it. It is no good saying that the Conservatives would underpin universities with extra resources from a portfolio that no one would buy. It was not commercially attractive to anyone unless it was written down by at least 50 per cent.

Chris Grayling: I think that in today's world one has rather more chance of securitising the student loan book than of encouraging further bondholders in Railtrack.

We move on to what the Government are proposing. If we are to believe the apparently authoritative leak in *The Guardian* today, we shall see a return to a maximum grant. However, it will be a maximum grant that will go nowhere near what is needed by today's students to live a life in full-time education. The suggested figure is £2,600 a year. I will be intrigued when the Minister sums up at the end of the debate if she can give us a hint of whether that figure is even in the ball park. If it is, it is profoundly worrying.

If a poorer student is going to be entitled to a grant that represents a fraction of what is needed to live on, and if the student loan structure is to disappear, what about the rest? Are we saying that students from less well-off backgrounds will have to borrow large amounts from their bank and repay it at much higher rates of interest than the present student loan? The consequences will be serious indeed.

Professor Alan Smithers of Liverpool university has offered some initial analysis of the report, saying

> "For many students it will be a poor deal as it would actually be better for them to pay the money up front and not to incur debts at market rates of interest . . . It is a very untidy solution and it is hard to see who is going to benefit. The financial consequences for a number of students are going to be quite serious . . . It is an attempt by the Government to put a sticking plaster over a self-inflicted wound."

When the Minister replies, I hope that she can reassure us that the plans that are being discussed behind the scenes will not impose the potentially enormous financial burden that such an approach could represent for our students.

At the end of the day, the family will be expected to pay. The Government's view is, and seems always to have been, that a family with an income of £35,000 a year is rich and can well afford to pay tuition fees—to pay a little extra here or support maintenance grants there. In reality, some Ministers have privately admitted that they are placing too many burdens on middle-class families with mortgages and other children to support. The present threshold of £35,000 is not such a vast amount of money that it leaves a huge amount of disposable income to support a student.

We also hear that there may be a graduate tax, repayable over 25 years. What will be the threshold for the repayment of that tax? Will it apply in full measure to the newly qualified nurse, doctor or teacher I mentioned? Will they start paying in full from day one? If a graduate tax is to be the approach, it should not be structured in a way that will affect the least well off—the newly employed graduate.

Caroline Flint: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. Does he agree that we want to expand the opportunities for most young people, so that they can get the best out of their education? We must recognise that graduates can earn four times as much in their lifetime as someone without a degree. There is no doubt about that fact. Therefore, there is a social justice to a graduate tax—they should pay something back for the benefits that they have gained from their education.

Chris Grayling: At a time when the public services in my constituency and many others are crying out for people and simply cannot get the new entrants they need, it is the height of folly simply to pursue a political dogma, increase the financial burden and make it less easy still for graduates to move into jobs that are less well paid than those in the private sector. We need to deal with the problems of today's students going into today's public

[Chris Grayling]

services. Trying to expand numbers just to achieve a target while failing to recognise the potential impact on those people would be foolhardy in the extreme.

Why the rush? The Prime Minister made a speech two or three weeks ago and we are already hearing detailed leaks of what the Government are planning. If they got it wrong four years ago, surely now is the time to step back, think about the matter carefully, talk to the organisations involved, have widespread consultation and then reach a conclusion. They should not cobble something together in three weeks.

Many hon. Members referred to Liberal Democrat education policy—the magic 1p. I will not attempt to satirise it. My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire has done a far better job than I ever could. Year after year, election after election, the magic 1p returns, each time with a different spending commitment attached.

I flicked through the detail of the Liberal Democrat manifesto to see what came under the heading of that 1p this time. There are some startling figures. The range of potential spending commitments is enormous. The one that particularly caught my eye was the commitment to reduce class sizes to 25 pupils, on average, for children aged five to 11—an admirable desire in theory, but if fulfilled would require the construction of the equivalent of 3,000 new primary schools and the hiring of 30,000 new teachers. Schools cannot find teachers to fill today's vacancies, let alone find 30,000 more. The possible capital cost alone of pursuing that policy would gobble up a huge chunk of the magic 1p.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is rather more realistic to promise improvements in public services and help for students by accepting that taxes may have to rise, than by pretending that they will be cut?

Chris Grayling: A responsible political party should make commitments on a basis that can be substantiated, not on the basis of promising all things to all people all the time, with no genuine financial backing to support them.

It is also noticeable that little is said about grants and financial support for students in the Liberal Democrat manifesto. Tuition fees make the headline-grabbing political point, but the detail of how to tackle the debt burden is important. As I said in citing the example of the small threshold increase for repayments that was included in the manifesto, in reality little has changed in the huge debt burden placed on today's students.

Mr. Rendel: I have a copy of the manifesto here, and the bit on student maintenance is clearly rather longer than the bit on tuition fees.

Chris Grayling: I have given a specific example, taken from the hon. Gentleman's manifesto, involving a newly qualified nurse, to show that a significant repayment burden would still be placed on newly qualified members of staff in a key part of our economy where we desperately need more people. We should not provide disincentives to people to join those professions. The danger is that if we use our student finance system to penalise new entrants to the public services that are crying out for people, we will not get the people needed to populate those public services in the future.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) referred to what has been done in Scotland, but my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) mentioned the Barnett formula. The truth is that while the Barnett formula exists, it will always be possible to do more in Scotland than in the rest of the country, because taxpayers in all other parts of the country—including those in the less well-off areas of the north of England, such as that represented by the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor)—will continue to subsidise taxpayers in Scotland. While the Barnett formula exists, the Administration in Scotland will continue to be able to do things that are not possible in other parts of the country.

I believe strongly that the magic 1p policy is hugely disingenuous. During the election campaign, I heard a senior member of the Liberal Democrat party say on the radio, "If we could only put 1p extra on income tax and charge a higher rate overall for high earners, we could solve the problems of our public services once and for all." Well, if Liberal Democrats really believe that they are genuinely fit only to be a minor party, that is how they should remain.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Would the hon. Gentleman like to remind the House which of the three party manifestos was fully costed by the Institute of Fiscal Studies?

Chris Grayling: As I have just said, the hon. Gentleman is a member of a party that proposed a capital programme for schools that could not have been achieved without spending huge sums. That policy is simply not credible.

The No. 1 priority is to reduce the repayments burden in the early years for today's students. I emphasise the phrase "today's students", because this issue concerns students who are in education today and who will leave with substantial debts in forthcoming summers. We need to find a better way to deal with that in future—not through the rushed review that the Government are carrying out and not through policy made on the hoof at the party conference, but through a long, substantial, real review that delivers a workable solution that will endure, not simply last another four years until people discover that it has not worked either.

We need to do other things. There are plenty of anomalies in the way in which student finance is handled. A constituent contacted me a few weeks ago to ask, "Why do I have to pay a separate licence fee for the television in my room because the four of us who share the house just happen to have four different tenancy agreements?" Such anomalies in the financial framework surrounding our students must be addressed. We need to deliver the support, get rid of anomalies and find a better way of doing things.

Let us not forget that it was a Conservative Government who expanded participation in higher education from 10 per cent. of young people to more than 30 per cent. Let us also not forget that it was a Labour Government who ended the principle of free higher education for all.

3.10 pm

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I am very pleased to have an opportunity to contribute to the debate, and to debate with my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning. She kindly invited me—along with one or two colleagues on the Labour Benches—to a private meeting a few weeks ago to discuss these matters, and I put my view to her. I thought that I was alone at that meeting in expressing the dangerously radical view that we needed to reconsider abolishing fees and paying for the restoration of maintenance grants from general taxation.

I was therefore absolutely delighted when the very next day an apparently well-sourced leak appeared in the newspapers suggesting that the Government were to conduct a review and might restore grants and abolish fees. I cannot tell my hon. Friend how pleased I was about that. I hope that the review will, indeed, come up with such policies. I have no doubt that during the review there will be certain pressures from the Treasury. I shall do everything that I can to support my hon. Friend in her struggles with the Treasury on those matters.

I was one of 33 Labour Members who opposed the decision three years ago to impose fees and abolish grants. I did that with great reluctance; clearly, rebelling in the Lobby is very difficult and painful for everyone, and it certainly was for me. However, I had a view at that time, which I have held consistently, that the Government's decision was wrong. The fact that we are to have a review shows that the Government have listened, are listening and are going to change their policies, which is very welcome.

Sadly, I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). I agree with him on almost everything, but I find him unconvincing on the subject of higher education student finance. However, I hope that we shall always remain friends in other respects.

Students are often portrayed as fortunate in enjoying the advantage of a university education. Indeed, I had one myself and feel fortunate as a result. However, students forgo several years of employment—certainly three years, often four and sometimes as many as six years, especially if one includes education from the age of 16—and the income that they could derive from that.

Valerie Davey: I happen to have twin daughters, one of whom went to university and one of whom worked. My hon. Friend can imagine the fertile debates in our household as the one in work paid tax in order to pay for her sister at university. Does that seem fair?

Mr. Hopkins: Provided that taxation is progressive and redistributive, taxation is fair. I should like to think that my hon. Friend's daughter who went to university will pay considerably more tax in her lifetime because she will receive a higher income.

Valerie Davey: They will pay exactly the same.

Mr. Hopkins: My hon. Friend disagrees, but the fact is that graduates earn more than non-graduates once they have made the sacrifice in those early years. Financing people through that period so that they can attain qualifications and therefore pay higher taxes later in life that meet the cost of their education is a fair deal.

Those students are privileged in the sense that, in general, they will have a better life because they have a degree than someone who does not. Of course, that does not apply in all cases. However, students pay higher taxes and they are vital for our economy. We must have well-qualified people throughout our economy; indeed, we are seriously worried about skill shortages. Recruiting people with the right skills and qualifications is proving difficult. Although unemployment is much lower than when the Conservative party was in power, we are suffering from skill shortages that must tackled.

The Prime Minister was right to suggest that we should increase the number of those who go into higher education to 50 per cent. of the population, because it is good not only for those people but for society and our economy. To achieve that, we must guarantee students financial security while they are in higher education.

Many people say that it is good for students to work while they are studying. That is not always so. In the past, when only the scions of the upper class went to university, they did not have to work. They were dilettantes, who lived the life of Riley while they were at university. Perhaps they would drop in to the odd lecture and talk to the odd tutor, but, by and large, they drifted through university and into one of the well-paid professions. Doubtless some of them drifted into the House.

That was the life of the upper class; we now live in a more democratic, egalitarian age when many more people go into higher education. That is essential for them and our economy. We must find ways of supporting students because they do not have the resources that the rich enjoyed in the past. It is right for the state to support them while they are studying.

We should regard students not as privileged youngsters but people who do a job for themselves and society, which therefore pays them an income while they do that job of studying. If students saw matters in that light, I believe that they would concentrate better on their studies. It is preferable to following the traditions of the dilettante upper class of the 18th century.

Students who have education maintenance allowances in my local sixth form college show greater diligence and a tendency to turn up to classes more often. They believe that their EMA might be taken away if they do not turn up. All the tutors there strongly favour EMAs because they have encouraged students to work harder and to turn up. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to extend that pilot scheme to the rest of the country. It will cost money, but reap dividends. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North said, if we are to increase participation among post-16 students, we must encourage more marginal students to stay on in education.

There are many families with non-traditional backgrounds in my constituency. Some are from ethnic minorities and others are from working class backgrounds with no tradition of going into higher education. Remaining in education beyond the age of 16 was perceived as strange. Indeed, when my wife wanted to become a teacher, her father said, "What do you want to do that for? Get out and get yourself a job, love." She persisted, went to teacher training college and became a school teacher, but it was a struggle because she came from a background that was culturally unused to higher education.

[Mr. Hopkins]

We are overcoming that barrier; more students are staying on, but we remain a long way behind competitor countries. We must make it easier for students from the sort of backgrounds that I have described to go into post-16 education and on to higher education. The 50 per cent. goal will be achieved if we can persuade people to stay on at 16 and undertake pre-university studies.

We are considering a big issue, which is important for our future. That is recognised on the doorstep. In Luton, North, it was the second biggest issue after the health service, about which everybody was worried. I was surprised that education was the second biggest issue because the number of people in Luton, North who go to university is below average. It is a working-class area and fewer people go to university, but the feeling on the doorstep was strong. That applied to the less well off in some of the council estates and to some of the middle-class areas; people who had previously voted Conservative but swung to Labour perhaps because they had been enlightened in middle age. However, they realised that our traditional approach of state funding for public services was vital for a civilised society. They voted for us on that basis in 1997, and they were a bit shaken when part of it seemed to be taken away in the legislation on grants and fees.

I said on the doorstep that I felt strongly that we must change that policy, and I am delighted that the Government are now reviewing it. I look forward to the restoration of maintenance grants, the abolition of fees, and the achievement represented by 50 per cent. of students entering higher education.

3.20 pm

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I pay tribute to the candour and honesty of the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins). I also declare an interest. I have three children at university—who, I hope, are working assiduously even as I speak—and I am very familiar with the telephone requests for extra money and the constant need to reach for the cheque book. My problems, however, are nothing compared with the problems of those on low incomes. Many have testified to that, and the evidence, such as it is, is not contested in any part of the House. We all agree that there is a high drop-out rate, that there is a high cost, and that there is high debt. Those are statistical facts, and statistical facts are not really open to argument.

What I will say, however, and what I will blame on both Conservatives and Labour and their disastrous systems of student finance, is the radical change that has taken place in the whole atmosphere of universities. The relationship between university and student has changed—the line is often "If you cannot pay on time, get out"—as has the relationship between students and all the other people with whom they have to deal. Imperious demands from landlords are part and parcel of student life, as is working in cafes late at night and working at weekends.

The Government's policy is an acknowledged disaster. It would have been welcome if the Minister had said "Yes, there are glaring flaws in the system as it stands. Yes, we have established focus groups and spoken to people on the doorstep, and we have found that this is a very unpopular Labour policy". For that is what it is, as research shows. The Minister, however, pretended that things were otherwise. She said that this was part of good practice. She was not altering things because things were wrong; she was simply embarking on a procedure of good practice.

If that is Government policy, and if good practice means revising each piece of legislation every three years, may I ask what other examples of good practice will be forthcoming? How many other pieces of legislation will be subject to the same treatment? Will every education policy now have a dust-over every three years?

Mr. Andrew Turner: The hon. Gentleman speaks of good practice, implying that there is some kind of bad practice. Is he suggesting that it is wrong for students to work in cafes or bars occasionally in the evenings?

Dr. Pugh: I am not suggesting that it is morally wrong. I am suggesting that it imposes an extra burden on them, which they might not need to bear if they were adequately financed. That is, I think, pretty evident.

Let me be fair to the Minister; I might otherwise be accused of being a little unfair to her. Towards the end of her speech—having delivered the form of words, and said that this was just good practice—she read out a litany of flaws and errors in the current system, to which I listened very carefully. That is something that the Minister can own up to. It is not surprising: Governments make mistakes, and Governments can admit to them. It is also not surprising that there is to be a rethink, which I welcome. As I said, I was grateful for the honesty and candour displayed by the hon. Member for Luton, North. I wish that the Minister would show the same degree of honesty and candour, and I wish that we could agree on a review that would advance the position significantly and produce a better dispensation for students.

Caroline Flint: It has been said that students with low-income parents are worse off than their counterparts. It has always been true that those with better-off parents receive better Christmas presents, and get the backhanders. I spent summers working in a baked-bean factory when I was at university while some of my more affluent fellow students were touring Europe, and I found that hard; but that is life. We must have a fair funding system, but we cannot constantly compensate for inequalities that we face every day. I would like to feel that my experience in the baked-bean factory had stood me in good stead in terms of character building, and understanding how others worked outside the ivory towers of university.

Dr. Pugh: I am not in favour of sending all students off to baked-bean factories. The hon. Lady has identified a fault—a social inequality—and a problem that we have in society. I rather thought, however, that the object of the Labour party was to do something about social inequality.

Mr. Hopkins: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that working in a baked-bean factory through the summer vacation is an admirable thing to do, but having to work nightly in a bar when one should be studying is a very different matter?

Dr. Pugh: I quite agree; the hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head with his usual candour and refreshing insight.

I do not want to talk at length about the Scottish experience, but whatever has been decided in Scotland will not be followed by this Government. They will do anything but that, basically because they did not think of it themselves. Whatever the Government may say about the Scottish experience, there are three hard facts that I do not think anyone here will dispute. Fact No. 1 is that the take-up of students in Scotland is better than it is in England. That is indisputable.

Mr. Chaytor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Pugh: No, I want to make three points, and I will give way after that.

My second point, to which the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) might also want to respond, is that his colleagues in Scotland voted for the proposals. Unless Labour Members are going to argue that their colleagues in Scotland are either particularly dim or weak willed, it must be the case that their colleagues see some serious merit in that system. The third fact about the Scottish system is that it is financed, because it is impossible in Scotland, as in any corporate or Government body, to set an illegal budget.

By all means, let us have the rethink. Let us have the review. At the end of the day, the battle might not be between anyone here in the Chamber but between the Minister and the Treasury. That is where the serious aggravation might begin. However, if we are to have a review, and some serious consideration of how things are going—I think we would all be up for that—it would be helpful in clearing the ground if the Government would say to the universities, to the parents and to the students, "Sorry."

3.26 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): This has been an interesting debate. We have had magic robots and we have had bean factories. What we have not had is the former Conservative Front Bench, which resembled "The Magic Roundabout"; all of its members jumped off at the last election when the Prime Minister said, "It's time for bed."

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): Boing!

Mr. Willis: Thank you for the sound effect.

I am delighted to see that the House has been so consumed by the Liberal Democrats' election manifesto. It is quite rewarding that people have taken it to their hearts, and that the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) actually takes it to bed with him and reads it in such detail that he can memorise so much of it.

The debate affects every Member's constituents, irrespective of which part of the United Kingdom they represent. Those of us who represent English constituencies sense that we have been left out of any real debate about student finance over the past two years. Whatever we might think about what has happened in Scotland, the reality is that the devolved Scottish Parliament grasped a fundamental issue and dealt with it. Whether MSPs dealt with it rightly or wrongly is clearly a matter for them and not for this House.

It was interesting to see Conservative Members display the politics of envy about the Barnett formula. If the Conservatives' new policy is to abolish the Barnett formula, they ought to tell their friends in Scotland, who would find it very difficult to determine their policy in those circumstances.

I thank the Minister for the candid way in which she exposed the real inequities experienced by students from poorer backgrounds when they try to get into our universities. It is refreshing to hear a Minister expose the real problem in detail, and Barking is clearly no different from many other parts of the country, especially areas such as Leeds and parts of the north-east where I worked as a teacher.

What emerged from the debate was the sad fact that, unless we tackle the issue of post-16 youngsters staying on at school or college, we shall have this debate in 10 years' time and nothing will have changed at all. It was therefore incredibly sad when on 13 October the chief executive of the Learning and Skills Council launched an appalling attack on standards in FE colleges on the "Today" programme. He said that 40 per cent. of their work was poor and that 5 per cent. was appalling.

That statement undermined every further education facility and sixth form college in Britain. How can we possibly expect to encourage young people to go into forms of education other than school when the chief executive makes such comments? If nothing else comes out of the debate, I hope the Minister will do all she can to take the chief executive to one side and make it clear to him that he owes every FE college in the country, other than those that have been inspected, an apology. Only five colleges were inspected, and that was the basis on which he made his remarks. I hope that, in her usual candid way, the Minister will respond to that directly in her winding-up speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) made a powerful and convincing case, as did other Members, about the effects of student support arrangements following the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998. There is no doubt that the level of student debt and poverty is beginning seriously to damage not only participation but the fabric of our university system.

The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), in his first Front-Bench speech since he was outed by the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), made a measured and well-researched contribution.

Mr. Chaytor: I think that the word the hon. Gentleman was looking for was ousted, not outed.

Mr. Willis: I should choose my words carefully. I apologise profusely if I got the hon. Member's orientation wrong.

The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire spoiled his contribution by making an unresearched attack on Liberal Democrat policies, especially costings. He may deride the fact that we went into a general election with a costed manifesto, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies examined it and made it clear that every costing stood up to scrutiny. It was disingenuous of him and other Conservative Members to attack the cost of our policies when the Conservatives went into the general election without a costed manifesto, but with a commitment to cut public expenditure by £20 billion. That is the declared objective of the new leader of the Conservative party:

[Mr. Willis]

in time, the Conservatives want to cut public expenditure. There has to be some honesty about the way in which the new Conservative Front Benchers tackle student debt and poverty.

In his passionate defence of further education, as ever, the hon. Member for Bury, North spoke a lot of sense. We will disagree about tuition fees. He has always held that position; we have always held a principled view and will continue to do so.

The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) hit the nail on the head: it is investment that is needed, and the most effective and fairest way to provide it is through a direct tax system.

The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) made an uncharacteristic intervention. She said that those who do not go to university do not benefit from those who do. That is wrong. We all benefit from the skills of people who go to university, irrespective of whether we have had that opportunity ourselves.

Valerie Davey: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman recalling my comment and I would like to clarify what I said. It has to be recognised that those who do not go to university pay tax, to the advantage of those who do. I said not that people at university have all the benefit, but that the contribution to our society of people who are working should be recognised, as the tax they pay benefits those at university.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Member for Luton, North answered that point. First, graduates pay significant additional taxation throughout their lives and, secondly, the whole of society benefits from graduates.

I should also mention the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), who demonstrated a real commitment to resolving the issue. I was interested in the way in which he pursued the Tory party's proposal to raise the threshold immediately. Perhaps the financial ramifications of that proposal should be made clear. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the costings calculated by the House of Commons Library show that a medical graduate leaving university with a debt of £27,000 would have a debt of more than £50,000 after five years. I am sure that was not what the hon. Gentleman had in mind.

The debate has shown that the House is committed to resolving the problems—Liberal Democrats certainly are. That contrasts with the uncharacteristically puerile remark by the Secretary of State to the vice-chancellors on 22 October. She said:

"Universities are not a birthright for the middle classes . . . Richer kids are not brighter than poorer kids."

That is a disingenuous statement. It is not an either/or situation. We are not fighting a class war over whether some kids should go to university and others should not. We want a meritocracy in which everyone, including students from poorer backgrounds, has the chance to go to university.

The facts speak for themselves. The Government, like their predecessors, have failed to attract students from poorer backgrounds to university. The significant difference is that the present Government admit it. Between 1994 and 1999 only 870 additional students from the lower socio-economic group went to university. The fact that we have been unable to break down that barrier is a huge slur on our education system and our society.

In Labour's first two years in office, the number of students from poorer backgrounds declined. I believe that that was a direct response to the 1998 Act and the furore over student finance.

Other factors also affect poorer students, most of whom go to local universities, which inevitably are cheaper. That is wrong: students should be able to choose the course that is right for them at the university that is right for them. They should not always have to consider the local option. UCAS statistics show that students from more affluent backgrounds are prepared to travel an average of 82 miles to university, whereas those from poorer backgrounds travel an average of 42 miles. An analysis of the mosaic database reveals that students from poorer backgrounds tend to apply for low-cost courses—those that do not require a large supplementary income.

Medical students are a special problem because they cannot earn additional income. The point about whether it is good for students to go to work is academic for medical students, because most of them are on their course for 50 weeks a year. They cannot exist at university without huge parental support. The sad fact is that 80 per cent. of all medical students are from the top two socio-economic groups, and virtually none from the poorer groups. That is not right and we need to tackle it.

A recent analysis of the funding of medical students shows that 48 per cent. of those who come from semi-skilled or unskilled backgrounds receive no parental support at all. People cannot exist at medical school without significant extra support. Once the loans have run out, where do they go?

The Minister and the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire laughed at the work done in Scotland and the post-Cubie arrangement. I found that, and the response to the Reece report, rather sad. Not once in the debate did the Minister cite any of the research undertaken in Scotland following Cubie or Pamela Reece's research in Wales. We achieved a coalition with our colleagues in Scotland to do something about student finance. We achieved consensus when the Deputy First Minister, Jim Wallace, and the late Donald Dewar buried the hatchet and reached a compromise. The blind obstinacy of a Government who say that Andrew Cubie's findings and the Reece inquiry have no part to play is staggering.

Now there is to be a review. Interestingly, it was announced on a fringe of the Labour party conference. It was not announced to the House, there is nothing in the Library about it and no hon. Member knows any details. What are its terms? Can any of us become involved? Can we present evidence? Surely we all have a part to play.

We know that the hon. Member for Luton, North is a key player, because he has influenced the review. How long will it take? The papers say that it might conclude in December or January. Will Parliament have a say? Will there be a debate? Will the Education and Skills Committee be asked to undertake an inquiry? Ministers are asked to speak to the Committee but it is not currently undertaking any inquiries. Surely there is an opportunity there.

No doubt when Conor Ryan and Andrew Adonis decide the outcome and report to No. 10, the details will be revealed to the House—sorry, I mean to the "Today"

programme or *The Guardian*, which today informs us that the matter has already been resolved. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor have had a meeting with their political advisers, to which the Minister and the Secretary of State were not invited—and neither were you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and suddenly *The Guardian* is called in and, in order to trump us, all is revealed on the day of the Liberal Democrat debate on student finance.

What is the truth? Is the story in *The Guardian* today absolute nonsense? Is it true that the Secretary of State's plan for a grant and a graduate tax for everybody was her preferred option, but that it has been kicked into touch?

What a way to run a review. It was announced at the Labour party conference, but there has been no debate in the House on a matter of such importance and with such a consensus of view. The policy for the whole country has been decided by a little coterie of friends late at night at No. 10 and then leaked to *The Guardian*. Do the Government ever learn? The Secretary of State told me that it was pointless to speculate about specifics, but *The Guardian* has revealed the whole policy for the next 15 or 20 years.

We will sign up to the principle that students have to pay for part of their stay at university. In fact, in 1995 at our party conference in Nottingham, my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) ensured that it became party policy that students had to make some repayment because they benefit from that education, as do employers and the state. That remains our position. We accept that students should make a significant contribution to maintenance costs. That is what Cubie said, and we do not have a problem with it, but we will not compromise on our principles about tuition fees.

The state invests in its people through the tuition fees. If the state is not prepared to do that, the Government cannot be serious about creating a knowledge economy. We have to make that investment, and that is our bottom line. This debate has revealed a consensus in the House to make progress. We will willingly take part in the Government's review: will they have us?

3.47 pm

Margaret Hodge: With the leave of the House, I wish to respond to the debate.

We have had an interesting debate and some hon. Members have chosen to address some of the real challenges that we face in developing a strategy and policy to meet our ambitious targets for higher education. The debate was initiated by the Opposition—

Alistair Burt: It is not an Opposition debate: it is a Liberal Democrat debate.

Margaret Hodge: They are both the same. Either way, we do not have much to learn from the their contributions today or from their actions outside the House. I remind the House, for example, that the Conservatives slashed the unit funding by 36 per cent., put a cap on student numbers and starved our institutions of the money that they needed to retain their global status.

The Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, do not have a clue. The infinite elasticity of their 1p on tax is the stuff that dreams are made of. For example, they have responded to every plea on higher education. They would abolish fees, restore grants for poor students, and open access to benefits for students in the holidays—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I have read it all in Liberal Democrat manifestos and other documents. They would raise the threshold for repaying loans, put up salaries in higher education institutions, give universities more money for taking working-class children, give more money to universities for every student that they take, solve the equal pay issue in higher education, extend generous student support to part-time students and bring in student support for all students in further education. Then the Liberal Democrats would spend the change from the extra 1p tax by cutting class sizes, recruiting more teachers and spending more on equipment for our schools. Who do they think they are kidding?

I welcome the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) to his post and I look forward to engaging in debates with him. As I understand it, he will consult on subsidies for poor students by the introduction of maintenance grants and on top-up fees to give our universities some money. As I see it, the only outcome of that will be taxing the very rich, the only people who still occasionally support the Conservative party. Given the hon. Gentleman's record at the Child Support Agency, we should not have expected much more from him today.

Alistair Burt: The Minister is trying to draw conclusions that simply are not there. I made no specific reference to any particular partner group. We are having an open consultation with all the parties involved in higher education. That is in total contrast to the closed review that the Minister started, but which now seems to have been completed by the Chancellor and the Prime Minister.

Margaret Hodge: I was simply drawing to the House's attention the spending implications of some of the suggestions that the Conservatives have put on the table.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) asked us not to abandon the principle that those who gain from education contribute towards it. I can give him the assurance that we will not. I also recognise my hon. Friend's support for early-day motion 308, and I recognise the additional financial pressures that exist for students in London. I hope that he recognises that their entitlement to loans is 23 per cent. higher than elsewhere, but we will keep that under review.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) showed more concern for today's students than for our ambition to increase participation to half of all people under 30 in Britain today. The financial burden imposed on today's students by the mortgage-style loans system introduced by the Conservative party in government creates far more difficulties for today's graduates than our proposal, which is based on the ability to repay because it is income-contingent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) is right that we are a listening Government. We are listening to him and to all other hon. Members. I agree that providing support to enable people to participate post-16 is one of the key issues that we must address.

[Margaret Hodge]

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) also referred to post-16 participation. I agree entirely that if we cannot get that right, we will not achieve the ambition that we have set ourselves. Part of our task is to ensure that those students who go through further education—most of the 16 to 19-year-old cohort is in that FE sector—should receive high-quality education. We must work to improve the retention and attainment rates of those students who go through the education system. The attention that we are placing on raising quality and standards in the FE sector—a matter addressed by the chief executive of the Learning and Skills Council—is important. The matter may not have been raised in the most appropriate way, but the issue is important. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me and the Government in what we are trying to do to raise standards.

Only the Government have the credibility, the energy, the commitment and the bottle to tackle the tough and challenging issues that need to be tackled to achieve real change. Getting more people through higher education will not be easy. We have to keep more young people in full-time education beyond school-leaving age. We must raise attainment levels at level 3. We must lift young people's aspirations, especially those from the lower socio-economic groups. We must change attitudes in schools, universities and colleges.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in her speech to the universities on Monday, we want universities to put down roots in schools and colleges so that the presence of someone from higher education in our schools becomes the norm. We want young people's ambitions to be raised so that they are persuaded that university is for people like them.

We must also ensure that the student funding systems are right to support our policies. I should like to make three brief points.

First, we should not get the issue out of proportion. The UCAS figures for this year, far from showing a decline, show a healthy increase in the number of people seeking and securing a place in higher education. The exception, interestingly enough and in contradiction to an earlier claim, is Scotland. That goes for mature students, who belong to the group that many have claimed were the most fearful of debt and most likely to reject university because of the new funding regime.

Secondly, we need to be clear about what is in place already. The tuition fee is means tested. This year, more than half of students will pay no fees at all. There is a range of specifically targeted schemes to support those students most likely to face most financial difficulties. That range includes opportunity bursaries, grants for disabled students, grants to students with dependants and child care grants.

Thirdly, I believe that all hon. Members share and accept the important principle that it is right that those who benefit from the investment in higher education should contribute to the costs of it. The issues that we need to address have to do with the balance between the contributions from graduates, their families and the state, and about how and when repayments occur.

That is why we have established our review. Now is the right time to take stock. We want to look at the concerns that have been expressed about student debt, especially among students from lower-income families. We want to maintain and enhance the standards of excellence in our universities, and we want to make sure that we can reach our target of widening access.

Despite speculation to the contrary, nothing is ruled in, and nothing is ruled out. This is a complex and difficult area, and the debate has shown that we will need to consider it carefully.

I reassure hon. Members that the Government will want to consult widely on the options that we develop, but our ambition is clear. We want to open up opportunity for many more young people. We want them to have the opportunity to widen their horizons by engaging in further and higher learning, and to develop their intellectual skills, imagination, confidence and understanding.

We want young people to be able to enhance the qualifications that they gain so that they can contribute more to the world of work, and to be able to earn more through their adult lives. We want them to have the opportunity to contribute fully to our country's economic, social, cultural and political life. Our agenda is about widening opportunity for individuals, and enhancing the potential for the economy.

Higher education has a vital contribution to make to that agenda. It is our task to deliver, and we will.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 42, Noes 301.

Division No. 43] **[3.58 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
McDonnell, John
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and Tom Brake.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob

Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Hal. 'n)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the approach the Government has taken to higher education since 1997, particularly the extra investment the Government is making in Higher Education, meaning an extra £1.7 billion of publicly planned funding in the six years to 2003–04; further welcomes the Government's commitment to widening participation so that half of under-30 year olds will benefit from the opportunities of higher education by the end of the decade; supports the Government's reforms of student support, introduced in 1998, which have increased the resources available to higher education establishments; agrees with the principle, underlying these reforms, that those who benefit from the considerable advantages that higher education can offer are asked to contribute when they can afford to; recognises that the Government has always been committed to monitor and to review the impact of these reforms; and further welcomes the Secretary of State for Education and Skills' recent announcement of this review.

Social Security

4.11 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3210) dated 21st September 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 26th September, be annulled.

The motion—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Will hon. Members leave the Chamber quickly and quietly? We are beginning an important debate.

Mr. Willetts: The motion was tabled so that the House would have an opportunity to scrutinise the Government's proposals on changes to incapacity benefit and other regulations. Indeed, we tabled it during one of the emergency recalls in order to secure an early debate.

The purpose of the debate is to bring some clarity to the confusion spread during the past four months about the Government's proposals on incapacity and other benefits. It is a sorry tale that has left many disabled people uncertain as to what the Government are proposing by way of changes to the benefit regime that affects so many millions of them.

The story begins with the Queen's Speech on 20 June which announced legislation on the matter, including a welfare reform Bill. A few days later, during parliamentary questions, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions made it clear: he said that

"the Queen's Speech announced a welfare reform Bill that will include measures to ensure that more and more people are invited in for interview, so that they can see what options and choices there are to enable them to get back into work."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 367.]

The proposal was for primary legislation as part of a welfare reform Bill.

In a speech to the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Secretary of State expanded on his proposals. The press, of course, expanded on them even more, but the right hon. Gentleman said

"as an example of that new approach, we propose to make awards of Incapacity Benefit for fixed periods. So that at the end of the award, we can review the claim and offer more . . . support".

That was the position at the beginning of July.

The Secretary of State encountered considerable concern and distress, not least owing to the clumsy briefing to the effect that the proposals were MOT tests for disabled people—hardly a helpful way of discussing welfare reform. The Conservatives support measures to ensure that disability benefits are awarded only to people who are genuinely disabled, but we do not think that is the way to tackle a serious reform.

The issue came up during Prime Minister's questions on 4 July. The Prime Minister said:

"It cannot be right that we have a situation in which people coming on to incapacity benefit will be paid on average about £4,000 a year for, say, 10, 15 or 20 years, with no one ever checking whether they have recovered from their injuries and are able to work."

He went to make a comment that we often hear from Labour Members:

"I think every Member of the House knows that people were transferred on to incapacity benefit to disguise the true levels of unemployment in the 1980s."—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 254-261.]

I want to offer the House a brief history lesson. Incapacity benefit was introduced in 1995 as a reform introduced by the then Secretary of State for Social Security, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley).

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): It was a new name.

Mr. Willetts: No; it was not simply another name for a previous benefit; it was a significant change in the regime.

The number of people on incapacity benefit fell steadily from the introduction of the benefit in 1995 until 1998, since when, under the present Government, the number of people in receipt of incapacity benefit has started to increase. Therefore, under us the number of people on incapacity benefit was falling; under the present Government, the number of people on incapacity benefit is rising. The number of people whose claims were terminated by reason of failing the personal capability assessment was running at approximately 40,000 per quarter. That number is now down to 20,000. Almost half of the decline in measured claimant count unemployment is matched by an increase in the number of people claiming incapacity benefit under the present Government.

I would gladly give the Secretary of State the opportunity to repeat the claim that he always makes: that those statements may be true—of course, they are true—but the explanation is that more and more women have a contributions record that entitles them to incapacity benefit. That is not the whole story. It is true that some of the increase in incapacity benefit claimants is among women, but there are now 24,000 more men claiming incapacity benefit than there were when the number of recipients reached its lowest point. In fact, there is now a steady upward trend in the number of people claiming incapacity benefit and I believe that the Government, instead of making false claims about the history of the benefit, need to explain clearly why, while they are in office, the number of people claiming incapacity benefit is rising.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): I very much hope to catch your eye later in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I want to point out now that no history of incapacity benefit that starts in 1995 can possibly be complete. The total case load of incapacity benefit is far too high, and to a large extent that is because a very large number of people went on to the then invalidity benefit in the 1980s. The problem was that those people were given no help or advice to return to work; the then Tory Government simply dumped them on that benefit to disguise unemployment. If we are going to have a history lesson, let us have a complete history lesson.

Mr. Willetts: It is certainly one effect of the calling in for interviews of people who claim unemployment benefit, and it was undoubtedly an effect when restart interviews were conducted in the mid-1980s, that some people who are classified as unemployed are discovered to have disabilities that mean that they receive disability benefits. I should be interested to hear whether the Secretary of State will deny that that happens today, when some people are claiming jobseeker's allowance or income support on the grounds that they are not in work. Is the right hon. Gentleman willing to deny that, in benefit offices all around the country now, staff are saying, "We have discovered, from the interviews that we have been conducting with you, that you have a disability, so we believe that it is more appropriate that you be on a disability benefit"? Of course that goes on. That is part of the day-to-day business of scrutinising benefits and ensuring that people claim the benefits to which they are rightly entitled. I am asking the Secretary of State to explain why the incapacity benefit case load is now rising, and rising among men as well as women.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): The hon. Gentleman's figures appear to suggest that all the scare stories that he and the Liberal Democrats were putting round in 1999 have come to nothing, but I want to take him back to the Queen's Speech, which he mentioned at the start of his contribution. Is it not the case that the Queen's Speech talked about enhancing the civil rights of disabled people even further, and would that not include the right to work for people who can, the right to benefit and support for people who need it, and the right to high-quality advice, and are not they all embodied in the Secretary of State's proposals?

Mr. Willetts: I entirely agree with all those propositions. It is important that people who are suffering from disability are helped into work whenever that is feasible; I accept that. The question that I hope to come to during my remarks is whether the Government's proposals will be effective in achieving that objective.

While the Prime Minister was on his feet in this Chamber on 4 July, claiming that people were going to be on incapacity benefit for 10, 15 or 20 years without any attempt being made to investigate whether they were genuinely entitled to it—while he was perpetrating nothing short of a myth—the Secretary of State's colleague, Baroness Hollis of Heigham, in the other place at almost exactly the same time, was adopting a different tone, perhaps because, unlike the Prime Minister, she knew the facts. She said

"At the moment the Benefits Agency carries out 1 million personal capability assessments every year. Half of those tests are repeat assessments, the other half are first-time applications. So all new claims for incapacity benefit are now subject to review at some point between the timespan of six months and five years. There is nothing new about checking ongoing claims for incapacity benefit."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 July 2001; Vol. 626, c. 858.]

Indeed, a well-established provision in legislation enables any benefit officer who suspects that someone on incapacity benefit might be capable of work to require that person to have a medical reassessment.

The Minister's predecessor, who is sadly now on the Back Benches, the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley), when discussing medical incapacity testing in Standing Committee D on 15 April 1999, said

"Seventy-three per cent. of those tested were recommended by the doctor for retesting within 18 months. In only 28 per cent. of cases was no change in the medical condition anticipated and no pre-ordained retest time set."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 15 April 1999; c.786.]

[Mr. Willetts]

That is the regime that applies at present. That description from the previous Minister responsible for disability benefits in the then Department of Social Security is an accurate description of the present regime.

What the Prime Minister said in oral questions and the accounts that were spun to justify the Government's measures were not an accurate account of that regime. It is worth hon. Members on both sides of the House being aware of the facts about how the present regime works, as it enables us to scrutinise this measure properly.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): If there is so much concern on the Conservative Benches about this issue, how come only eight of the 169 Conservative Members have turned up today?

Mr. Willetts: The main debate today was introduced by the Liberal Democrat party and we know how boring debates introduced by the minor parties on their Supply days are. The hon. Gentleman will find that Conservative Members never flock here on such days.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): May I remind my hon. Friend that had he and his colleagues not prayed against the measure, we would not have had any debate on it?

Mr. Willetts: That is correct and it is another matter with which I hope to deal.

By 5 July the Secretary of State had announced that the Government would introduce primary legislation and establish fixed time limits for the receipt of incapacity benefit. They justified their policy through seriously misleading claims about the way in which the present regime was operated.

As we all know, there was widespread concern and confusion about what was proposed. Lord Ashley of Stoke was accurate when he pointed out in *The Times* that

"The Government has the power to repeatedly reassess if it wishes, and it undoubtedly uses it. The proposed changes are unnecessary."

One of our criticisms of the Government is that it is not the regulations that have caused problems with securing reliable and prompt medical assessments and reassessments under the present rules for incapacity benefit; the problem has been getting access to medical assessments and reassessments when benefits offices want them to be carried out. The real problem has been with the delivery of those assessments.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that the difficulties with the medical assessments that he mentions are partly caused by the way in which the Government have messed about with the remuneration and administrative arrangements of the medical officers involved, as one of my constituents recently wrote to tell me?

Mr. Willetts: A very powerful Select Committee report on precisely that subject was published during the previous Parliament. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

The Government got themselves into a serious mess, and on 12 July, *The Guardian* reported:

"Government sources privately recognise the presentation of the proposal did not go as well as hoped".

That is a fairly accurate account of the mess that the Government had got themselves into by 12 July. At that point, the climbdown began. First, we learned in a parliamentary answer from the Secretary of State that he had lost his nerve about introducing all these measures as part of primary legislation, which is where we began. Primary legislation would not be used, and he announced that

regulations under the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 would be laid before both Houses in the autumn."—[*Official Report*, 11 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 567W.]

So I should be grateful to the Secretary of State if he could confirm that, contrary to the assertions that were made, this matter will not form part of the welfare reform Bill that we expect to be introduced in the next few weeks? That was the first climbdown.

The regulations that were then tabled include a memorandum that states:

"The regulations will not result in claims being time limited."

So I should be grateful to the Secretary of State if he could also confirm that, contrary to what he told the House during oral questions before the summer recess, claims for incapacity benefit will not be time limited under the regulations.

In answer to an oral question that I asked last week, the Secretary of State said:

"Medical examinations are indeed appropriate and we are not proposing to change the regime in that regard, although the administration of the examinations is being improved."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 911.]

Has the regime for medical examinations under incapacity benefit changed? Hon. Members on both sides of the House and many representatives of disabled people are entitled to an answer to that question, not least because the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions appeared to suggest in a written answer to a question asked by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) that

"in certain circumstances, the new triennial review could lead to an additional medical test."

So there seems to be a difference between what the Secretary of State said during oral questions and the Minister's answer.

There has been confusion about whether the measures would be introduced under primary legislation or in regulations. There has been confusion about whether there will be a fixed period for incapacity benefit claims. There has also been confusion about whether there will be extra medical tests. To add to that confusion, the Government even seem to be confused about why we are debating the confusion.

On 4 October, Conservative Members tabled early-day motion 216, which Liberal Democrat Members also signed, to try to secure a debate on these regulations. We made it clear at the time that that was why we tabled the motion, and I have a copy of it here. We were very surprised therefore to hear the Secretary of State say on the "Today" programme on Monday this week that

"by the middle of last week I discovered that neither the Tories nor the Liberals had asked for a debate so I asked for our Whips to arrange a debate. The first slot I could get is this Thursday. Getting a slot on the Floor of the Commons is difficult at the best of times, but we've got that."

We are holding this debate because we tabled a motion objecting to the regulations and we then pressed for a debate through the usual channels, so the Secretary of State has been consistently wrong and misleading not only about the purpose of the regulations and how they will work, but about why we are debating them today in the House of Commons.

Uncertainty and distress has been caused by the four months of confusion about the regulations, but, as has been said, the crucial, underlying question is whether they will have any practical effect in helping people who are disabled and receive incapacity benefit to find work.

The Government are supposed to be keen on what they call "evidence-based" policy. That is one of new Labour's buzzwords. We have much evidence in many research reports from the Department of Social Security about the impact of the ONE programme and what effect piloting of work-focused interviews has had on benefit claimants.

I shall quote to the Secretary of State the research produced by his own Department, evaluating the impact of ONE. Research report No. 140, published this year, says, for example:

"ONE did not seem to challenge or change the expectations of those jobseekers with previous experience of claiming. They largely perceived the service to be the same 'process' they had experienced before and, in some instances, compared the advice received unfavourably with that offered through the Jobcentre."

The report states as a summary:

"there was no change in the attitudes and/or behaviour of those already in work".

The researchers were not able to detect any change. The summary also states:

"Personal advisers were able to change a few participants' attitudes to work".

That, I suppose, is progress of a sort, although the summary continues:

"These impacts, however, are an exception to the wider experience of those participants who did not feel work was an option."

Labour Members believe that the Government have cracked the problem of helping people on benefits into work by introducing compulsory interviews. I invite those who genuinely believe that to consider the evidence in the Government's evaluations of the piloting of the schemes.

Research report No. 126 found that in areas subject to the piloting of the scheme, where, it is worth pointing out, it has been going on for some time,

"Respondents in the sick or disabled group who had not participated in ONE were more likely to be in work than were participants".

So, before Labour Members tell us that they have cracked the problem of helping disabled people or others into work by introducing compulsory work-focused interviews, they need to explain why they do not believe the Government's evaluations, which the DSS has helpfully produced. As the researchers say,

"This finding is not easy to explain",

but that is their finding.

I shall quote from other research reports, and refer Members who wish to pursue the subject to research reports Nos. 126, 140 and 149.

"Among sick or disabled clients whose background or circumstances might hinder entry to the labour market, there was no evidence that those in the pilot areas were more likely than the controls"—

those who did not have ONE job-focused interviews—

"to be working or looking for work at the second survey interview about 10 months after their claim".

Therefore, the evidence is that the proposal, which after all the confusion and distress the Secretary of State has finally put before the House, is unlikely to have any practical effects on the prospects of people in receipt of benefit, especially disabled people, subsequently entering work.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): It is helpful that the hon. Gentleman has told the House that he is thoroughly confused about the matter. I am sure that, by the end of the debate, it will become clearer to him.

At the base of the issue is a significant difference between the approach of his party when in government, which was to look carefully at people's inabilities and to identify whether people could not do things, and that of the Labour party in government, which is to see what people can do and what measures can be taken to ensure that they are not written off as in the past but given all possible help. In every circumstance, that help may not be enough, but at least it will be given.

Mr. Willetts: We have heard that rhetoric for five years. Are the practical effects, which are outlined in the evaluations of the policies that the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) supported, consistent with that rhetoric? After five years, we are entitled to evidence. It is beginning to appear and it shows that the programmes are not delivering what was promised.

The evaluation of the new deal for lone parents and their prospects of finding work clearly shows that those who did not participate in the compulsory interviews were slightly more likely to get employment than those who were called for interview. There is therefore no point in the hon. Member for Gravesham simply repeating the 1997 rhetoric. The Government can no longer live on that. We want to know what is working, and the evidence shows that the Government's approach is not.

Mr. Pond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Gentleman said that I was confused; I am pleased that he is not. I shall give way again, provided that he explains why we have moved from primary legislation to regulations, whether there will be extra medical tests and fixed claim periods for incapacity benefit, and why the House is debating the matter today. I am confused about those subjects, but I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is not.

Mr. Pond: The hon. Gentleman knows that the majority of lone parents who went to an interview took up one of the options that they were offered. That does not necessarily mean that they entered paid employment; training or child care opportunities might be considered in an interview. However, the interview process increased the opportunities and potential of lone parents to make a better life for themselves and their families. That is a move forward.

Mr. Willetts: We are getting into more detail than necessary at the moment.

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): The substance.

Mr. Willetts: I shall tell the Minister exactly what the research shows. In the pilot areas for the new deal,

[Mr. Willetts]

a slightly higher rate of lone parents left income support than in those where it was not piloted. The number of lone parents going into work through the new deal was slightly lower. More lone parents left income support because of "repartnering". The only practical effect of the new deal appears to be that some lone parents admit that they are cohabiting when they get the letter that calls them for interview. I should be happy to debate that any time with the hon. Member for Gravesham. If he does not accept my comments, I should like to know why he disagrees with research report No. 108.

The Government have caused distress and confusion to disabled people. They have changed their policy several times in the past four months and been unable to offer any significant evidence to support it. They have also been unable to show evidence that the interviews, which are supposed to have such a transforming effect on the prospects of disabled people, will make any difference.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): The hon. Gentleman has made some telling points, but he has left me uncertain about the position of the Conservative party. Does he believe that the measures are too draconian or not draconian enough?

Mr. Willetts: Our party's position is simple: we support effective measures to help people on incapacity benefit and others into work. We do not know what exactly the Government propose and whether their measures will have any effect. That is the reason for the debate. We look forward to the Secretary of State's explanation of the confusion that he has caused in the past four months.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that the debate must finish at 5.41 pm. Several are trying to catch my eye and the length of the speeches will determine how many hon. Members can contribute.

4.39 pm

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I remember the 1980s, when the then Employment Service in every town and city had a monthly target for the number of people who had to be removed from the register—not necessarily into work—and the number against whom a sanction had to be applied. A regime of fear operated in the Employment Service, which had no interest in assisting anybody to get work. I hope that we saw the back of those days long ago.

There is a great deal of misinformation, and disinformation, about exactly what the proposals mean. Personally, I am delighted that the Employment Service now seeks to be interventionist and to help people return to work. Some may recall that back in the 1970s everyone who claimed unemployment benefit had to go for an interview, and it was a work-focused interview. It may not have been called that, but that is what it was. In the 1980s, the Conservatives abandoned the system and abandoned unemployed people.

In principle, I see nothing wrong with new claimants having to go for interviews, given the safeguards contained in regulation 5. However, perhaps the Secretary of State will tell us in what circumstances an interview would not be deemed "appropriate"—that, I think, is a worry for all of us.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I—along with others, for all I know—am especially concerned about the severely disabled, as I said in a question to the Prime Minister a few months ago. I note that when there are good reasons, such as a claimant's state of health, interviews can be deferred. The severely disabled, as new claimants, should not be put in such a situation as they are clearly in no position to work. I—and, I am sure, my hon. Friend—would not want any further anxiety to be imposed on them.

Mr. Rooney: That is a worthy concern, but, according to the terms of incapacity benefit, claimants can be excused from further medical examination for three, five or 10 years, or for life, if it is obvious that their condition will not improve. I assume that the intention is to extend exemption from interview to those who are already exempt from medical examination.

We need to reflect on the measures taken over the past four years and the impact that they have had. Will the regulations prove to be an extension of those measures, or will they begin to undo them? Between April 1997 and September 2001, my area has experienced an 80 per cent. reduction in youth unemployment and a 72 per cent. reduction in adult long-term unemployment. That has not happened by accident; the new deal has played a part. The new deal, however, is becoming an old deal. It is becoming tired.

There is now a hard core of young people with multiple problems who do not fit easily into any of the slots, and the new deal is not flexible enough to cope with them. For instance, about 50 per cent. of unemployed people under 24 in the Bradford travel-to-work area are referred to the environmental taskforce or voluntary sector options, 90 per cent. of them on a mandatory basis. The vast majority are experiencing that for the second, third or fourth time. All that the new deal is doing is recycling people. If we are to handle them properly, we must think again about the principles of the new deal and the rigid inflexibility that it incorporates.

I fear that claimants will lack confidence in the new work-focused interviews. I fear that the advisers will not be sufficiently well trained, and will not be supported by enough flexibility in the system, to deliver packages demonstrating that individuals rather than targets count. It may not have been intended, but there is now an incredible degree of rigidity and prescription in the Employment Service's application of the new deal. It has escaped from its original admirable ambitions and application. During the first two or three years, it was fantastic and the flexibility was there, but it seems to have lost it. We need to be careful that this measure does not go down that same road. The focus has to be the individual, not departmental programmes, statistics or targets.

There is another problem, which seems to operate across all civil service matters and all programmes, whichever Government are in power. Over time, there develops an obsession with outputs rather than outcomes. If we are serious about this matter, we need to start sending messages down the line that it is outcomes that matter, rather than being able to put a tick in the correct box.

If this measure is to work, we need the right training for the advisers, and confidence among claimants that the system will help them, rather than beat them. We also need to emphasise that this is a matter of choice, not coercion. Approximately 25,000 people a year with severe disabilities have, with the right help and support, been moved into mainstream employment through sheltered employment projects such as Remploy. That is not cheap, but it shows that, with the right programme, the right support and the right attitude towards discriminatory employers, the opportunities are there for those who want them. This scheme must work on the same basis. Those who are readily employable and who want to work will easily be able to walk away from the benefit system and get employment. The challenge will be for those difficult cases with a multiplicity of problems.

I would like to ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a technical question, because I cannot see the answer in the regulations. At the moment, anybody on statutory sick pay is automatically transferred to incapacity benefit after 196 days. It is not clear from the regulations—that provision does not seem to have been repealed—whether that will still apply or whether such a change would be conditional on an interview. I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend could clarify that.

In principle, I support what the Government are doing, but the mechanics of the proposals need to be worked out very carefully.

4.47 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): It will be on the record of the House that I expressed concern about these regulations when the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill was first debated in May 1999. I used the opportunity of an exchange during oral questions to the Leader of the House on 11 May to pursue the subject. The Secretary of State will recall that, during the most recent oral questions, I also pursued the matter of the therapeutic earnings rules, when I asked what part they would play in what would be offered to people with disabilities.

My particular concern is the one that I had originally, and it has also been picked up by the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney). It is the matter of people with a severe disability. I want to focus on people with learning disabilities and on-going mental health problems. I shall not rehearse the arguments that I made before on the subject. I simply say to the Secretary of State that the arrival, out of the blue, of a request to attend a compulsory interview on a particular day is a major problem for many people with a severe learning disability or mental health problem. I can think of many people with that type of disability who would simply bin the letter in a panic.

The Secretary of State has said that there is to be recognition of people with on-going severe disabilities and that they will be protected. Will he give a little more detail of exactly how those cases will be analysed? I accept that this regulation relates to new claimants, but some new claimants will have severe, lifelong disabilities. I am all in favour of trying to access appropriate employment for people with a range of disabilities, including some of those with severe mental health problems and some of those with learning disabilities.

We hear a lot about portals and gateways. If those people are to be required to go for an interview and are told that if they do not attend they will lose key benefits, it is essential that, whatever portal or gateway they are encouraged to go through, appropriate and well-informed sources of support are in place to help them to access that employment. It would be criminal to raise expectations and to put them through what could be for them the traumatic experience of the interview without being able to guarantee that support will be there on the other side of the gateway or portal.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): The hon. Lady raises an important point regarding mental health and various other conditions. The key aspect is the training of the staff involved, their ability to respond to the particular needs of people suffering from those conditions, and their ability to assess reactions to the demand for an interview and the behaviour at the interview itself, which could become confrontational unless training is given.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman is right. I know that he takes a particular interest in these issues and speaks with great knowledge on the subject. I hope that the Secretary of State will have heard what he said.

What worries me is that in the regulations there is a priority list of benefits that will be lost if a person fails to attend the interview. At the top is income support. The Secretary of State will know that people with a severe disability may qualify for the severe disability premium of income support. The amount of money that they receive may qualify them for certain levels of housing benefit. They may have a package of support from, say, social services, to which they make a contribution. That contribution will be based on the level of income support that their disability attracts. Suddenly to remove or to reduce it because they did not attend an interview could cause severe financial problems. They could get into debt. It could cause huge problems in terms of their well-being and state of mind.

I want to know from the Secretary of State how he will deal with severe disability while at the same time offering equal opportunity. If what was being put before the House was an enhanced opportunity for people, particularly those with learning disabilities or on-going mental health problems, to access employment or a phased way into paid employment that was not just a make-work scheme but real paid employment, I could appreciate that. What I cannot appreciate is that that group of people will be told, "This is compulsory and if you do not attend the interview you will lose benefit."

I think that the Government have gone wrong. It is a new rule that is to apply only to new claimants. The very language of the debate and what is written in the regulations seems to imply that just about everyone claiming benefits who has a disability once held down a job and for physical disability reasons no longer does so.

We know the prevalence of back injury; it is common. People start out in a working life. Their health may deteriorate physically or they may suffer a back injury or some strain injury at work that means they are no longer able to do the job they have always done. They may then go on incapacity benefit. To try to get those people into some other form of work is wholly laudable.

If that is what the Government are trying to do, they will have my total support, but there is an element of, "Come for the interview on the day we say, regardless of

[Mrs. Browning]

your level of disability." [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I wait to be reassured. It is now three years down the track and I am still not reassured. the disability organisations are not reassured and Lord Ashley of Stoke is not reassured. We are waiting for that reassurance. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down."] I will in a minute. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may find it amusing, but I have received correspondence from people with disabilities who may be affected by the legislation. They do not find it amusing at all. They find it not only hurtful and confusing, but rather frightening.

David Winnick: I know that the hon. Lady is being baited by my hon. Friends. Party politics comes into these matters and I am the last one to criticise that. However, she can take this reassurance if it is worth anything to her: today she has said hardly a single word with which I disagree.

Mrs. Browning: I am very grateful. The hon. Gentleman indicated in an intervention earlier that he is knowledgeable on this subject. I am sure that he is concerned, as many of us are, about our constituents who will receive such a letter. I should like the Secretary of State to provide more details about what will happen to people who may not turn up to the interview because they cannot manage official correspondence or because their state of mind is such that they are unable to deal with the letter. We cannot assume that all such people have very convenient social workers whom they can phone up and ask, "What shall I do about this letter?"

We are dealing with a draconian rule that failure to attend the interview will result in a loss of benefit and with regulations that catch-all do not apply only to people who have a disability that has prevented them from working for some time and want to get back into work, but to people on the disability register who have lifelong disabilities that they were born with. The provision makes no differentiation between those people and someone who may have a back injury.

Mr. Levitt *rose—*

Mrs. Browning: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman. I let him intervene on me in the debate in 1999 and I hope that this time he will make a more sensible intervention than he did then.

Mr. Levitt: Fond memories, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The points that the hon. Lady raises would be right if they had not been answered during the debates in 1999. I remember raising the same issues in Committee and I was told by Ministers that it would be possible for advisers to visit the homes of people who could not get out and that it would be possible for communications support to be provided—indeed, it would be essential. There will be a flexible, personalised, tailored process so that people get the appropriate help in the appropriate way. The hon. Lady should not forget that 1 million disabled people would like to work.

Mrs. Browning: I am not forgetting that, but for some people about whom I am concerned a stranger visiting them at home would be a major trauma. I quite appreciate that if someone has a physical incapacity that means that it is difficult for them to attend an interview, the interviewer may decide that it would be better to offer them an interview at home. However, people with certain disabilities have communication problems that could be critical in an interview. They do not always have support workers to attend the interview with them.

Reference has been made to training and the level of expertise offered by interviewers and their support workers. I should like to think that it was there, but I am afraid that it is not. We do not see it in any other aspect of the lives of people with those disabilities, so it seems strange that it is suddenly on offer when they have to attend a statutory interview.

Mr. Rooney: The hon. Lady is in danger of severely over-egging the pudding. She should remember that we are discussing people who have made contact with the service in order to make a claim, so she should be careful about using the communication argument.

Mrs. Browning: Regardless of how those people contacted the service in the first place, some quite intelligent people are affected by communications disorders. They cannot pick up the phone and make contact—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members are shaking their heads. Their ignorance on this subject is palpable. Ignorance is bliss. I hope that the Secretary of State will be wise when he responds to the debate.

The problem, as we can see from previous debates, is that the profile of a person with a disability is predominantly of someone with a physical disability and ignores those with multiple disabilities or severe learning disabilities. It certainly does not encompass someone with schizophrenia, living in the community and drawing benefits, who will almost certainly receive such a letter. It is too much of a catch-all provision.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said, the Government's agenda is not about addressing the needs of people with disabilities but about using the benefits system to gerrymander some figures to make it look as though they are fulfilling some long-lost election pledge to deal with benefit fraud. There are very few people who genuinely have a disability who seek to defraud the Exchequer.

5.1 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): My point links to the one made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney). One of the real achievements of the party that is now in opposition was to change the debate about unemployment. It managed to focus the public mind on the fact that a considerable number of people were unemployed because they wanted to be, rather than because no jobs were available. We have lived through a period of about nine years during which the number of jobs in the community has continued to rise. It may be that we are now in a period during which, in the country as a whole, the number of people in work will begin to fall.

When I was in opposition, I supported the policy of linking claimants to the labour market—it was called supply side reform—and I continue to do so now that we are in government, but we are beginning to enter a different period. I recently received a parliamentary answer showing that in 266 of our constituencies the

employment rate is now lower than when we were first elected in 1997. In other words, while there will of course be some jobs, even in Birkenhead, it is becoming more difficult for claimants to find work, even if they want to. That will be generally true of the country as a whole, but particularly true of areas where there are already job scarcities.

As we support joined-up government, the Secretary of State will have no problem with my plea to him, which is to tell the Chancellor that, while Labour Members support those moves that continue to develop the services that we provide for people who are seeking work, it is getting even more difficult to find work in some of our constituencies, quite simply because there is a shortage of jobs.

Of course we support the development of the supply side policies to help people into work, but I hope that it will not be long before the Government begin to think of measures that they can introduce to encourage reflation at a local level, so that those of us who represent seats where the employment rate is lower than when our Government were first elected—that is, about a third of hon. Members—will see that such policies go hand in hand with policies to try to increase the number of jobs in areas with severe job shortages.

5.4 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): In order to try to decide what the regulations are designed to achieve, it is worth considering the circumstances in which they were brought into the public view. On the day when the Secretary of State made his speech to the think tank about the regulations, catching the disability organisations on the hop, the newspapers, before he spoke, were running headlines about MOT tests for the disabled.

Ministers shook their heads when the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) raised the issue, but when we read on the day of a Minister giving a speech, that

"Details will be disclosed by Alistair Darling . . . Mr. Darling also hinted",

I suspect that there has been some communication between the newspapers and the Department. The same phrase, "MOT for the disabled", appeared in the *Evening Standard* one day and in *The Times* the next day, and although that phrase was not in the Minister's speech, it makes me wonder what role the briefers had to play.

Mr. Darling: I regard the phrase "MOT for the disabled" as deeply offensive in that context. If the hon. Gentleman reads the article, he will see that it is not attributed to me, but it is directly attributed to someone else. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would tell the House who said it, because that person should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Webb: If the Secretary of State's spinners, when they leak speeches to the newspapers, produce such headlines, he should have better people spinning for him.

Mr. Darling: I am not going to let the hon. Gentleman get away with that. As he is entitled to do, he has referred to a newspaper article. Will he now please tell us who made that remark, because it is attributed to someone by *The Times*. He has the article and, for the sake of completeness, I hope that he will tell us who made that offensive remark.

Mr. Webb: The article says that Joe Korner of the Royal National Institute for the Blind was worried that the Secretary of State was proposing MOT checks for the disabled. All the subsequent press coverage—and the Government have some influence on what is written about their policies—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Perhaps the Government have no influence on what is written and I have misunderstood. The coverage of what the Secretary of State had put in *The Times* before his speech led to grave concern among disabled people. The Secretary of State may claim innocence of that, but that was the result. Disabled people opened their newspapers in the morning to read the coverage that arose from the Secretary of State's briefing about the speech.

The next day, the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Walsall, North (David Winnick) challenged the Prime Minister at Question Time. Extraordinarily, the Prime Minister had believed the spin from the Department for Work and Pensions. As the hon. Member for Havant said, the Prime Minister said that people could not be left for 10, 15 or 20 years on benefits, but the fact is that the situation is extremely atypical except for the most severely disabled people. The Prime Minister thought that the regulations had something to do with getting people who were not really disabled off benefit. They are nothing of the sort.

The Secretary of State must take responsibility for the way in which he briefs the press when he launches an initiative. The Government are proud of the way in which they manage the media, but if that management disturbs genuinely disabled people, the Secretary of State should examine his conscience on the issue.

On which points do we agree with the Government? When it comes to Liberal Democrat criticism of his policy, the Secretary of State is fond of setting up straw men and then knocking them down, so I shall make our position clear. We support efforts to help disabled people who want and are able to work to get back to work.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): So do we.

Mr. Webb: So that is the Conservative party's position as well. However, should not the Government be doing more to make it easier for disabled people to get back to work allowing people to combine part-time work with part-time benefit?

Mr. Darling: Tax credits.

Mr. Webb: Those are received by a handful of people compared with the 1 million whom we are told want work. Four years ago, the Government said that 1 million disabled people want to work but are not doing so. Today, we heard the same figure. What have the Government been doing? They have achieved nothing in four years.

The key issue—which was properly raised by the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney)—is how the compulsory issues will affect disabled people. More than a quarter of the people receiving incapacity benefit have mental health or behavioural problems, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said. What effect will the regulations have on them?

[Mr. Webb]

On 15 October, I asked the Secretary of State to supply me with the guidance notes that he will issue to his officials to administer the scheme. Those guidance notes still have not been forthcoming.

Mr. Darling: They should be.

Mr. Webb: The Secretary of State says that they should be, but I asked the Library this morning. At that time, the staff said that they had received nothing. Later, they rang to say that they had received the two-page memorandum, but they had not had the jobcentre guidance for officials. So I had to get it from somewhere else. Tabling a question in the House of Commons and giving it ten days is obviously a waste of time; I had to get a leaked copy from somewhere else. That is appalling.

I was staggered when I read the guidance, which has not been in the public domain until this week. There is a section on people with mental health problems, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton said. Paragraph 58 deals with the threat of suicide, and says that

"if information is received by phone, letter or in person, that a person in distress plans to commit suicide the basic rule to remember is that, they might well do so. It is therefore important to treat such information seriously."

That is the guidance for those who will be forcing people with mental health problems to come in for interviews on pain of loss of benefit. The guidance says:

"Staff have a responsibility to process benefit claims quickly and accurately and to be aware of the potential risks to the customer when legitimately withdrawing or sanctioning benefit from a person known to have a mental health problem."

Why has not any of this been laid before the House for us to see? The Government are telling their own officials that, potentially, they will have real problems when they deal with people with mental health problems. *[Interruption.]* I will not repeat what was said from a sedentary position; it would be unparliamentary. It is clear that people with mental health problems will have concerns about this matter. What will the Government do for them?

What about severely disabled people? A number of hon. Members are concerned about who will be allowed what they call "waivers" at the interviews. The astonishing thing is that we have referred to the primary legislation—the Act that allowed the regulations to be introduced—but it did not say who would be exempted. We have looked at the regulations, which do not say who will be exempted.

The memorandum that came to the Library this morning says that, for example, people with a terminal illness, people who have been recently bereaved or people about to start a job should be exempted. But who else? We do not know and we have no way of controlling it, because it is not in the regulations. It is down to the guidance; the guidance that was not laid before the House and which is not subject to parliamentary scrutiny. It is down to the discretion of individual decision makers.

The Government say that they are concerned about the rights of disabled people. Why do not they have these rights in the regulations? Why is it down to the individual discretion of the decision maker? What protection do those involved have? Do they know that the interviews can be waived at all? Will anyone tell them? If they fell in a definite category because of a particular condition, they would have some security. However, they have no security under the proposals. The hon. Member for Havant said that the research evidence is clear that these schemes do not actually work. He referred to research report No. 149, but did not read out the title.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): The hon. Gentleman seems to be relying very much—remarkably so—on the arguments of the hon. Member for Havant. What about the views of the organisations of and for people with disabilities? So far, he has mentioned the RNIB. I have its briefing, which is excellent. Nowhere in it does the RNIB support the view that the regulations should be annulled. Does he have any evidence that any other organisation of that kind supports the same view? I have not found any.

Mr. Webb: The RNIB briefing says that

"the helping hand philosophy

—the Government's defence of what they are doing—

doesn't exactly tally with the compulsory, punitive nature of the provisions."

It goes on to say that the regulations will mean that

"blind people face a new hurdle to getting their full benefit entitlement."

The RNIB goes on to talk about people who become blind and lose their job, saying that an interview just after losing work because of the onset of blindness

"may not do them any good, but it could very well cause them additional stress and anxiety."

I agree that it does not say at the end of the briefing, "Therefore annul" but it does not sound to me like a ringing endorsement.

The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) is quite right to mention what disabled people's organisations are saying. Leonard Cheshire says that it is

"concerned that the fear of lost benefit as a direct consequence of not turning up to an interview may lead disabled people to giving up altogether."

SCOPE says that

"compulsory interviews will heighten the fears of disabled people."

A number of organisations are concerned about the regulations—to varying extents, I accept—and we should listen to what they say.

The research evidence is about the medium-term effect of the pilot schemes. It gives the schemes time to work, but the key word in the title is "voluntary." This is a departmental report on voluntary schemes to get people to go to interviews. It found that people who turn up to voluntary schemes—and such people are presumably well motivated—are no more likely to get a job. If volunteers are not more likely to get a job, what about conscripts? There is no evidence that the interviews work. In fact, there is clear evidence that disabled people—and especially newly disabled people—feel threatened by them.

I tabled a question to the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), about the effects of the interviews. This matter returns to the point raised by the hon. Member for Bradford, North. The Minister told me that, although the

work-focused interview would not normally have any effect on a subsequent medical test, there could be circumstances in which the person who conducts the work-focused interview will suggest that there should be another medical test.

What expertise does the person talking about jobs have about disability and people's ability to work? Given that the work-related interview will probably be triggered by a person failing a medical test in the first place, what expertise does the person who conducts the interview have that will enable him to decide that that interviewee is not really ill and that there should be another test?

Clearly, the regulations will be passed by the House, even though we will oppose them. Will the Secretary of State tell us, on the record, which severely disabled people will be excluded from the forced interviews? Secondly, will he confirm that the people conducting the interviews will have proper disability training so that they can work with people who are deaf or blind or who have other disabilities? Thirdly, will he confirm that targets will not be set for the numbers of people taken off incapacity benefit?

The Government have failed to lay before Parliament the proper information about the regulations. They have frightened disabled people. That amounts to harassment and should be opposed.

5.17 pm

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I should like to associate myself with the concerns that have been raised by other hon. Members.

When the matter first arose on 3 July, I was telephoned by a journalist who informed me that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had briefed the media about his speech to the Institute for Public Policy Research the next day. I was told that my right hon. Friend had told journalists that all recipients of incapacity benefit—apart from severely disabled people who had no prospect of recovery—would be subject to repeat medical tests every three years. It is correct to say that I do not think that anyone suggested that my right hon. Friend referred to MOT tests for disabled people. I am pleased to be able to make that clear.

That speech would probably have received little attention had it not been for that press briefing, which was clearly designed for a purpose. Subsequently, we heard about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's now notorious remarks, in which he spoke about people languishing on benefits. That seemed to be nothing more than an attempt to create the impression that disabled people get generous benefits that they do not deserve.

I presume that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister must have been briefed before his performance in the House that day, but clearly he was not well briefed. Perhaps it would be too much to expect him to grasp all the detail, or perhaps he was not aware that during the passage of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 the Minister with responsibility for disability benefits had explained that the doctors performing the all-work tests on behalf of the Benefits Agency are given five options with regard to specifying intervals between subsequent tests. They can specify three months, six months, 12 months or 18 months, or they can opt for "no significant change anticipated".

More than 50 per cent. of those who are tested are recommended for retest in 12 months or less. In only 28 per cent. of cases was no preordained retest time set. Subsequently, the Government acquired powers to carry out tests even when there was no obvious change in a claimant's condition. They also introduced the personal capability assessment, a stringent medical test that takes into account what work a person can do.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that fraud in claiming incapacity benefit, which is worth a meagre £69 a week at the long-term rate, is virtually non-existent. Only three cases—0.5 per cent.—were found from a sample of 1,400, whereas official errors were four times as high.

In our last manifesto, we claimed that the number of people receiving incapacity benefit had fallen by 11 per cent. since 1997. Since then, the Government have backtracked somewhat on the initial proposal mooted by the Secretary of State. It became known that the new arrangements would apply only to new claimants—at least in the first instance. We know from the regulations that the proposals are for work-focused interviews, as laid down in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act, which are to take place at least every three years, and people can still be referred for another personal capability assessment.

It is difficult to find out what assessment the Government have made of the impact on the Benefits Agency medical service of conducting additional personal capability assessments. There are delays of between 90 and 170 days in carrying out the tests, and the system produces many wrong decisions. Many right hon. and hon. Members are concerned about the system's inadequacy and, indeed, cruelty.

All hon. Members share the aim of giving people with disabilities more opportunities to participate fully in society, including, if they are able to work, the opportunity to do so. No doubt my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will say that many disabled people say that they would like to work and many think that they could, given the proper assistance. The question is whether compulsion will assist in the process.

Would a disabled person who was called to a compulsory interview about his capabilities and opportunities for work approach it positively? After all, he might not be entirely convinced that out there in the wide world, in the labour market, the Government have succeeded in overcoming the disadvantage and stigma attached to disabled people, particularly those with mental health difficulties. Would he approach the interview positively, given his fears that he might lose benefit and that he might be referred back for yet another harrowing personal capability assessment?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) referred in an intervention to the RNIB briefing. I cannot speak for his interpretation of the briefing, but mine is that although it is very much against the regulations it accepts that the Government are determined to push them through. Indeed, they started to do so a couple of days before we were able to debate the measures in the House.

If my right hon. Friend is determined to push the measures through, perhaps he could set up an experiment to gauge their effectiveness. The pathfinder areas could be divided into two groups. In one group, the measures

[Lynne Jones]

could proceed as planned; in the other, instead of making attendance compulsory, the measures could be promoted among disabled people, using their networks. That would comprise the positive and helpful support for disabled people that we want to see.

My experience from speaking to people who have been on new deal programmes before is that they value the assistance given. That is especially true of lone parents. Many of them opted into the system voluntarily because they had heard good things about it from their friends. That is a much better approach to achieving our aim, which I entirely share, of assisting more disabled people into work.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will seriously consider that as a possibility, and that in the light of the outcome of this experience—I hope that he will give it sufficient time to provide adequate evidence—he will not extend the provision further unless there is evidence that it works.

5.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): I apologise to those of my hon. Friends who had hoped to speak in the debate, but it is a short debate and if I do not speak now I might not be able to answer some of the points that have been put.

It is interesting that in neither of the speeches by the principal Opposition speakers did we hear one shred of policy for dealing with a problem that successive Governments have had to confront. I understand the difficulties that the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has in opposing what is before the House, because I have just reminded myself what the Conservative spokesman said about the single gateway to the benefit system and work-focused interviews when we debated the primary legislation in 1999:

"we do not have a problem with the idea of the single gateway . . . There is great logic in directly connecting a claimant's interview process and eventual job achievement with the claiming of benefit."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 1999; Vol. 331, c. 674.]

Who said that? It was the present Leader of the Opposition, so I can see the difficulty for the hon. Member for Havant

It might be helpful if I set out what the regulations do. They provide that everyone of working age who makes a new or repeat claim to benefit at a Jobcentre Plus office should take part in a work-focused interview as a condition of receiving benefit. Jobcentre Plus offices are replacing the Employment Service and Benefits Agency offices; the first 49 opened for business on Monday, and that number will be extended throughout the country, starting from next year.

Yes, this is a new approach. For the first time there is a single gateway to the benefit system, and we want to make sure that everyone of working age has the opportunity to find out what help there is to help them to work, if they can work. At the same time, that gives us the opportunity to get more help to people who cannot work.

We are making the changes because we want to ensure that the help and advice previously available only to people getting jobseeker's allowance are now available to other people of working age, too. During this short debate we have discussed the position of lone parents and people with a disability. In the past the problem was that we did not do nearly enough to ensure that those people got the sort of help that they needed.

We have heard about the fact that the Disability Rights Commission referred to the labour force survey that shows that there are about 1 million people with a disability who are not in work, but would like to work. If anyone in the House asked us today what we do to ensure that we help those 1 million people, the answer would be that we do not do enough. That is because until now we have never sat down with people, addressed the problems that they faced, and helped people with a disability get back into work.

I understand some of the difficulties that Members have raised about the availability of jobs, and the fact that we are dealing with people who may have a range of conditions, not just one particular condition. I understand the difficulties, but I say to my hon. Friends and the rest of the House that the Government are prepared to do everything we can to try to help people who for years have been excluded, and have been denied the sort of help that they ought to have had throughout those years.

That is what the regulations are about—providing help and support. However, that is possible only if we can see people in the first place and tell them what is on offer.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The trouble is that in constituencies such as mine, where the pits and the textile industries have closed—some during the past four or five years—the number of people who are really unemployed, if we count them all, has hardly shifted since 1997. The problem in those areas—the Labour party has identified at least 25 of them—and it is reflected in some of the voting patterns, is that we badly need employment. I made a proposal for about 9,000 jobs on a pit site in Derbyshire. I have been trying to get that show on the road for four years. People say to me that the Government should be finding them work. After meeting those interviewers, in their sharp suits and Italian shoes, and going through the exercise, a lot of people are going to say, "Where are the jobs?" The Government can try as hard as they like in some areas, and it may come to fruition. I do not like the culture that surrounds the proposals but, that notwithstanding, it will be almost impossible to make them work in areas such as mine. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) put his finger on the point: when unemployment figures, sadly, start to increase generally—I hope that does not happen—the position will get worse.

Mr. Darling: I fully accept the points made by my hon. Friend and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field): there are real difficulties in some constituencies in some parts of the country, but that does not mean that we should not try to do everything we can to help those people to get into work. For example, there are constituencies in London, such as Tottenham and in Hackney, where unemployment remains extremely high, yet not far away there are employers with acute skill shortages.

Mr. Skinner *indicated assent.*

Mr. Darling: I am glad that my hon. Friend agrees.

The whole thrust of the Government's policy is to ensure that mechanisms are in place to enable us to match people with those jobs. It is difficult in some parts of the country, but it is important that we try.

Mr. Frank Field: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Darling: I should like to make some progress—*[Interruption.]* If I have time, I shall get back to my right hon. Friend. With due respect, he spoke earlier and I want to deal with some of the points that were raised during the debate.

The difference between us and the previous Conservative Government is that through measures such as the new deals and the single gateway we are doing far more to meet people and to give them the help and advice they need to get them into work. That is why youth unemployment has come down by 75 per cent. That is why we have got 95,000 lone parents into work. Even in its pilot form, the new deal for disabled people got 40 per cent. of people into work. Most of those people would not be in work had we not been able to offer them the help and support that we are giving them.

Many Opposition Members asked why we introduced the proposals. The reason is that experience—in particular, through the new deals—has shown that unless we can sit down with people and tell them about the help and support that are available, far too many of them do not know what is on offer. For example, when we set up the new deal for lone parents, we found that when people attended an interview and found out what was available about 89 per cent. joined the new deal. The problem was that the vast majority of people did not go for an interview so they did not know about tax credits, the benefit run-ons for lone parents or the working families tax credit. Unless we can get people to attend an interview so that we can tell them what is on offer, including the help available for those who cannot work, a situation that is intolerable to most of my right hon. and hon. Friends, whereby a whole generation was written off for year after year after year under the previous Government and given no help, will continue.

I shall address directly some of the concerns that were expressed in this short debate. The first point is that we must treat individuals as individuals. That is where I have some difficulty with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). She had a good point to make but she spoilt it by over-egging her argument—as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) pointed out. I repeat a point that I have made time and again and which is also clear from the guidance and the memorandum that we placed in the Library: we must treat people sensitively. We must avoid a severely disabled person who has no prospect of working and who would gain no benefit from work being alarmed unnecessarily. The hon. Lady must accept that to treat everybody who receives incapacity benefit—or, indeed, everyone who might be affected by the regulations—as though they were completely unable to deal with an interview is wholly unreasonable. I repeat—

Mrs. Browning *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment.

The regulations and guidance issued to our staff make it absolutely clear that, first, there is power to waive or defer interviews and, secondly, contrary to what the hon. Lady said, we will not remove benefit from someone simply because they do not turn up. There are provisions to ensure that we act reasonably at all times. After all, decisions of our staff are subject to appeal, so I do not accept the rather over-argued case that the hon. Lady advanced. She also asked the perfectly good question whether we would treat people sensitively and ensure that our staff were trained; I readily assent to that.

Mrs. Browning: I did differentiate between certain hypothetical situations. Will the Secretary of State confirm one point? On 23 October, *The Independent* printed the draft guidelines for officers deciding waivers and deferrals, which provided that deferrals should be used "infrequently" and waivers "very rarely". How does the right hon. Gentleman square those words with the rather sympathetic approach that he is now explaining to the House?

Mr. Darling: I will tell the hon. Lady how I do that. We want to ensure, wherever possible, that everyone of working age, including people on incapacity benefit, is seen, so that we may offer them the appropriate help and support. If we decided at the outset that we would routinely write off large numbers of people and not invite them for interview, that would defeat the object of the exercise.

I believe that the hon. Lady would accept that it is a minority of people who would not at some stage be able to come in for interview and receive that help and support. I know of her interest in this matter, which has arisen for perfectly understandable reasons that I shall not go into now, and I can understand exactly the type of case that she has in mind, to which I am extremely sympathetic, but I do not accept the argument that our staff should routinely be reluctant to invite people in, because many people who could come in might benefit from that help.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) spoke nonsense about the guidance on suicide, which has applied to our staff for years. As he might imagine, we routinely encounter people in the present benefits system who might be at risk of suicide. The guidelines issued to our staff state very clearly that they should be sensitive. I am very sorry—

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I will not give way just now.

When it comes to scaremongering and upsetting people, the hon. Member for Northavon has done more than his fair share, particularly over the past few days, including the weekend.

We have introduced powers to waive and to postpone interviews. I hope that that knowledge will allay some of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick). No one wants our staff or the Government to act unreasonably, but I repeat that we want to ensure that people who would benefit from help and support get it.

It is important that we avoid the present position, whereby someone can go a considerable time—perhaps years—without help and support. We are now moving to

[Mr. Darling]

a position where, no matter what benefit people are claiming, their circumstances will be reviewed at least once every three years, to ensure that we do not let people lie for year after year without getting the help and support that they need.

I hope that when Members consider the regulations tonight, they will see that the Government are acting reasonably and are doing something that Governments should have done years ago. It cannot be right that we leave people with no help or support. It is extremely interesting that, despite the fact that we heard an extremely long speech from the hon. Member for Havant and another from the hon. Member for Northavon, at no point did we hear an alternative approach or a single workable or affordable measure that would help to deal with this difficult problem. In contrast, we can show that over the past four years, through the new deal and other measures, and through the single gateway to the benefits system, we are moving forwards and doing more to help people than ever before. I am determined that we, as a Government, ensure that we help people get back into work wherever possible, as well as offering far more effective support to those who cannot work.

In that spirit, I hope that the House will endorse the regulations, so that we may help the millions of people denied help for too long in the past.

5.40 pm

Mr. Willetts: With the leave of the House, I refer the Secretary of State to the manifesto for disabled people that we published at the general election. The Labour party did not produce a manifesto for disabled people; we did and it contained practical measures to help them, including implementing the points made by the National Audit Office, which one Labour Member rightly raised, about the failure of the present system of medical assessment.

This measure is another example of a Government who are preoccupied with regulations when the real problem is the delivery of medical assessments, for which there is already ample regulatory and legal provision.

The Secretary of State has been caught out in a bogus crackdown, trying to spin tough policies. His colleague the Prime Minister was doing so in July. Today, the Secretary of State has had to beat an undignified retreat, abandoning statements that he made on the record in oral questions in attempting to explain the policy launched at the Institute for Public Policy Research.

We welcome the fact that as a result of our motion we have had this debate. We are certainly committed to ensuring that, wherever possible, people on incapacity benefit are helped into work. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Is it your wish that the motion be withdrawn?

Hon. Members: No.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Orders Nos. 16(1) and 17(2) and Order [20 November 2000].*

The House divided: Ayes 38, Noes 302.

Division No. 44] **[5.41 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
McDonnell, John
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Skinner, Dennis
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mr. Nigel Jones.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caims, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(Birm Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim

Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. John Heppell.

Question accordingly negatived.

European Food Law

5.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Union document no. 14174/00, a draft Council regulation laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food; and supports the Government's objective of the introduction of effective arrangements to re-establish and maintain consumer confidence in the regulation of food safety at European Union level.

I welcome the opportunity to debate this important measure on the Floor of the House. The Government attach particular importance to the establishment of a European food authority as an aid to re-establishing consumer confidence in the food supply and to making the European Union regulatory process more transparent.

Proposals were published by the European Commission in November last year and agreement to a common position was reached in the Council in the summer. Several issues that are covered in the proposal have already been debated in the European Scrutiny Committee and in the House of Lords last year during deliberations on the Commission's White Paper on food safety. This proposal cleared scrutiny by the European Union Committee in the Lords in March. All views expressed have been taken into account in the negotiations that were given priority by the Swedish presidency in the first half of the year.

The European Parliament is considering the Council's common position text. It is likely that the co-decision process will be completed in time to allow formal adoption of the regulation by the end of the year. That would enable the European food authority to be established by early 2002, in line with European Council conclusions.

The proposal can be broken down into three distinct parts: general food law, establishing a European food authority and dealing with emergencies and procedural food safety issues in the Union. I shall speak briefly about each part.

The food law element will establish an overarching approach to considering food safety issues at European level by defining general principles, which legislators must take into account when developing European Union and national food law. It also includes requirements for those who produce our food. Some are new general requirements, such as traceability, although specific, detailed traceability requirements already exist in some sectors. Others enhance existing obligations, such as procedures on withdrawal and recall.

In the United Kingdom, we operate basic safeguards primarily under the Food Safety Act 1990. The Food Standards Agency administers the controls; consumer protection lies at its heart. We are trying to strengthen that concept in Europe and when setting international food standards more generally.

Although most food law is already subject to harmonised measures throughout the Union, the proposal now better reflects our basic safeguards. That will ensure that the principles of consumer protection and prohibition on placing unsafe food on the market will apply to food legislation throughout the Union.

We initially expressed preference for a directive, especially given our anxieties about the potential for delaying the establishment of the European food authority. The original proposal was unclear about scope and intent, but the text has been significantly improved in the past six months. In the light of rapid progress, we can support the legislative form of a regulation, which will be directly applicable. Given the similarities, some changes will be required to our primary legislation. However, our high standards on food and public health will not be compromised.

Although our Food Standards Agency has wide statutory powers, combining all the inherent elements of the risk analysis process—assessment, management and communication—the European food authority will differ because it will be limited to scientific assessment and its communication. The legislation and control elements—risk management—will remain with the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament. We do not want to change that, but as we stated in the Government response last year, it is essential to recognise the need for effective communication between all those involved in risk analysis. They include the food authority, the Commission and member states. We have achieved recognition of the need for such coherence in the common position text.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am trying to work out how one can split risk assessment and communication from risk management. How will that affect, for example, genetically modified organisms? The criteria overlap on that.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We aim to try to ensure that the role of the European food authority is to draw together the best scientific advice, expertise and evidence. Views based on that evidence should be communicated to those who will have to make decisions about risk management. The processes are different. We want to ensure that those responsible for the decisions make them in the light of the best scientific evidence available in the European Union.

We believed that it was especially important that, when advising on risk assessment, the food authority should be able to identify options or make recommendations for action to risk managers. They should give a public explanation for any deviation from the authority's recommendations. That would mean not that the food authority would become involved in determining risk management solutions, but that the assessors, with the scientific data at their fingertips, should be able to identify practical solutions. That was our view, but others were not able to support it. That is a missed opportunity, but we note that the proposal still provides for the authority to express and publish its conclusions on matters within its remit.

I stress that the proposed authority will not be directly responsible for any enforcement or control aspects of legislation. That remains the responsibility of member states under the food and feed control directives, although there are proposals in the pipeline, as the Commission's legislative plan in the White Paper on food safety suggests, to introduce a fully harmonised approach on the matter.

The authority's remit is also seemingly broad, encompassing animal health and welfare and plant health. Some of those issues could have an impact on food safety,

but it is extremely important to ensure that secondary issues do not divert the authority from its principal role of safeguarding food and feed safety. The National Farmers Union told us forcefully that the authority should concentrate on its core remit.

We have considered carefully the arguments and counter-arguments in regard to whether the authority should be a one-stop shop for all scientific advice, including advice on issues that have a less direct impact on food safety. That has obvious implications for resources, and for the authority's ability to deal with issues directly affecting food safety and the safety of consumers. We are satisfied that the proposed regulation now strikes the right balance in terms of the focus of the authority.

It is vital that this opportunity to establish a truly innovative approach to the way in which food safety issues are tackled at European level should not be squandered by the establishment of a food authority that is so overburdened that it may not act in a proactive manner, or whose structure dictates that it will not be able to make its voice heard in a truly independent way. We pushed hard for maximum openness and transparency, as well as independence from political influence, for the management board.

The Commission has stated its preference for its original proposal, which involves four members from the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission, but we now see reference to members' being appointed in such a way as to secure the highest possible levels of competence and a broad range of relevant expertise.

Our European partners have been impressed by the UK's policy of debating important food safety issues in public. We achieved provision in the proposed regulation for the possibility of public meetings of the scientific panels, and the possibility of observers on the panels themselves. Similar points have been made to us effectively by the Consumers Association, which is keen to ensure that the public are involved. We now have more potential for consumer involvement: the original proposal contained no more than a passing reference to contacts with consumers as contained in the original proposal.

The latest text now better defines the forum's role, ensuring that the authority can tap into the wealth of knowledge residing in member states. That will help to avoid duplication of effort within the EU, and will serve as a mechanism for exchange of information on potential risks and pooling of knowledge.

The final part of the proposal relates to procedural matters, such as the establishment of a crisis unit, and a mediation procedure, with Commission involvement, in the event of differences of opinion between member states. Those initiatives are particularly welcome in the area of crisis management. Consideration will need to be given to a fast-track procedure, with the authority's active involvement, enabling important decisions to be taken as quickly as possible on the basis of the latest science.

As I have said, the European Parliament is currently considering the Council's common position text with a view to amendments. The process is still in its early stages. The main issues seem to relate to a greater role in the appointments of the executive director and management board, and a provision that would prevent food business operators from preventing or discouraging anyone from co-operating with the competent authorities when there was a risk to food—a whistleblowing provision. On the latter, we are sympathetic to the principle but are considering the scope and effect. This issue is essentially covered in domestic legislation for employees under the Public Information Disclosure Act 1998.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Will the Minister say something about the massive power that we are giving the authority to charge fees? What kind of fees will they be, who will determine the size of the fees under article 45, who will determine to whom the fees apply, and to whom can the Government complain if they think that the fees are unfair? Would it not be helpful for us to be given some advice on this new power to levy fees throughout Europe?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I understand that member states already have power to charge fees for the analysis of documents and the submission of dossiers. This is not a new power as such, and we shall therefore need a system ensuring that equity and transparency are involved in the charges and the arrangements generally. Such a system will be developed during the process of establishing the authority.

6.5 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I welcome the debate. As the Minister knows, the Scrutiny Committees in both Houses of Parliament recommended that this was an issue of such importance that a debate on the Floor of the House should be devoted to it. I am pleased that that recommendation has been agreed to, and that we are having this debate today.

In recent years there have been serious problems in the food chain due to BSE, foot and mouth disease, E. coli and dioxin poisoning; there is also a public debate raging about genetically modified foods. The need for a focused and concerted approach to food safety is clear to anyone. It is also abundantly clear that, just as environmental problems do not respect national boundaries, so it is with food safety issues. It is important to have cross-country, cross-border co-operation to ensure the integrity of the food chain and the maintenance of the highest levels of consumer confidence in the food that is consumed.

I fully accept that there is an important role for Britain to play by co-operating in restoring and maintaining high levels of consumer confidence in food safety, but we must not forget that there is a balance to be struck in achieving this. We must resist the temptation that is often prevalent among Governments of all political parties to impose too many layers of bureaucracy in seeking to deal with a problem. That can lead to institutions being given, in effect, a blank cheque, allowing them to be meddlesome, unnecessarily interfering, officious and harsh in the way in which they go about their duties.

The motion on the proposed European food authority is a straightforward one, and I welcome the fact that the Minister's speech fleshed out some of the details of the authority, including how it will operate in practice and the principles behind its establishment. However, a number of issues in the proposals need further clarification in the light of the Government's responses to the House of Lords' report on the subject and the Department of Health's explanatory memorandums signed by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) and the Minister.

[Mr. Simon Burns]

Some areas of concern need to be examined further. If the Minister is unable to respond to some of my questions due to lack of time tonight, I should appreciate it if she would write to me to deal with the points that I have raised. It is important to clear these matters up. I have read the mass of papers made available to us by the Vote Office, and some of the detail has been changed through amendments in the European Parliament and through the Commission, so we need to know exactly what is being proposed at the moment.

The key objectives of the European food authority will be to provide independent scientific advice on food safety and nutrition issues, to identify emerging risks, to operate an extended rapid alert system and to inform the public on all matters within its remit. The key to the success of an effective food authority will be the quality of the scientific advice that it receives. The White Paper published by the Commission states that the organisation is

"to be the scientific point of reference for the whole Union."

Rightly, to find the best scientific evidence available, it will be able to seek evidence beyond the European Union if that is appropriate and necessary. Given our experiences, I suspect that on occasion it will be appropriate and necessary for it to go further afield for the best scientific advice—to places such as Australia, the United States, Japan and other nations.

However, I have a question for the Minister. At the time of the BSE crisis in the mid-1990s, there was considerable conflicting information and seemingly differing scientific evidence. Does the Minister believe that the situation would have been exactly the same if the European food authority had been in place at that time? Because of the unknown nature of BSE when it started to unfold in all its horrors, would we have been in exactly the same position, because there was not enough scientific advice anywhere for us to be able to come up with a straightforward understanding of what exactly was going on in the early stages of that crisis?

Similarly, as the organisation will be the scientific point of reference for the European Union, it logically follows that it will produce advice that will almost certainly need to be acted upon. There needs to be greater clarification of whether the organisation will primarily be a proactive or a reactive body. It is a potential conflict that will have to be resolved at the outset if one wishes to avoid tensions and pressures that will undermine its efficiency and effectiveness.

The organisation's remit has been described as strikingly broad, including food safety, nutrition, plant health, animal health and animal welfare. The Minister referred to that strikingly broad remit, but with any body that has a broad remit, there is a danger that it will lose sight of its main objective. In this case, its main objective is to provide and to help advance food safety.

The National Farmers Union has written to hon. Members in anticipation of the debate. To be fair, the NFU broadly supports the establishment of the EFA, but it has expressed a concern that I think is genuine: the EFA must be focused, have a specific remit and not be diverted by issues that are only vaguely linked to food safety. It has given an example to back that concern: environmental or consumer issues that are not strictly speaking related to food safety. Does the Minister have any view on how the problem can be avoided where an overzealous EFA, for whatever reason, is sidetracked on to issues that are only loosely connected to food issues, is waylaid and goes beyond its true remit of food safety? The danger cannot be dismissed lightly. I hope that the Minister has considered the matter and has an answer on how to try to stop that problem emerging.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Knowing his strength and determination, I am delighted to see my hon. Friend on the Front Bench, but surely we cannot ask the Minister to make sure that that does not happen. She will have no power to do that, bearing in mind that all the people on the authority must be independent and totally outside the control and direction of any national Government. Surely he should not ask the Minister to do something that she cannot do.

Mr. Burns: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, particularly for his kind and typically generous comments. I also fully understand his genuine concern about the Minister's lack of powers. Perhaps I did not make my plea as clear as it should have been but, given that all the necessary proposals to establish the EFA have not yet been concluded, and given that the Minister, through the Government, still has an opportunity to persuade her ministerial colleagues in the European Parliament and the European Commission to fine-tune any parts of the proposals as necessary, if she agrees with the point that I have just outlined I hope she will use her influence to that effect.

Another area of concern is the harmonisation between member states. The NFU has raised the problem of the variation in quality and safety that third countries can exploit when sending produce into a member state. The produce is often prepared and wrapped as if it were the produce of that member state. Is the Minister in a position to give any clarification or reassurance that the EFA will implement the European rules and directives to ensure a common standard that will harmonise food safety across the EU and put an end to such imbalances. The problem has persisted for far too long and it needs addressing. Another related issue that will be crucial to the success of this authority is surveillance and enforcement.

I understand that surveillance will be conducted through a dual process—by member states and in addition by the EFA. There have been examples of poor quality or utter failures in surveillance by certain member states. The most glaring recent example involved Germany's failure in regard to the import of beef with spinal cords. How will the EFA stop or improve those unacceptable situations?

Perhaps surprisingly, enforcement is not part of the remit of the EFA, but rests with the European Commission. I wonder whether that is the most satisfactory or competent arrangement. The other place has recommended that Food and Veterinary Office functions should be brought together with those of the EFA. I wonder whether, on reflection, the Government now think that that might improve enforcement once the authority is up and running.

As the Minister will know, the Lords Select Committee has also recommended that the EFA should have explicit powers to offer opinions on the effectiveness of

member states' monitoring and enforcement systems. That suggestion has many merits and I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will look at it again with a view to seeking to influence the EU, the EC and the European Parliament to move on this issue. I have found in many walks of life that one way to concentrate the mind when effective action is needed is for a body to look into what is going on, reach a decision on what the standards should be and, in effect, name and shame organisations or individuals that are failing.

Unfortunately, there have been far too many examples in recent years of some member states interpreting the rules of the club to their own advantage, rather than correctly. The glaring example is that of the French cocking a snook at the rules over British beef and, so far, getting away with it. It is not satisfactory for the Commission to be the enforcing officer. We need a far more vigorous system in place to ensure that all member states enforce the rules equally so that no one is disadvantaged.

I wonder whether the proposal to split risk management and risk assessment between the EFA and the Commission, unlike in our system, in which both responsibilities reside with the Food Standards Agency, is sensible. When the Government introduced the Food Standards Agency, they clearly believed that the most effective system was to have both functions within the remit of one agency. I assume that they spotted the fundamental difference in the European proposals. I do not know whether they made representations and were unsuccessful, or whether they took their eye off the ball. If it was the former, I am sorry that their influence did not carry the day, because I believe that they were right in what they did here.

Does the Minister feel that splitting the functions could lead to conflict between the authority and the Commission? Not having them under the same umbrella could lead to tensions that could mean that the system does not work as effectively or efficiently as intended.

I want to ask about an issue of great importance to hundreds of thousands of individuals and organisations that is raised in the Minister's explanatory memorandum of 11 October. When her predecessor, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston, published her memorandum before the general election, it said—I make no criticism, as it was a reasonable statement at that time—that it was too soon to come up with any realistic figures or suggestions on the extent of the impact of the proposals on British agriculture, commerce and industry.

Since then, the Minister has published another memorandum, in which, because events have moved on, she has been in a better position to give an idea of compliance costs. Annexe A of the Department of Health's partial regulatory impact assessment gives an estimate of the number of businesses that the Government anticipate will be affected by the proposals. The figures are quite significant: it is estimated that 63,000 farmers, 405 farm animal feed producers and approximately 612,000 food business establishments will be affected. However, even as recently as 11 October, the Department of Health was still unable to produce a guesstimate for the compliance costs. The legislation will have a significant impact on the whole agriculture sector and the food industry, and it would be helpful if the Government would publish their guesstimates—or their estimates, if they are more confident of those—of the compliance costs as soon as they are able to do so.

The explanatory memorandum also deals with whistleblowing. The European Parliament's environment committee is trying to come up with some sensible and workable proposals on this issue and it would seem that the Government are sympathetic to the principle that food business operators should not prevent or discourage anyone from co-operating with competent authorities if there is a possible risk to food. I assume that the Government are working with the European Parliament on workable proposals to protect whistleblowers who have information that should be passed to authorities to prevent threats to the food chain and food safety.

As the Minister knows, the House has a considerable interest in the development and improvement of food labelling. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) introduced a private Member's Bill on the subject last year and, in a few weeks' time, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) will introduce his private Member's Bill on food labelling. In the debate on 3 March 2000 on the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston—the then Minister—was not minded to support the legislation because it fell for determination within the European remit, rather than that of our national Government and this House. I am not convinced that that is accurate, but if the EFA is to have a responsibility in all areas of food safety, food labelling is an important issue. Consumers have the right to know certain things about the food that they purchase or consume. Any extension of food labelling should consider the issue of the nutritional value of food. Can the Minister tell us whether in this Parliament we can extend the food labelling proposals? If not, will the new authority be able to do something to afford greater protection and more information to consumers, which they should have as a right?

I have raised a number of issues on which the House needs more information concerning this far-reaching change in the existing regime for ourselves and our European partners in terms of the way in which we seek to protect and defend the integrity of the food chain.The debate is time limited and I fully understand that the Minister—who is helpful—will not have time to answer all the points that I raised. If she would write to me on those matters with which she cannot deal in the debate, I would be very grateful.

6.30 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I do not intend to detain the House, but I wish to speak on this important issue. For those of us interested in the evolution of food policy, this is another step along the road. I will not counter what the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) said on food labelling or on the Bill on that subject, which I shall be supporting a week on Friday and which I want to become law.

I wish to make three points: first, the role of the Food Standards Agency in relation to the European food authority; secondly, what the proposal may do in terms of food imports; and, thirdly, food labelling. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford made a valid point when he asked whether the agency would be proactive or

[Mr. David Drew]

reactive. One of the best aspects of the agency—an organisation in its infancy—is that it has sought to investigate, research and communicate with the general public.

I had the fortune to accompany my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey), for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith) and for Bristol, East (Jean Corston) a couple of weeks ago when the agency held an open meeting. It was good to see that the agency was trying to engage with the general public on issues that matter to them. Food issues do matter. Anyone who wants a good discussion—not disregarding the subject of international terrorism—should mention food and people will put in their threepenny-worth.

It is not usually my inclination to be pro-European, but I can see the value in setting up such a European authority. However, I would not want the nature of the Food Standards Agency to be lost by being merged into something flaccid and regulatory, rather than innovatory. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give a clear indication that we will encourage the agency to pursue its exciting role in education, health and communication.

I would like to know how the European food authority will engage with issues such as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, which clearly have a pan-European importance. It is not just Britain that is struggling with scrapie and BSE in sheep; the TSE issue is something that Europe as a whole must face. There is the possibility of conflict between scientists of different nations—something we have grown used to. Scientists will give their honest and best advice on whatever issue they are asked to comment. For example, the findings of French scientists on British beef were different from the findings of scientists in the rest of Europe. They may have been looking at slightly different questions, but I want to know how the problem will pan out. We have to be aware that it could cause difficulties for the EFA. Any comments from my hon. Friend the Minister will be closely scrutinised.

I have been pursuing in Europe the question of embedded items in food. Such items have been banned in the United States, but in this country we still allow them in chocolate eggs and other foods. I was lucky enough to hold an Adjournment debate on the matter some time ago. How will the EFA deal with that issue?

I come now to the other two matters that I wish to raise. It is clear that food imports are one of the issues of the moment, and the number of written questions on the subject show that we are examining import controls in this country. Imports from third countries have been mentioned, so how will the UK tighten up on imports, given that we will be taking more of a pan-European approach? The National Farmers Union inquiry into import controls raises questions about the co-ordination and effectiveness of what is going on. I hope that the EFA will have a role in getting rid of some of the substandard products that arrive in this country and end up on our shelves.

Finally, it has been established that consumers want food labelling. The forthcoming Bill on food labelling has yet to be published so I cannot comment on it, but although its predecessor had some merit it also had some problems. Not least of those was the fact that the European Court was likely to rule against it on the advice of Ministers. We need some clarification on whether matters have moved on since then, as the hon. Member for West Chelmsford hoped.

It would be good to know that we are able to deal with the principle and the practicalities of food labelling. People need to know that they are buying what is listed on the label. If they want more detail, they should be able to get it from a database. That is now possible, and it is just a matter of getting the delivery right. This country wants to tighten up in this area, and it will be interesting to see what the EFA may have to say on the matter.

I largely welcome the draft regulation, although I agree with the hon. Member for West Chelmsford that we need further clarification of some matters. We should do all we can to make our food safer and better, and information about it more accessible. The draft regulation seems to be moving in that direction, and so can only be a good thing—even though some hon. Members want a national entity working in the areas to which I have alluded.

6.38 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I agree with earlier speakers that this debate is important and timely. The development of food policy and consumers' interest in the food that they eat, its safety and how it is produced, will command attention both in the House and outside it. Perhaps more people outside the House will be interested in the subject than hon. Members, judging by attendance for this debate.

Food safety issues are increasingly important, and the international aspect of the food production and processing chain is growing. We have to ensure that there is genuinely free movement of goods in the single internal market, but we must also recognise that there are clear problems and risks associated with food imports. However difficult it may be, we must try to establish some basic principles with regard to what food safety, nationally and internationally, really means.

First, the regulation needs to cover the whole of the food chain, across all the food sectors and between all the member states. If it is to work properly, it will have to be drawn up very carefully. Secondly, we must establish where responsibility truly rests within the chain and which authorities are competent to monitor and enforce matters. Having read through all the papers, I do not think that that has been made abundantly clear. Thirdly, we need to set up real traceability of feed and food. The process must be transparent and the risk analysis must have credibility based on clear science. Again, there seems to be a problem regarding where the scientific advice is established and deciding how it is to be used between the European food authority and the Food Standards Agency.

We greatly supported the establishment of the Food Standards Agency, which has made an important contribution to the process. However, it is still in its infancy and has as yet to command the unquestioning public confidence that it will need if its pronouncements are to have authority. Regrettably, some of the recent comments about BSE in sheep have not added to the FSA's credibility.

We need to extend this area into a European dimension to protect public health and restore consumer confidence now that food processing and trade has become more international. As right hon. and hon. Members have said,

labelling will be crucial to the exercise. It was pointed out last year that our ability to introduce labelling will be subject to European involvement. Will the EFA's remit cover proactive involvement in labelling?

As the Minister mentioned, the EFA's establishment also provides the opportunity to divide the responsibilities of risk assessment from risk management. However, it is not clear to me nor, I believe, to some other speakers whether that distinction is vital to the ability to control food safety or whether it will be divisive and a means by which national food standards agencies can conflict with the European food authority. They need to be complementary, not contradictory.

There is a need to take measures to safeguard food imports from third countries, and it was brought home to me when I visited Felixstowe a few months ago. People there were obliged to accept descriptions and paperwork from European imports of food that had been imported from third countries. There is no doubt that we are all exposed to the weakest European Union border and its control and enforcement of what can ultimately arrive on our shores and on to our plates.

For the EFA to be successful, it must display true independence and be free of any commercial or political pressures. That will be one of its most important and, perhaps, difficult tasks. There could always be a suspicion that political influences and expediencies as well as commercial pressures—perhaps even via bodies such as the World Trade Organisation—may have an undue influence on its pronouncements. It must be open and transparent in its dealings with the public. For it to have respect and credibility, its science and evidence must be rooted in cross-border national scientific bodies.

It is essential that the European Commission and the European food authority evjdence is always made available to the European Parliament. It is no good if pronouncements are taken to the Commission and decisions are made on evidence that is not freely and transparently available. I hope that the Minister will confirm that when we make our views known to the European Union, we will say that that transparency should be an important part of the way in which a European food authority will operate.

I agree that it is rather dangerous to extend the remit too far by including food risks, nutritional issues, animal health and welfare, environmental protection and suchlike, and so lose the focus. None the less, it has become clear that we want many of those issues to be included in the round of World Trade Organisation talks. It would be interesting to know whether the EFA will participate on behalf of the European Union, or whether its advice will be part of any EU involvement in the talks. If so, the EFA must have some involvement in and knowledge of animal welfare and environmental issues.

There has been comment about the costs of the exercise. We do not know precisely how much the EFA will cost, let alone what it will cost individual farms, food processors, businesses and shops. It would behove the European Union to give clear guidance on what the costs are likely to be. The public will not be too impressed if we merely accept something with a huge potential cost that could fall on our farmers, our agriculture industries, our retailers and our food processors.

For far too long, the general public have not been fully engaged in understanding or even accepting much of Europe, but if the consumer is to be king and is to be properly involved, and if there is to be proper consultation and public discussion, rather than pronouncements being received from on high, here is a real opportunity for the public to be involved in an area of policy in which they are directly interested. It behoves all hon. Members to ensure that there is proper public debate and that our constituents are involved in food policy, especially the way in which it affects our relationship with Europe.

A few concerns remain. Some of them have been aired already, but I would like to repeat them. How will the proposed EFA and the national food safety bodies—in our case, the Food Standards Agency—relate to each other? How will we ensure that they do not duplicate each other's work? If disputes arise, as they are almost bound to, how will mediation work? Who will come out on top in the end? That must be clear. Will the national body be sovereign in its own state, or will the EFA have the last word?

How will the division of responsibility for risk assessment and management work in practice, especially if there are differing scientific views? How will we be protected from the danger that regulatory decisions may be influenced and taken on overtly political grounds rather than on grounds of real agreed science? How will we ensure that in all member states the EFA has the credibility to be able to make clear decisions without undue influence being exercised? Finally, as I have said, we need to know precisely how the authority will be funded.

Those are legitimate concerns, but there is an overriding need to move on. The last time this subject was debated, my hon. Friends voted against the motion, but matters have now moved on and become more urgent. Unless we address the concerns that remain, many of which have been raised this evening, we will not get it right. At the time, we believed that it would have been appropriate for the EFA to grow out of the national food standards bodies in each member state, so that they would have a stake in how it was being formed and how it would operate and be regulated. We are now proposing to put it on top, before some member states have even established their own food standards agencies. We should realise that there could be difficulties that will need to be overcome. Despite that, we give the measure broad support in the hope that the EFA will be successful and that public food policy, and food safety in particular, will be enhanced by it.

6.50 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I have a few questions and I hope that I shall get some answers.

I was glad to hear the thoughtful and challenging speech of my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). He talked about the transfer of power to this European organisation. Bearing it in mind that this is an important issue that will cost much public money and involve a substantial transfer of power, it would be helpful if the Minister could tell us whether it will make the slightest difference whether we vote for or against the motion. I hesitate to mention voting because my party has recently made it clear that we do not want to vote on anything, but I should like to establish the point.

My first point is that there is much undue optimism and hopefulness about the establishment of this massive new body. Instead of discussing how to set up this huge new

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

organisation, which will overshadow organisations that are already working well, would it not be infinitely better for Britain, and for Europe, to set up an organisation to consider the basic problem of over-production of food?

I ask that question because the Minister may have noticed that on Friday I received a written answer that described the success of the European Union in destroying food. I found to my astonishment that last year 269,000 tonnes of apples were destroyed at public expense, as were 255,000 tonnes of peaches, 229,000 tonnes of oranges and much more besides. Well over 1 million tonnes of food were destroyed at public expense when we have already paid farmers a great deal of public money to produce it. Is there not a danger of over-optimism? What will this new organisation be able to do that is not already being done by our national organisations?

Secondly, how much power will be transferred? The report of the European Scrutiny Committee notes:

"whilst the present system had . . . functioned well, there needed to be a comprehensive and integrated approach to food safety"—

and that, although responsibility was not exclusive to the Community—

"all aspects needed to be addressed at Community level".

It strikes me that there will be a substantial transfer of power to the EU and that, once it goes, our Parliament, our Government and the European Parliament will have no control over what happens: total independence will be given to the organisation.

The organisation's remit will cover matters such as animal health. What powers will it have on that? For example, if it thought that the conditions in which calves were kept in, for example, like Holland were deplorable, shocking and disgraceful, what could it do about it? People who are concerned about animal welfare will be especially interested to learn from the Minister about the powers that the organisation will have to deal with nasty or cruel conditions.

Thirdly, I want to ask about the power to charge fees, which is another substantial power being given to the organisation. In three years, it will be able to charge fees for any of its services. If British food producers, farmers or shopkeepers thought that the costs and fees were unfair or unreasonable, what exactly could they do about it? My understanding is that once the organisation has decided on its fees, there is nothing that we can do about them.

Fourthly, will the Government have any power or control over the organisation? The proposed article 37 includes the words:

"The members of the Management Board, the members of the Advisory Forum and the Executive Director shall undertake to act independently in the public interest".

That means that they should not be subject to any political controls. Is it a fact that that organisation, once established, is fully independent and cannot be controlled in any way?

Fifthly, where will the organisation be located? It is most unusual to have before us a motion that does not allow us to decide anything that sets up an expensive new organisation in an unknown location. Of all the European organisations, such as banks, that have been established, hardly any have come to the United Kingdom. Has it been decided where this organisation will be located, and if not, who will decide?

Sixthly, I want to ask about the costs. The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) said that there was no indication of costs, but there are a good many references to them in the papers that we have been given. Paragraph 27 of the explanatory memorandum, headed "Financial implications", says that the start-up costs were to be £5.4 million, the annual costs initially £14.9 million and the running costs thereafter £26.6 million. Is that a realistic projection? Will we in fact spend £26.6 million after spending the £5.4 million, and will the costs be kept under control? My feeling is that, like all the Euro-ventures, it will probably end up costing a great deal more.

Seventhly, I want to ask the Minister about media, because the legislation and papers refer to the organisation's setting up a substantial media organisation. If the British Parliament, the British Government, the European Parliament or any other democratic body thought that the organisation was using its media consultants and staff—which are provided for in the legislation referred to in paragraphs 23 and 23.1 of the Government response to the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union, headed "Risk communication and relations with the media"—to put out information that they regarded as unsatisfactory, untruthful or misleading, what power would our Government have over the organisation? My understanding is that they would have none.

Eighthly, what controls will the organisation have over imports? All the written answers on imports make it abundantly clear that as a result of our chronic problem of over-production of everything in Europe, which is getting a great deal worse, there is massive pressure to try to restrict and control imports. I do not feel a special obligation in that respect because I consider that we have a responsibility to other countries that produce excellent food to high standards that the consumers of Britain like to consume.

I always buy New Zealand butter because I know that it is produced in a country where standards are high, and the knowledge that it is produced without subsidies adds to my enjoyment when I eat it. I would be very upset if I felt that our European so-called friends were going to have the power to restrict or control imports from such countries. I simply ask the Minister, if, for example, the new organisation said, "Because of a specific plant or flower, we take the view that New Zealand butter is unacceptable" because we have too much butter of our own, what could New Zealand, the British Government or consumers who wanted to consume it do?

I am afraid that I have been a bore about this over the years, but in Europe we have set up a number of organisations over which we and our democratic bodies have no control, but in respect of which we have expressed undue hope and optimism. I found that that was the case when I had the pleasure of being a member of the Treasury Committee—although I misbehaved—for a brief period and visited Germany and France.

I met the business communities there to discuss the single currency. They all thought that everything was going to be wonderful. The Germans were delightful people. They said, "We've got a rubbish Government and, unfortunately, rubbish Opposition but once we get the single currency everything will be sorted out."

The French were even nicer, although they seemed to drink a little more. They said that they had a mad Government who were, unfortunately, introducing a 35-hour week, but that all that would stop once they had the single currency. In the continent of Europe, they seem to think that anything new and any new power, such as the food authority, will bring benefits that they simply do not bring.

Another strange aspect of the matter is that on page 18, the document uses the words

"to be open to . . . public scrutiny".

That influenced me a great deal. Will the Minister say how the body will be open to public scrutiny? If my constituents, the Confederation of British Industry or some organisation in my constituency wanted to find out more about it, how would they do so? She will be well aware that organisations set up under the European Union are not open to public scrutiny.

For example, on financial controls, the Minister will be aware of the horrific news the other day that for six years the Court of Auditors has not approved the EU accounts. The way in which the money is being spent should be a matter of concern.

I do not wish to speak for too long as other hon. Members want to contribute, although the motion does not matter and it will not make the slightest difference what we say about this or any other matter relating to the European Union. What benefit will result from this measure? Are we not simply transferring powers that were effectively controlled and managed and that could be altered and adjusted as we thought appropriate?

I was interested to hear all the talk about labelling. Hon. Members must know that although we propose private Members' Bills, the system is a load of codswallop. We do not have the power or control. Although we can let people put "Made in England" on goods, we cannot demand, under European laws, that it be stated that something is made in Germany, France or Portugal.

There is a danger that we think that we have powers that we do not have. Tonight we are simply transferring more power for something that will be of no good purpose. We are setting up an organisation that we cannot control. It will be wholly independent and outside democratic control and it will cost us a great deal of money. We are transmitting far more powers than we contemplate. The measure is a great mistake. I think that we could press the matter to a vote, but bearing in mind the views of the Conservative party—we do not want to vote on anything—I will not do so. We certainly should make it clear that we regret the measure and are concerned about it.

7.3 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I could probably disagree with one or two statements made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). I understand that we are discussing a take-note motion, but it gives us an opportunity to debate an extremely serious issue.

I also disagree with my hon. Friend about New Zealand farming. It is true that subsidies were stopped for farming there, but other subsidies still exist and there are also questions of marketing and processing to consider. When the agriculture recession hit New Zealand, the majority of farmers were on some form of benefit payment. To say that when he spreads his butter on his wholemeal bread for breakfast, he is eating unsubsidised butter may not be true. It is good butter, however. Furthermore, in New Zealand grass grows for 11 months of the year, which gives their farmers a slight advantage over hill farmers in the north of England. That is why vulnerable farms here need some form of assistance.

As always with such European issues, we are ill at ease because we do not know where we shall be at the end of the process. We do not even really know the route that has been proposed. Those of us who have lived through such things in the past know only too well that what starts as an apparently beneficial and useful idea ends up being costly and complicated for those who become involved. For example, the EU directive on abattoirs was printed on two sides of A4 paper, but by the time that it had been fully implemented, the United Kingdom's slaughtering industry had been virtually wiped out because of it. I always embark on such things with a certain trepidation.

Having said that, I do not disagree with the proposals on the European food authority. However, I should be grateful to the Minister if she would tell us her views on the House of Lords recommendations. Unlike my hon. Friend, I think that the value of the EFA would be its independence. The House of Lords recommended:

"the EFA should have explicit powers to offer opinions on the effectiveness of Member States' monitoring and surveillance systems, and in turn on the adequacy and consistency of food safety enforcement activity across the European Union."

The EFA would represent an important development if it were to have that power because, as has been said, it is feared that substandard food gets into the EU through its weakest border. We know that some EU countries pay little attention to what food comes into their countries because they know that it is simply in transit from their port of entry to other parts of Europe. If the EFA could flag up that issue, it would do the EU and its nations a service.

I appreciate that the Minister will want some time to answer the questions that have been asked, so I shall briefly explore the detail of two other matters that were mentioned by the National Farmers Union in its briefing and by hon. Members, the first of which is how much the EFA can stray into dangerous areas. The NFU suggests that as

"pesticides or additives . . . may involve risks to the environment or to the safety of workers, some environmental and worker protection aspects should also be assessed by the Authority in accordance with the relevant legislation."

We need to clarify exactly what powers the EFA will have to deal with such issues.

The same applies to genetically modified organisms, because the NFU suggests that the EFA will have a view on GMOs, and the EFA's expert views may well contrast with those of individual nation states. Certain people in the United Kingdom are highly nervous about genetic modification, whereas I am pleased to say that people in other parts of Europe take a more robust view and think that genetic modification is a good thing. I agree with that view; I am one of the few people who think that it is a thoroughly good science that should be encouraged.

Secondly, I want to say something about plant and animal health and welfare. That does not form part of the EFA proposals, but it is dealt with in the general food law

[Mr. Peter Atkinson]

section of the EU document. Again, interesting anomalies could arise between different countries. The Minister may or may not be aware that, for example, the use of stalls and tethers in pig rearing was abolished unilaterally in the United Kingdom. That obviously caused considerable additional costs for our pork producers, but stalls and tethers were not outlawed in Denmark. If the objective was to rule that the use of stalls and tethers was satisfactory because they were not prohibited in other European countries, what recourse would United Kingdom farmers, who could no longer use them, have to compensation for being put at a disadvantage?

When organisations such as the EFA start to deal with health and food safety issues, there is scope for costs to increase greatly and for the market to be distorted in consequence.

Mr. Drew: It is a question of persuading the Danes to bring their animal welfare standards up to those of this country. That is the way to approach the matter.

Mr. Atkinson: The hon. Gentleman is right, but the Danes may argue that there is no welfare problem with the practice. If that were endorsed Europe wide, our pig farmers would have the right to challenge it.

I would be interested to hear more detail about the issues that I have mentioned if the Minister can provide it in the time available. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) that much more has been raised than she can deal with in her reply. We have had an interesting debate. I hope that we have shone a little light—clearly not enough for my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East—on what could be a complex and important issue.

7.10 pm

Ms Blears: With the leave of the House, I shall reply.

There have been several extremely well informed and expert contributions to the debate. I for one have certainly learned some interesting new information. I shall do my best to respond to the questions that have been raised, but if I am unable to cover one or two of them, I shall certainly reply to hon. Members in writing.

The hon. Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) wondered whether the European food authority would be a new layer of European bureaucracy. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford was concerned that it would become unduly meddlesome, unnecessarily interfering and an extra burden on us. I reassure him that there is absolutely no intention that the EFA will become a bureaucratic body. In fact, it will rationalise much of the scientific information available in Europe. I understand that, at the moment, there are eight separate scientific committees advising the European Union on a range of issues. The proposal is for six different scientific committees and one overarching committee, so that there is unity and coherence in the system. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Burns: To reassure the Minister, I was saying that a balance must be struck. All too often, organisations set up by Governments become bureaucratic, but I was not saying that the EFA necessarily would. We must ensure that it does not.

Ms Blears: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that clarification and for what I take to be support for the organisation. The issue is important. In this case, the proposal is about bringing together mechanisms to try to ensure that we do not duplicate our activity but draw added value from pooling our scientific knowledge.

Other hon. Members raised the issue of the coherence of the system and member states' input into the EFA. I reassure them that the advisory forum will comprise representatives of all member states—from the Food Standards Agency in our case and from similar institutions in other member states. Therefore, there will be an opportunity to pool expertise and knowledge while at the same time maintaining a connection with local institutions. The EFA will not, as it has been alleged, sit on top of member states' institutions. It will be a partner in a network. It is a key issue for us that the EFA is not about overlapping of layers but about added value.

The quality of scientific advice has been mentioned. That is also a key issue. If the organisation is to have credibility not just in the European Community but internationally, it must draw together the very best scientists. We intend to draw on opinions from outside the EU as well as from within it to amass the best science possible. The key to the credibility of the institution is putting all that information in the public domain so that people can make informed choices. Therefore, the EFA will make a tremendous contribution.

Hon. Members asked whether the authority will be proactive or reactive. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) made some important points about the proactive nature of our Food Standards Agency, which holds hearings, involves the public and is developing a new approach. I am pleased to say that the European authority will play a proactive role. It will be able to take up matters that are in its remit; it will not simply react to events, but explore what goes on in the wider community.

I said in my opening remarks that we want to ensure that the EFA's remit is tight, with a core focus on food and food safety. Other issues, such as animal welfare and plant health, impinge on food safety, but we have managed to amend the mission statement for the authority so that its role is limited to providing scientific opinion on the other issues when they have no bearing on food or feed. That will occupy no more than 5 per cent. of the authority's overall work. I hope that that reassures hon. Members that the EFA's remit is focused on food safety, not other matters.

Hon. Members asked about tightening country of origin labelling. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East is clearly knowledgeable about that and holds strong opinions. We are pressing for changes to the rules to provide clear, unambiguous country of origin labelling. We appreciate that consumers want improvements in labelling, and it is a priority for us. The Food Standards Agency is about to review current guidance to ascertain whether we can toughen it. It is clearly important to the public.

I was asked whether, had the EFA existed, it could have identified the problems of BSE. It is difficult to speculate about that time, when little knowledge was available. I was also asked whether the EFA could have prevented

the French from banning British beef. I should like to believe that the advisory forum, which will comprise member states, could have met to share knowledge and expertise and work for consensus. The action by the French was illegal and is a matter for the European Court. However, I like to believe that when we can share knowledge and expertise maturely, we can prevent such difficulties from arising.

Mr. Breed: On that basis, there will be no change. If the EFA pronounces on a matter, the member state can simply ignore it and carry on regardless.

Ms Blears: Yes, but I hope that, in a system whereby everybody is engaged and has a stake in the process, people will share information and expertise and reach a consensus. If not, the EFA could not prevent people from taking unilateral action.

Cost and compliance were mentioned. There are high level proposals for traceability; people will have to record where they buy a product and to whom they sell it. The majority of businesses make some record, for example, of an invoice or a VAT return. Consequently, there are no new specific requirements to fill in forms; there is no increased bureaucracy, as the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East will be delighted to know. It is simply a matter of recording in the way that businesses already operate. We have held extensive consultations with small and medium-sized enterprises and were assured that compliance costs for business can be met.

Let us consider the EFA's involvement in nutrition. It will play a role in functional foods, babyfoods and so on, but its purpose is not to run campaigns on healthy eating. Those are matters for member states, which must decide what they wish to promote. Its purpose is not to harmonise so that all member states have homogenous food and diets. All of us who enjoy consuming different European food must strive to maintain its diversity.

The debate has been interesting because genuine tensions have been expressed. Some hon. Members said that the EFA should be independent and robust if it is to have integrity and credibility, while the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East wants to control it and ensure that politicians determine its actions. In our negotiations, we have striven to push forward the boundaries of openness and transparency to try to ensure an element of public scrutiny. That does not accord with traditions in some other countries, and it is fair to say that the Food Safety Agency and our approach take a lead on involving the public and consumers. That is the right way forward. If this body, whose aim will be to bring together the sources of the very best science, is to have credibility and re-establish consumers' confidence in their food, it is crucial for it to be seen as being able to say things without fear or favour on the basis of the scientific evidence before it.

The cost will be 24.9 million euros initially, rising to 44 million after three years. No extra funding will be needed: I understand that provision has already been made. As for location, there are currently bids for Barcelona, Helsinki, Parma and Lille. The Government have not taken a view of the appropriate location; each will be considered on its merits.

Media provision is important. Obviously the public will want to know that information is being disseminated widely and that they know what is emerging from the scientific committees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud—indeed, I think all hon. Members—mentioned the division between risk assessment and risk management, which will clearly be a fundamental issue for the authority. The authority's purpose is to provide advice in order to inform the development of policy, and there is a clear difference between those two roles. If a new authority had a complete remit, without leaving member states or the Commission any role, we would risk creating a monolithic approach without the necessary flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of individual states.

The whole debate has concerned getting the balance right between independence and credibility—balancing control and advice, and achieving balance between the parts of the authority that will need to act and the basis on which such action should be informed. Such considerations are important, but I believe that the balance is right.

Third-country imports have been mentioned. That, too, is an important issue: consumers want to know that they can rely on the information that is available. I believe that the Food and Veterinary Office makes regular enforcement visits and gives regular guidance on the matter.

I entirely understand the commitment of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East to these issues. Let me encourage him to be a little more optimistic, and not to assume that this institution will not make a difference. It will make a difference: it will bring together the best scientific knowledge that we have.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Union document no. 14174/00, a draft Council regulation laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food; and supports the Government's objective of the introduction of effective arrangements to re-establish and maintain consumer confidence in the regulation of food safety at European Union level.

Cervical Cancer

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

7.23 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this subject. Let me begin by summarising what I want to say before developing my arguments.

The cervical cancer screening programme has performed an enormously valuable service in this country over the years. Tens of thousands of women's lives have been saved by it. However, it is now running up against technical limitations. Advances are being made in the science and the application of testing—especially human papilloma virus testing—that are not yet operating in the United Kingdom. I know that the Government are conducting pilot studies, but my purpose is to bring a sense of urgency to the process, and to ask whether it can be accelerated.

I have a personal and a broader reason for doing this. Earlier in the summer I lost my wife, whom I loved very much, to cancer. As it happens it was breast cancer rather than cervical cancer, but obviously, having been through that experience, I want to ensure that all that can possibly be done will be done to stop women's lives being cut short prematurely. My wife received superb NHS treatment in the Royal Marsden hospital, as many women do. The fact is, however, that lives are being lost, and we must do anything that we can to stop that.

There is a growing campaign to focus attention on the possibilities of human papilloma virus testing. It is now a Europe-wide campaign, and some Ministers, parliamentary colleagues and European colleagues are involved in it. It is sufficiently well developed that, earlier this year, I had 5,000 separate letters from women in my constituency alone, pressing for action on this matter. There is a growing consciousness of the issue, and a growing sense of frustration at the slow progress that is being made.

I shall explain why the issue is important. Cervical cancer is a major cancer in women—the second most important for younger women. The incidence of the disease in the United Kingdom is above average in European terms. Morbidity from the disease has been falling, which clearly reflects the success of the screening programme, but it has, until recently, been rising among younger women, which reflects some growing difficulties.

The key point about this disease, as opposed to many other cancers, is that it is exceptionally amenable to early treatment. I believe that 80 per cent. of women whose cervical cancer is detected early survive, which is a very high rate. That is why the issue of screening is so important.

Smear testing in the United Kingdom has a long history—I think that it was first introduced in the 1940s. It has been well developed in this country, and I think that we are still the only European country with a full national screening programme. It is to the credit of the NHS and the Government that they introduced it and made it work. There have been considerable success stories along the way. As I mentioned, probably tens of thousands of women are alive who would not be if they had not been screened using smear tests.

However, it became apparent a few years ago that there have been limitations. This was all brought to a head in the 1998 report by the Public Accounts Committee, which revealed the many limitations of the screening programme that were beginning to pile up. These included human fallibility, lack of staffing, failures in the cytology process, numerous cases of litigation against the NHS—in particular, scandals associated with hospitals such as the Kent and Canterbury hospital—and so on.

The Government have addressed these issues, and I do not want to dwell on them. This is part of the history of the smear test as it has developed, and the limitations are now reasonably well understood, in terms of the lack of training, the lack of staff numbers among cytologists, and the fact that a significant number of women are still being missed by the test, many of whom are on low incomes or in ethnic minority groups.

I do not want to dwell on those issues, however. I want to focus on the particular problems associated with the testing itself. The problem is that the smear test is highly imperfect. Even the most optimistic assessments judge that 20 per cent. of the tests are wrong. There is some argument about whether it is 20 per cent., 30 per cent., or 40 per cent., but substantial numbers of women who are tested and found to be clear none the less develop the disease. That is due to the limitations of the technology.

I believe that about 1,200 women a year die from cervical cancer, despite the screening process. About half those women have been fully tested—in other words, they participated fully in the screening process and there were no failures by the people carrying out the tests. What has happened has been due simply to a deficiency in the technology. That is the issue on which we need to focus.

In recent years, there has been a growing understanding of what causes the disease. Uniquely among cancers, it is caused by a virus, known as the human papilloma virus or HPV. There is also a growing understanding that the virus can be detected. When I started researching this debate, I was surprised at the extent to which that was well known years ago. Professor Jack Cusick, one of the leading practitioners from the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, was publishing on this subject in the British cancer journals in about 1994 and 1995. We are not dealing with entirely new science. We are dealing with science that is well known and well understood.

There has been a lot of research and testing, particularly in the United States. I do not claim to be a medical scientist, but I have tried to understand as best I can some of the recent literature. In February, a major study was published in "Journal of the National Cancer Institute" in the United States—the ASCUS/LSIL triage study, a summary of a great deal of testing in pilot studies in the United States, which advanced not only the science, but the understanding of how testing can operate and be made to work.

Knowledge is spreading widely in Europe. The *European Journal for Infectious and Immunological Diseases in Obstetrics and Gynaecology* published a study earlier this year by a group of German scientists, which again advanced knowledge and understanding of the subject. What can now be said categorically is that the cause of the disease is understood: it comes from the virus. That virus can be detected with 100 per cent. certainty, as opposed to the 80 per cent. or less certainty that comes from the smear test.

I understand that merely achieving a scientific breakthrough is not a sufficient condition for adoption by the NHS. The NHS rightly has to go through a process of evaluation. The economics are always important. I have on occasions pressed for early introduction, for example, of drugs to deal with Alzheimer's, and the answer comes back from Ministers, "We understand that it will clearly help a lot of people, but it is very costly and we have to look at the costs and benefits."

What is unique about the HPV screening controversy is that it is an example of a new advance that would save, as opposed to cost, large amounts of money. That is not merely my assertion. A lot of technical literature supports that view, with which I am sure the Minister's Department is familiar. Articles were published as early as 1997 by Professor Cusick and his collaborator Sasieni. The *British Journal of Cancer* published an article in the same year by a Dutch researcher, Van Ballgooijan. Jeremy Holmes of the Economists Advisory Group was also involved. They have all done the sums and come to some careful conclusions about the benefits that the NHS would derive from adopting the HPV testing system. It would be possible to increase the length of time that women need to spend before the screening from three to five years, and there would be fewer inadequate tests: the figure could be cut from 8 per cent. to 1 per cent. That means fewer women being recalled and less need for testing, quite apart from the anxiety that that causes the women concerned.

There would be a considerable reduction in the NHS time and resources involved. Moreover—and perhaps most important—fewer women would attract the disease, and there would be less need for extensive and indeed painful therapies. The research suggests that the NHS would probably save £30 million a year by adopting HPV testing—a quarter of the whole cost of the screening programme. There are probably very few examples in modern medicine where the benefit-cost ratio of a new programme is so clear cut.

That brings us to why testing is not happening. A controversy has run over the years as to why things have not moved more quickly under the Government of the day—primarily this Government, because people became aware of the problem after 1997. One of my colleagues in the House of Lords, Lord Clement-Jones, secured a debate on the issue in the early part of 1999 and raised many of the questions that I raise now, which makes me even more impatient to understand why there has been a hiatus.

I understand that the Government have brought in a series of pilot tests in three regions and that they are due to be finished at the end of 2002. Presumably, there will then be a period of evaluation until early 2003, and a decision will be made roughly two years from now. Perhaps the Minister can clarify whether that would be the timing and what the roll-out time would be to make the programme universal, were it established that it was sound.

First, I have to ask why this is necessary. As someone with scientific training, I understand the importance of pilot studies, but many pilot studies have been carried out in the United States involving not only an enormous amount of laboratory work, but extensive field testing. Beyond that, health practitioners in the United States have already been given guidance on how to administer the test, so they are several years ahead of us. I appreciate that that applies not only to the UK, but to the whole of western Europe.

I am perplexed about why we cannot adopt American best practice. I appreciate that we have a universal programme and that, in that sense, ours is a better system, but given that the technology and the economics have been proved, I cannot understand why we cannot move on more quickly.

My second question relates to the British pilot testing system. I understand that it deals only with borderline cases. As the HPV test has potential for universal screening to be run alongside the smear test, why is it not being undertaken on all women in a particular region of the country? Why is it being carried out in this rather narrow, circumscribed way?

My third question also relates to the British pilot. I understand that the Scottish Executive have recently curtailed funding for various pilot studies in Scotland. I appreciate that it is not the Minister's responsibility; indeed the Scottish Executive are the joint responsibility of our two parties, so this is not a party political point. However, for whatever reason, the Scottish Executive have chosen to curtail research. That merely adds to the feeling of many campaigners and specialists in this field that the United Kingdom is not as committed as it could be to bringing this new testing system on stream.

In conclusion, I should like to quote an extract from what my colleague in the House of Lords said about this two and a half years ago. Almost exactly the same points were being made then, so it is not a novel problem. He said:

"The FDA in the United States has already undertaken extensive trials. The test is in use for the US for borderline cases. There are trials in a number of other EU countries. Here in the UK the ICRF has a trial involving 12,000 women due to be completed next year."

That was in 2000.

"It is already in use in Marie Stopes clinics, yet the official trials seem to be destined to take for ever . . . Yet this is a diagnostic tool to supplement an existing test, not a major new treatment. Why cannot we rely on the ICRF trials when they are complete? That does not seem to be displaying the same sense of urgency as the Dutch Government, for instance, who are pressing for interim results."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 March 1999; Vol.597, c.1781-2.]

I could repeat the same message today.

At first sight, there seems to be little reason for holding back. There are good humane reasons in terms of the health of women as well as economic reasons for progressing fast. Will the Minister explain why it is necessary to go through this rather protracted process? When is the earliest end point to the process of testing that she can envisage? Can she give us an assurance that if—as seems to be the case—knowledge and understanding are advancing rapidly, this process of testing can be short-circuited in order to save hundreds of unnecessary deaths?

7.38 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) for raising this important subject. I am sure that all hon. Members will join me in offering him our condolences. He clearly has a personal commitment to this subject and an understanding of the issues.

[Jacqui Smith]

He outlined the key point, which is to ensure that our programmes are effective and that we do what is necessary to safeguard women from cervical cancer to the best of our ability.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we already have significance evidence that the NHS cervical screening programme is successful. Research has shown that it saves about 1,300 lives per year. It was directly responsible for a 43 per cent. drop in the incidence of cervical cancer between 1988 and 1997, and more than 8,250 lives were saved over the same period. In 2000–01, 83 per cent. of eligible women in England had had a test in the previous five years, 3.6 million women were screened and laboratories reported 4.1 million tests. I pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of cervical screening staff across the country.

Organised screening, as the hon. Gentleman said, is available nationwide only in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. In 1988, the UK was the first country in the now European Union, and one of the first in the world, to launch a nationwide cervical cancer screening programme based on computerised call and recall. The UK programme is among the best in terms of numbers. The Dutch programme is similarly nationwide and organised, but no other country screens as many women per year as the UK, where coverage is highest.

Cervical screening is the most reliable method of detecting changes to the cervix that, if left untreated, may go on to develop into cervical cancer. However, like all screening techniques, it is not perfect. There is a measure of interpretation, as the hon. Gentleman said, based on the expert judgment of the individual cytoscreeners involved in assessing abnormalities in screening samples. In a proportion of cases, the abnormalities will be so slight that different cytoscreeners could reach different decisions as to the correct result. In addition, the test itself is not 100 per cent. sensitive.

Women invited for cervical screening need to understand the potential benefits and limitations, in order to be able to make an informed choice about whether they wish to proceed. Information provided to women must be honest, comprehensive and understandable. That is why the NHS cancer plan said that all women will receive a national information leaflet on cervical screening when they are invited to attend. The new leaflets will be launched at the end of this month, and are based on research, including discussions with a diverse range of women. The development of the national leaflets was overseen by the Advisory Committee on Cervical Screening and the national cancer director.

The new screening leaflets are an important step under the new principle of openness in the NHS to which we are all committed. For the first time, women will be given all the facts about cervical screening and a real informed choice about whether they wish to be screened.

The hon. Gentleman concentrated on the opportunities provided by developments in technology, and I want to follow him in that. New developments may help to address some of the problems surrounding cervical screening. That is why the Government are currently piloting both liquid-based cytology and human papilloma virus testing in the cervical screening programme.

The two pilots are related. Liquid-based cytology techniques offer a new way to prepare screening test samples for examination in the laboratory. By offering a new way of storing and preparing cervical samples, liquid-based cytology may improve the quality of the cervical screening test. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has suggested that introducing liquid-based cytology could increase the sensitivity of slides, reduce the number of unsatisfactory tests and improve the speed with which slides can be read. The LBC arm of the pilot is designed to collect information on the effect, costs and practical implications of introducing LBC technology into the cervical screening programme.

As the hon. Gentleman said, human papilloma viruses are a group of 80 viruses known to be implicated in 99 per cent. of cervical cancers. In most women, the virus is cleared naturally by the immune system, but in some it persists and goes on to cause cervical abnormalities that, if left untreated, may develop into cervical cancer.

The hon. Gentleman's questions about the speed and effectiveness of HPV screening partly come down to whether we are talking about that screening as a primary screening method or as a method of sorting, following a smear test that suggests a mild or borderline case. I wish to address both of those issues.

As yet, there is no evidence to support the use of HPV testing as a primary screening tool. The health technology assessment review of research into HPV testing, published in September 1999, concluded that the evidence might support testing for HPV only in certain situations, such as the management of mild and borderline screening tests. The HPV arm of the pilot is therefore using HPV testing as triage—sorting—for women with mild or borderline test results to provide stronger evidence on which women should return for further screening and how soon.

We are not ignoring the issue of primary screening. St Mary's hospital in Manchester is co-ordinating a study to investigate HPV as a primary screening method. The study began in January 2001 and will take six years, including the following up of the data, and will involve 28,000 samples. The Department of Health is funding equipment for the study, at a cost of £90,000.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I was interested to hear the Minister's comments about the Manchester trial, because I have also been in contact with the people there. Is she aware that a significant part of the trial includes the examination of the stigma associated with cervical cancer, of the resultant depression when women believe that they have contracted cervical cancer, and of the expensive prescribing of anti-depressants that results? Is she also aware that significant bodies of medical research suggest that HPV testing can be used as a predictive measure to identify those women at particular risk of developing cervical cancer and enable follow-up work to be done?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Lady makes important points about the range of the research, the complexity and implications of screening programmes—for diagnosis and the effects on the women involved—and the procedures before and after diagnosis that we need to ensure are in place.

The hon. Member for Twickenham raised the issue of the timing of the pilots. It is beneficial to pilot the HPV testing and the liquid-based cytology together, which is

one of the reasons for the timing; HPV testing can be carried out on the original LBC slide, whereas at present a woman would need to be called in for a separate HPV test.

The pilot of HPV testing as triage and of liquid-based cytology began in April 2001 at three sites in Newcastle, Norfolk and Norwich and north Bristol after the selected sites had addressed the issues of training and installation of equipment. Results of the liquid-based cytology arm of the pilot should be available early next year. The HPV arm of the pilot will end in September 2002. Analysis of the data on HPV will begin in October 2002, and the report on the evaluation of the HPV arm of the pilot will be submitted in early 2003. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the NHS cancer plan set out the commitment that, if the pilots prove successful, the Government will fund implementation of the programme across the NHS.

In addition to piloting the new technologies, strict quality assurance operates across the cervical screening programme, at a cost of £3.5 million a year. Quality assurance is an important part of the cervical screening programme. It acts as a safety lever by maintaining standards and continuing improvement in the performance of all aspects of cervical screening in order to ensure that women have access to a high-quality service wherever they live.

The performance of laboratories is kept under close review. They are subject to rigorous external quality assurance procedures. The procedures aim to spot potential problems before they become serious and quickly to identify solutions. This, together with the ever-increasing expertise of screening staff, means that the observed benefit of cervical screening is set to continue to increase.

The improvements in cervical screening would not be achievable without investment in cancer staff. Cervical screening staff are an important group and we will invest to support their continuing development. Arrangements for new ways of working are under development. They will explore the potential for an advanced practitioner grade, which will lead to a more flexible work force. New pay arrangements to support this measure have now been agreed with staff representatives.

In conclusion, I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham for raising this important subject. The NHS cervical screening programme is successful, enabling us to identify and support women. It has enabled us to diagnose early and to save women's lives. However, we need to ensure that as we develop the technology, we introduce it into the screening system effectively and appropriately. We are committed to ensuring that we maintain a high quality of monitoring and staff development.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the issue is not only of personal importance to him, but of significant importance to the NHS, and one that we are committed to continue to develop.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Eight o'clock.

Corrections

Official Report, 23 October 2001: In col. 130, "**Mr. Foster**" should read "**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath)"

In col. 136, delete "**The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar)**" and insert "**The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson)**"

House of Commons

Friday 26 October 2001

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.33 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Winning the ballot for private Members' Bills is like winning the national lottery, except that one does not get the money. However, one does get all the begging letters. Coming out of the Committee Room where I had gone to see which poor soul had come top in the ballot, I felt rather like someone coming into a mediaeval court, having petitions thrust into my hand.

Sometimes I feel that we in this place make too many laws and regulations, and the idea of adding to the burden on our population was a little much for me. However, I decided that deregulating was not my job—nor would I be capable of it—so I thought carefully about the Bill that I wanted to introduce. Ever since I was very young, I have had a passionate interest in wildlife and wildlife conservation, so despite the many obvious and worthy candidates for a Bill, I decided on the present subject.

The Bill fills a significant gap in protection for the marine environment. I should say at the outset that the Bill should not be the final word: the Government need to take action on a much wider scale than my Bill would hope to achieve. Indeed, they have made such statements, and we in all parts of the House will make sure that they keep their word. A comprehensive approach is needed to marine management and conservation, including integrated planning and strategic environmental assessment. I hope that the Government's working group reviewing marine nature conservation will take matters forward.

I introduced the Bill because I passionately believe that the marine environment needs better protection. The postbags of parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House, which are full of letters from constituents supporting my Bill, indicate that the wider public share that passion. That may to some extent be fuelled by the BBC's excellent series "The Blue Planet".

At least half of the United Kingdom's biodiversity is found in the marine environment, but existing laws do not adequately address its protection and management. Protection for marine habitats and species is far weaker than that for their equivalents on land, where protection was recently further improved by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The UK has international commitments to protect marine wildlife through the habitats and birds directive and the Ospar convention. However, there is no domestic legislation to underpin those obligations or for us to meet our national aspirations to conserve wildlife.

For too long, the marine environment has been the Cinderella of wildlife conservation—a case of out of sight, out of mind. Surely it is a matter of great concern that such sensitive areas as Lyme bay in Dorset are unprotected, and that in areas where dolphins, porpoises, puffins and gannets can be found, their habitats are still vulnerable.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): When I was Northern Ireland Minister looking after agriculture and environment, we found that to be the case with Strangford lough, where it was difficult to find the powers to stop beam trawlers wrecking the lough bed. Proposals such as those that my hon. Friend is making would be useful not only outside territorial waters, but inside them.

Mr. Randall: I thank my hon. Friend. He will know that Strangford lough is now a marine nature reserve and the Bill does not deal with Northern Ireland, but the point is well made. Such areas need protection.

Coastal policy guidance states that sites of special scientific interest do not normally extend below the mean low water mark but can do so if there is local authority jurisdiction. That means in general that SSSIs—a land-based designation—are doing very little for the marine environment. My hon. Friend referred to Strangford lough, which is one of three marine nature reserves. They can be designated in coastal waters out to a distance of three nautical miles. However, since 1981 only those three marine nature reserves have been designated, the other two being Lundy and Skomer. The Government have accepted that the concept of MNRs

"has not been as successful as had been hoped"

and concluded that

"procedures are regarded as complex and unwieldy, and in need of an administrative overhaul".

Since the passage of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, successive Governments have undertaken reviews which have identified the need to address shortfalls in the Act with respect to the marine environment. I am a relatively new Member, but I understand that in 1985 the Environment Select Committee suggested that one solution might be to extend the SSSI provisions of the Act to marine sites. In 1992, the Committee recommended that the Government address the issue of how to protect sites of marine conservation importance, and considered an option to extend SSSI-type mechanisms below the low water mark.

In 1999, the House of Lords Committee Select Committee on the European Union concluded that a new approach was required to protect sites in the marine environment and that the relevant provisions of the 1981 Act should be reviewed to provide workable and effective protection for important marine areas of nature conservation interest.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) and I were active members of the Committee that considered what became the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

We struggled hour after hour to wring out a concession for marine nature reserves. The hon. Gentleman is right when he says that the outcome has been a disappointment. Is part of the disappointment the fact that insufficient effort has been made to get local people, especially the fishing community, to accept MNRs in areas such as Loch Sween? I know that that is a Scottish example.

Mr. Randall: I am sure that there was concern in the past, and I am sure that local people will be concerned about in today's environment. There is usually some reaction. During consultation on the Bill, we did not find significant local opposition. It might be true that the world has moved on—people are much more aware now of the importance of such sites and their responsibilities to them.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, there is an important economic benefit in being near areas of marine importance, as with any wildlife area. There is increasing eco-tourism, and people want to visit pleasant places to enjoy them. The Government responded to recommendations by establishing the review of the marine nature conservation group, which was chaired by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Earlier this year, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs submitted an interim report to Ministers that was based on work and discussions with the group. The membership of the group was a broad representation of interest groups, Government Departments and conservation bodies. The report concluded that only retention of the status quo seemed likely to require no statutory action. New duties imposed on DEFRA and the National Assembly for Wales, which apply throughout the territorial waters of England and Wales, coupled with new duties on public bodies, open the possibility of protecting sites and marine waters. I agree entirely with the marine nature conservation group's view that retention of the status quo is not desirable, which is why I have introduced the Bill.

I wanted there to be an inclusive process. At the end of July, I put my initial proposals out for wide consultation. Those consulted included the participants in the Government's review of the marine nature conservation working group, including ports, fishing organisations, energy interests and leisure interests. The response to the consultation paper was excellent. Most respondents agreed on the need for nationally important marine sites to be designated, although views on how to go about that varied.

I listened to the respondents' views and took account of them. For example, my initial idea of simply extending SSSIs into the marine environment was dropped in favour of something specifically designed for the marine environment. The idea of introducing an offence of recklessness for users was dropped. I have been grateful for the assistance of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds both in helping me to consult and assisting me in drafting the Bill. I mention particularly Duncan Huggett, Ben Stafford and Sharon Thompson. I thank also David Lloyd of the Public Bill Office, who was waiting for an addition to his family. I am pleased to say that that addition has arrived safely.

I put on record also my grateful thanks to DEFRA, which has helped me to define what should be achievable. I was happy that the Department undertook a more joined-up approach by consulting other Departments.

There are extensive explanatory notes, which I hope will be helpful to Members in understanding the intention behind the Bill.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): My constituency has an SSSI for wildfowl. Indeed, it is an area where there is a great variety of wildfowl. There are, however, quite promising environmental proposals for wind farms, which would be adjacent to the SSSI. As I understand it, the intention behind the Bill is not to have no development in a marine environment but to have controlled and sensitive development, and it will not necessarily prevent wind farm development out at sea. Is my understanding correct?

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head. I have a feeling that there is some confusion in the wider world. It is thought by some that the Bill will mean no further economic development and no wind farms, for example. That is untrue. The Bill will lay down a designation of an area to ensure that if any development is considered, its importance as a scientific site will be taken into consideration.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Is there not an argument that the Bill would assist the rational development of offshore wind farms? It would make possible an agreed protocol for the development of wind farms. At present, the development of onshore and offshore wind farms is fraught with controversy. Sometimes there is irrational opposition from the Ministry of Defence as well as from local protesters. Is there not an argument for supporting the Bill in that it would enable a more rational, planned development of renewable energy in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Randall: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making a valid point. Some of the objections to the Bill stem from a misunderstanding of the objectives that lie behind it and of what will be achieved by it. I think that those who support the Bill would also support the idea of renewable energy sources. In doing one thing, it would be foolish to shut off something else in which we all have a great interest. I shall possibly touch on wind farms later in my remarks.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I take up the point about renewable energy and offshore wind farm development. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is well aware that the British Wind Energy Association has been clearly opposed to his Bill. I support what the hon. Gentleman is trying to do, but does he recognise that SSSIs—the terrestrial equivalent of what he is trying to achieve—have been used by onshore objectors to wind farm projects as a way of delaying, stalling and thwarting onshore wind farm proposals? Should the House agree to the Bill being considered in Committee, will he agree to meet representatives of the British Wind Energy Association and to address their concerns before the Bill makes further progress?

Mr. Randall: The British Wind Energy Association is one of the groups that I consulted. Its representatives

expressed the notion that there was absolutely no need for this sort of Bill. It was the only organisation to express that view.

Of course I will meet representatives of the BWEA. My approach throughout, and that of the RSPB, for example, which helped me to prepare the Bill, has been to consult. However, there must always be a compromise. I would not necessarily wish to place wind farms or any other development over and above a scientific interest. Neither would I say that a scientific interest should be placed first. That is why the Bill provides that the Secretary of State has ultimate power. I hope that my commitment to meet BWEA representatives and to consider in Committee any amendments that they may propose will go a long way to sorting out any problems that they have.

It may be useful if I point out what my Bill does not do: it does not overlap with terrestrial SSSIs or duplicate the international designations of special areas of conservation or special protection areas; it does not give English Nature or the Countryside Council for Wales the power to designate sites without any further safeguards; it does not give new powers to anyone to prevent development in the marine environment and it certainly does not impose further restrictions on port expansion—most major ports already operate within internationally important wildlife sites; and it does not provide any new powers to constrain existing uses of the marine environment, such as fisheries, except when powers to manage those activities do not exist.

Hon. Members may find it useful if I gave a couple examples of candidate sites. Worthing lumps is an area which my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) probably knows well. It is an expanse of sub-tidal chalk cliff exposures with rich wildlife, including the black tar sponge, leopard-spotted gobies, tompot blennies and, of course, the lesser spotted dogfish. The Bracklesham balls are also off the coast of West Sussex. Sites that have been identified are widely scattered, but those in West Sussex have interesting names. The Bracklesham balls is an area of spherical and hemispherical boulders embedded in the sea bed. It is much beloved of anemones, soft corals, sponges and sea squirts.

Economic benefits of designating and protecting areas in the marine environment will help to increase fish stocks and tourism revenue and will create safer tourism. For example, I discovered that the diving fraternity is concerned about ghost nets—drifting fishing nets—in which divers can get entangled. Hopefully, the designation will result in those areas being cleaned up.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Will the hon. Gentleman tell those of us who have not followed the arguments in this field in as much detail as he has why he is introducing separate legislation, rather than including his proposals in the existing SSSI legislation?

Mr. Randall: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not hear that in fact that was my original intention. However, after consulting all the interested parties, it seemed that terrestrial designation—things like marking the location of a site—is much easier on land than at sea, so a separate designation is more appropriate.

I am pleased that several Ministers have recently acknowledged the importance of protecting the marine environment; I therefore hope that they will support the provisions in the Bill that do so. During the passage of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, Lord Whitty, speaking on behalf of the Government in the House of Lords, said:

> "I accept that there has been a lack of progress on designating marine conservation areas, as compared with land-based ones".

I agree wholeheartedly with that. Referring to the review of marine nature conservation, Lord Whitty said:

> "We now have the will to pursue an increase in identification and powers to enforce marine conservation areas of all kinds".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 October 2000; Vol. 617, c. 840-41.]

In March 2001, the Prime Minister said:

> "We will be launching measures to improve marine conservation here and abroad".

The commitment of the Minister for the Environment is well known, and I should like to thank him on the record for what he is doing for marine conservation. Only on Wednesday evening, at the RSPB's parliamentary reception, which many of my colleagues attended, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), paid tribute to the work that the RSPB and I have done on the Bill. He said that he looked forward to working with me; I certainly look forward to working with him.

This week, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, speaking at the Royal Horticultural Halls, said:

> "Biodiversity too is an area where the new department can make a real difference . . . At least half of our biodiversity is found in our oceans and seas. Protecting marine areas around the UK and more widely will be one of our key goals."

I am happy to find something on which I can agree with the Government wholeheartedly.

I am sure that the Government will welcome the opportunity to move towards that key goal. However, I have seen signs in the last 24 hours that seem to suggest that their interest in the marine environment has gone from lukewarm to cold. If that is the case, my colleagues on both sides of the House, our many constituents who have expressed interest in and support for the Bill and I would be grateful if the Minister would explain the Government's objection.

Mr. Dalyell: Who is the sea squirt that is causing the trouble?

Mr. Randall: I am not sure that it is a sea squirt; I think that it is a much larger beast that is beached a little further down Whitehall. I still hope to persuade the Government to support the Bill, so I do not want to finger anybody at this point, but it may well be a spotted blenny.

If there are Government objections to the Bill, I should be grateful to be told what they are. I have approached the measure in the mood of trying to consult and make sure that we get good legislation; I do not want bad legislation or something that, perhaps, is thoroughly worthy but causes problems for interest groups. I come from a business background and, as I said at the outset, sometimes regulations do not help the economic environment. If there are problems, such as those suggested by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) with regard to wind farms, I would be willing to

[Mr. Randall]

discuss them in Committee. If Second Reading is completed, I am sure that many concerns could be looked at; I approach that with an open mind.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): My hon. Friend talked about economic interest. Obviously, inshore fisheries are a crucial economic interest. Will he come to that point in a moment? What consultations and discussions has he had with those bodies?

Mr. Randall: By and large, the fisheries have welcomed the Bill because they realise the great importance of conserving fish stocks; it will not be a problem for them in any way. Indeed, the Under-Secretary of State, who has a great deal of expertise in the fisheries directorate—not always the best directorate to be in charge of, hon. Members may agree—said he believes that fisheries will welcome the measure. I am pleased about that.

I know that many Members wish to speak. Our debate will be interrupted for an important statement and, at a time when we have international concerns and worries, people may feel that marine conservation is not the most important matter. However, conserving our environment for future generations is every bit as important as current problems. I am sure that the Government will welcome the opportunity to move towards achieving one key goal of their biodiversity policy now. The Bill will allow them to do that and I commend it to the House.

9.59 am

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on his good fortune in coming first in the ballot and on all the hard work that he has done to get the Bill to this stage. Let me say very firmly that I hope that it succeeds in getting on to the statute book.

The United Kingdom has a pretty appalling record of neglecting the natural environment during the 19th and 20th centuries. During the 20th century, we gradually learned how to protect the land, but our record on the sea is still appalling. The view is that we can tip almost anything into it and try to extract anything from it. It is seen as a sort of piggy bank without a bottom, or a dustbin that never has to be emptied. We must change that attitude, and this Bill could achieve much in that regard.

My hon. Friend the Father of the House referred to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Along with one or two other hon. Members, he and I kept the Standing Committee that considered the Wildlife and Countryside Bill sitting for long hours. Eventually, we were offered a sop. We were told that, if we finished reasonably early, the idea of marine nature reserves would be included in the Bill. We got that sop, but nothing happened for about 15 years. The Government had the powers, but they did not designate any areas. I think that we now have three designated areas in the United Kingdom. That is a very sad record of inactivity, especially as, under Governments formed by each of the main political parties, we were making pretty good progress on land. As far as the sea was concerned, however, we made virtually no progress at all.

I do not want to make a long speech, as I am well aware of what is happening today, but I should like to apologise to the Whips Office. In yesterday's business questions, I suggested that the Whips might be plotting to stall the Bill today. I have been working hard to find out what was happening and I am assured that the Whips, and especially my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), have been trying very hard during the past three weeks to persuade all the Departments to agree a common-sense approach. Sadly, as I understand it, my hon. Friend has not succeeded. We are likely to hear a series of speeches made in support of the Bill, but it will probably then run out of time. That would be tragic, as I am sure that we could introduce the legislation that is needed via a private Member's Bill. As I understand it, the Government are saying that they want legislation on the matters with which the Bill deals, but perhaps not just yet, and that they need a bit more consultation. Surely consultation can occur as the Bill progresses, and now is the time for the knotty problems to be sorted out.

Piecing together the situation, I understand that the Ministry of Defence has objected to the Bill, but that those objections have been overcome and we now have its support. Allegedly, there were to be some problems with fishermen, but I understand that their objections have also been overcome. So where is the objection coming from? I am told that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is still making objections because it is alleged that people who use high-powered speedboats, go water skiing and so on are worried about the Bill. However, I am sure that negotiations could be conducted to allay their worries. It is very sad that people who have an interest in big boats do not have an interest in ensuring that the beauty of the sea can be conserved.

I understand that the Department of Trade and Industry is worried. I know that offshore oil and gas interests must also be considered—again, there are legitimate needs for pipelines and so on—but surely their concerns could be allayed in negotiations.

We have heard about people who are promoting wind farms. I very firmly believe in wind farms, but those who promote them seem to be brilliant at destroying public support. I am sure that thousands of people will be absolutely appalled if they believe that the wind farm industry has scuppered the Bill. I do not see why we cannot accommodate those with interests in wind farms. Of course, they will want to build some wind farms in the sea, and I would commend such development, but it should be possible to negotiate some way around the problem. I am told that there is also concern in ports and harbours, but surely it is not beyond the powers of negotiation to meet their needs.

The final argument that has been put to me concerns devolution. It is suggested that the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales are unhappy about the Bill. I would not like the Bill's remit to be reduced to cover England alone, but I am sure that the hon. Member for Uxbridge would be prepared to consider making such a change if it was necessary to secure its passage. All those groups say that the Bill should be blocked, but they do not have fundamental objections, and the Government have made a commitment that they want the legislation.

I do not want to take up any more time. My plea now is that we get the Bill into Committee and initiate effective negotiations. I remind the Whips and those who pull their strings that, even if the Committee stage begins and we cannot secure agreement on all the issues, there is still Report and Third Reading. But, please, let us get it moving today.

10.6 am

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I wholeheartedly support the views of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett). I welcome the Bill as a contribution to much-needed environmental protection and conservation.

It is not always necessary to have grand international conferences about environmental conservation measures, which do not always have to be introduced in huge Bills. We can introduce varied legislation that works in the same direction and helps to achieve the ultimate aims. The range of international agreements and national designations needs to be complemented by local initiatives. Private Members' Bills should be given the same support and assistance if we are to achieve the real aim of ensuring the environmental stability that we all want.

As has been mentioned, the current system of marine conservation in this country is highly inadequate, in contrast to that of conservation on land, where significant progress has been made without some of the perceived problems about which concerns were expressed when legislation was introduced. The Bill would provide much-needed protection for marine sites of special biodiversity interest.

The sea is extremely important to my constituency. In the fishing ports of Looe and Polperro it makes a significant contribution to the local economy. Sailing takes place from Saltash, Torpoint and Fowey, and there are commercial docks at Fowey and Par. I have not received a single letter from any organisation representing interests in fishing, sailing or ports in objection to the measures, of which I am sure that such organisations have been properly notified.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): The hon. Gentleman may be aware that there are also fishing interests in my south-east Essex constituency. Does he agree that small fishermen want a measure such as the Bill, as biodiversity is very much in their interests? They, more than anyone else, want to protect our marine environment.

Mr. Breed: That is absolutely correct. Many fishermen are beginning to recognise that their economic livelihood at sea will not depend only on fishing. Leisure interests—especially diving and so on—will provide a significant proportion of their work and income.

A number of areas in south-east Cornwall could benefit from the Bill, including the Eddystone rocks. Although I have been out to sea above water, I have not ventured down below, but I understand that the rocks are formed by a huge outcrop of pink granite that rises from a level sea bed in a wonderful cliff-like structure that dominates the area. The rocks are extremely important not only to fishermen, but to divers. Like other sites, they should be protected as use of the area increases. Of course, protection assists the continued use of such features. Thus, the ingredients of protection and economic well-being can be married.

Cornwall has a considerable number of wind farms. Although some may object to wind farms at sea, I suspect that many would prefer wind farm development at sea rather than on land.

Environmental protection needs to be continued, both on land and at sea. Although we are a long way behind in marine protection, we are not as far advanced in land environmental protection as we would wish. I hope that the Government will not only support the Bill today but, during this parliamentary term, introduce even more legislation to ensure stronger sustainability throughout the UK marine environment.

The Bill is a useful stepping-stone; it certainly goes in the right direction. Judging from the considerable number of letters that I have had from constituents and other residents of Cornwall, there is significant public interest in this matter. If the Government somehow prevent the Bill from proceeding, people will want clear answers about why that happened.

We require a broader range of measures to achieve real sustainability of our marine resources, but we must also encourage others in that direction. The Bill deals with measures taken in our territorial waters, but the whole subject of marine conservation needs to be further up not only our agenda but the European agenda as well.

My final point is about the growing problem of bycatches from fishing, which include porpoises, dolphins, birds, sharks and turtles. Although some of those are protected by law, the number of victims is causing concern because it is increasing, albeit inadvertently. The problem is particularly acute in the south-west approaches. Will the Government consider funding more conservation research to increase our understanding and knowledge of how bycatches occur so that we may find ways of preventing that tragic loss of marine life?

For now, I wish to give the Bill a warm welcome and I hope that it will be strongly supported today.

10.12 am

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on coming first in the ballot for private Members' Bills in this Session and on his choice of topic. My reasons for saying that are particularly strong because of my constituency, Plymouth, Sutton. I am delighted to have a chance to speak in this Second Reading debate.

I wish to discuss why the subject matter of the Bill is of growing interest and importance to our constituents, particularly those who live in Plymouth and the surrounding areas of Devon, Cornwall and the south-west peninsula. I hope then to relate that to the measures proposed in the Bill.

To most people, the seas are inaccessible and mysterious. Why should we be concerned about what we cannot see? To those hon. Members present in the Chamber, most of whom are enthusiasts, that may seem anathema, but many people do not understand these matters. They regard the seas as either grey and choppy or, when the tide is out, a load of old mud. We know little about the sea and treat it as an endless cornucopia. It is a treasure chest on the one hand and, as others have said, a carpet under which we can sweep our waste—anything and everything, from human to nuclear waste—on the other.

We reap but we do not sow. We exploit with little knowledge of what we are doing and of how it might affect the ocean ecosystems, yet 1 cu m of that unattractive load of mud contains the same amount of energy as five Mars bars. All chocoholics, including me, should take an interest in the quality of our marine

[Linda Gilroy]

environment, because seaweed extract is present in much of the chocolate that we eat. As nearly £4 billion of chocolate is eaten every year in Britain alone, we have an interest in ensuring that the environment in which seaweed grows is healthy.

We need to conserve our coastal waters because they are still richly biodiverse and still have much to offer us. We know that they are essential in the food and reproductive chains that eventually bring us food from the sea. The tiniest organisms, the plankton, have a profound influence on climate and will play an even greater role as changes in global climates accelerate. However, we need to gain a much deeper understanding of how they work; we then need to encourage public appreciation and participation through education.

If we are to do all of that, we must ensure that the marine environment is conserved—that we hold it as much in trust for tomorrow as we do the atmosphere, and the land mass and its waterways. The United Kingdom is already a world leader in marine-based research, much of which is carried out through a unique partnership in Plymouth—the Plymouth Marine Sciences Partnership, which is a world leader in research, education and, of course, conservation. It consists of five organisations: the Plymouth Marine Laboratory; the university of Plymouth; the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom; the National Marine Aquarium; and the Sir Alister Hardy Foundation for Ocean Science.

Mr. Breed: Have those organisations written to the hon. Lady to support the Bill?

Linda Gilroy: I have consulted them, and they are certainly most interested in the Bill and in all the other developments that the Government are pursuing, as well as those that form part of our manifesto commitment to the marine environment. Each organisation is independent, but works closely and often collectively to deliver world-class marine research, education and conservation.

Bob Spink: Is the hon. Lady saying that, in her opinion, those organisations would want the Bill to make progress so that the issues can be developed?

Linda Gilroy: I shall come to that in a moment, and to the views of the Devon Wildlife Trust, which has briefed me on matters that affect Plymouth sound in particular.

Mr. Dalyell: As a Member of Parliament from the other end of the country, may I just say how excellently the organisations to which my hon. Friend has referred cope with casual visitors? Our family was entranced by what we saw in Plymouth. They are to be congratulated.

Linda Gilroy: I thank my hon. Friend. I hope that he was able to visit the National Marine Aquarium, about which I shall say a few more words in a moment.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend; she has been most gracious in giving way. I know that she is an avid reader of the Plymouth *Evening Herald*. Did she see the article that appeared in it the other day about a 30 ft piece of wood on which more than a million goose barnacles were found? I understand that a 3 ft section of it has now been lodged in the National Marine Aquarium and is proving to be one of the strongest visitor attractions.

Linda Gilroy: I have indeed read about that development this week, although I have not been to the marine aquarium recently. However, I hold an annual membership and hope that I can visit it soon. I urge other hon. Members to make the journey to Plymouth, far though it is, to view the Jewels of the Sound exhibition, which has been running this summer. Some hon. Members may already have visited it.

Plymouth overlooks one of the finest natural harbours in the world and is the largest city on the UK south coast. Its maritime heritage goes back thousands of years. Some of the organisations in the partnership that I mentioned can trace their roots back well over 100 years to the middle of the 19th century. The Plymouth navigation school, which eventually evolved into the Institute of Marine Studies within Plymouth university, was founded in 1862; and the Marine Biological Association of the UK was formed in 1884 and opened its Plymouth laboratory in 1888. The 20th century saw the consolidation of Plymouth as an international centre of excellence in marine research, education and conservation with the formation of the partnership organisations.

In the 21st century that lead position will be enhanced and developed in the spirit of discovery. Society will need to grapple with the oceans' role in sustainable development, regionally and globally, and the trends in and consequences of climate change.

The oceans, with an average depth of several kilometres, cover 71 per cent. of the earth's surface. They provide the largest, mostly unexplored, living space on the planet and contribute enormously to global diversity. There is growing awareness of the need to manage the world's seas and their coastlines sustainably to ensure the maintenance of biological diversity and productivity. It is right to try to be at the forefront of developing the best possible framework for the marine conservation that the Bill's promoter envisages.

Natural stresses and those from our activities are increasingly important through the economic impacts that threaten the quality of life for communities around the world. To monitor, understand and predict those impacts, we must identify the processes and interactions that are involved, and understand the role of the oceans in the global system.

Oceans play a crucial role in many natural cycles and processes that support life on earth, controlling global weather patterns and key chemical processes in the atmosphere. The oceans sustain and dictate the shape of life on earth. However, to study, we must be able to conserve and vice versa. The Bill is therefore especially relevant to my constituency and the people who live and earn their living in it.

Independent organisations from the research, academic and education sectors in Plymouth have come together to pool expertise and resources and to increase understanding of the many questions that will help us to appreciate fully the operation of marine systems and how we can sustainably use them. That includes the

identification, development and exploitation of alternative energy sources. I was interested in the points that hon. Members made earlier about renewable energy. That is of special interest to Plymouth, which has dramatic sites where such developments could occur. Some people in Plymouth have an ambition to make it the first city to become carbon neutral. Hon. Members who understand such matters will realise the extent of that challenge.

Indeed, if it was not already possible to claim that Plymouth is now the focal point of marine sciences in the UK, it soon will be, especially as it continues to extend its influence and breadth of interest. An exciting new development is the proposed national centre for marine science and technology, which will bring the partnership together on a single site in Plymouth. This will greatly enhance the ability of the separate organisations to work together to unravel the mysteries. That will lead to greater knowledge of the oceans and how humans can interact with them without destroying them.

The centre will have a strong emphasis on outreach work in the community, drawing on the expertise of the National Marine Aquarium and the Plymouth Marine Laboratory. The new centre could become a focal point for the popular as well as the academic interpretation of the sort of marine sites that the Bill covers.

There are already strong links between the National Marine Aquarium and the renowned Eden project in Cornwall. That visitor centre is becoming a focal point for people to appreciate land-based biodiversity in all its glory. So, too, could the marine science centre build on the sound base that the National Marine Aquarium established, and prove an enjoyable and attractive showcase for the challenges of climate change, and the link between our use of energy and floods, tides, the sea and all that lies within it.

That is a major project of considerable vision and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment will take an interest in it. It could have great relevance to the Bill's provisions and to their environmentally responsible interpretation by the world at large. One of the centre's major aims is to inspire and encourage nine to 13-year-olds to take an interest in marine science and technology issues and careers.

The centre is the subject of a major bid to the Treasury for money from the capital modernisation fund. I hope my right hon. Friend will be able to lend his support to such an important scheme when it is considered by his colleagues. I know that he will understand that the technological spin-offs of such a centre can generate employment output similar to that from our successful Tamar science park. In addition to building on the experience of the National Marine Aquarium, the centre will also have at its disposal the experience of the Plymouth Marine Laboratory. It undertakes numerous projects that are linked to marine conservation and would be enhanced by the provisions that the Bill proposes. The laboratory's biodiversity group has a long and active involvement with nature conservation agencies in the United Kingdom.

In the marine environment, too little is currently known about the distribution of species and habitats for researchers to employ methods commonly used in terrestrial and freshwater habitats. Part of the laboratory's role is to contribute to understanding the distribution of species and habitats in nature and how they are affected by man's activities. The main thrust of its work is to develop methods and techniques that are useful to those who do the work that the Bill envisages, or those with regulatory responsibilities for the conservation of marine and estuarine areas.

The methods that the laboratory has developed are widely used by the Environment Agency, English Nature, wildlife trusts and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science as well as environmental consultancy companies and universities. Those methods and the associated training are marketed successfully by a spin-out company and continue to be developed as part of the laboratory's continuing core programme. The prospects for that company will be enhanced by the Bill.

The laboratory is currently celebrating because, in the past month, the National Environmental Research Council has unanimously approved its business plan for the next five years. After a difficult period, staff are excited by the prospects for their science and the exploitation of their intellectual property.

Successive Governments have already done much on marine conservation. Some hon. Members have already referred to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and its weaknesses. There is no statutory basis for regulatory bodies that operate in the marine environment; they rely on voluntary consensus and tend to be established in areas where human activities and impacts are remote or non-existent.

In addition, the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 provide for establishing special areas of conservation and special protection areas. The habitats directive is Europe's most important nature conservation measure, creating a range of safeguards for the Community's most endangered plant and animal species.

The Government's commitment to improve habitat conservation is being developed through the directive, with the help of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which is due to report to DEFRA in March 2002. It is important that the Bill takes account of that work, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us today that that will be possible. I also hope that he will comment on the work of the review working group, which was established in 1999 to evaluate the success of previous nature conservation measures, and the resultant pilot project.

The Prime Minister announced on 6 March in his speech, "Environment—the Next Steps" that the Government are committed to launching measures to improve marine conservation at home and abroad, including a series of marine stewardship reports. The first report will set out the Government's goal for integrated and sustainable management of the marine environment across the range of marine sectors. As I have said, a commitment to improve marine conservation overseas and in the UK was made in the manifesto.

I want to consider some of the Bill's possible implications for Plymouth. I am indebted to the Devon Wildlife Trust for a specific briefing on that. It is especially keen for the voice of Devon's Members of Parliament to be heard, and I am sure that it would also welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed). It has pointed out that, with the exception of two, the constituencies of all Devon Members of Parliament border the sea, and that the coast is a natural capital asset essential to tourism in the whole

[Linda Gilroy]

county. No other county has two discrete and very different coastlines to protect. I hesitate to say this, as I look at the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall, but I think that there is a marked contrast between the north and south coasts of Devon, whereas the coastlines of Cornwall have many more similarities.

The Devon Wildlife Trust has been active in marine conservation for many years. It has a team of marine experts second to none in the country; it regularly conducts sea bed surveys and monitoring in support of its marine conservation programmes; it runs two voluntary marine conservation areas at Wembury near Plymouth and on the north Devon coast around Ilfracombe; it has been involved in the Lyme bay reefs project for many years; and it has been instrumental in drawing up and agreeing voluntary conservation measures with local fishermen to protect two of the reefs, Lanes Ground and Saw Tooth Ledges. It is currently working on a similar initiative for Beer Home Ground, and supports a large team of volunteers working on the seaquest south-west project to report sightings of marine megafauna. It is in the process of developing an "estuaries for life" project for the conservation of these special habitats. Richard White, its marine conservation manager, will be well known to those who follow Select Committee inquiries into reform of the common fisheries policy.

The trust tells me that the marine life of Plymouth sound and the approaches has been well studied, and the presence of the Marine Biological Association, the Plymouth Marine Laboratory and the university of Plymouth ensures that valuable research work continues in this area. As well as work on the shore, underwater surveys are also carried out. Indeed, some of the earliest diving surveys were carried out in Wembury bay adjacent to Plymouth.

In 1993, the Devon Wildlife Trust carried out a survey to fill gaps in the knowledge of this important area, which reported:

"Plymouth Sound and its approaches were found to possess a wide variety of habitat types many of which are of high nature conservation importance."

A number of species were found that are rare in the UK, or at the limit of their natural distribution in UK waters, including seaweeds, sea slug, the yellow trumpet anemone and soft corals such as the pink sea fan. Those species were found among rich and diverse plant and animal communities. In addition to the importance of the area's marine wildlife, the estuary complex of the Tamar is valuable in its own right, providing an important feeding and breeding area for large numbers of waders and wildfowl.

The international conservation value of the wildlife in Plymouth sound and the surrounding estuaries is recognised by its designation as a European marine site under both the birds directive and the habitats and species directive.

Mr. Bellingham: The hon. Lady mentioned wildfowl and other species. What sort of wildfowl is she talking about in particular?

Linda Gilroy: There is a wide range of wildfowl. As a result of these designations, English Nature has drawn up conservation objectives for the area.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the hon. Lady not know?

Linda Gilroy: I do, but I am not going to stop.

Those objectives are implemented through a combination of management plans for the Tamar estuaries complex, the Wembury voluntary marine conservation area and the Yealm estuary, which together cover the geographical extent of the European marine site. The Devon Wildlife Trust sits on the advisory groups for the management of the Tamar and Yealm estuaries, and manages the Wembury voluntary marine conservation area.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): My hon. Friend the Member for North–West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) made an important point about wildfowl. It would be helpful if you could explain to the House which wildfowl you are talking about and how you feel—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman must refer to other hon. Members in the third person.

Linda Gilroy: As I said, these points were made to me by the Devon Wildlife Trust. My key interest in this subject arises from my close association with the National Marine Aquarium. I am more familiar with the flora and fauna in the sound, but I trust that through my developing association with the Devon Wildlife Trust I will learn a great deal more about the birdlife in both estuaries that surround my constituency.

The Bill establishes a framework for the notification of sites of importance for marine biodiversity, geology or physiography, and for the setting of conservation objectives for those sites. The Bill is unlikely to have any effect on the management of those areas of Plymouth sound already designated as European marine sites. The initial designation excluded some important habitat features, but a recent review has addressed that problem, so current conservation objectives cover all key marine habitats in the area.

However, the Bill would allow the notification of some important areas of rocky reef habitat in the approaches to Plymouth sound that fall outside the current boundaries of the European marine site. The reef habitats support some unique seabed communities, and include dense beds of pink sea fan, which is a species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. As a result, the wildlife trusts have suggested an extension of the proposed boundaries in our response to the original Government consultation on the designation of coastal and marine sites in 1995.

The Bill would enable English Nature to notify and set conservation objectives for those sites that remain outside the current boundaries of the European marine site. In the wider context, the Bill would enable the notification of new marine sites of importance for biodiversity, and as such would add to the effectiveness of site-based conservation in the marine environment. However, there are limits to what could be achieved by this site-based approach alone, and a wider approach to marine management is required. In addition, we have seen in Devon that the emphasis on specific sites has tended to divert resources from other areas that are just as important for biodiversity, but which fall outside the network of protected sites.

The wildlife trusts, including the Devon Wildlife Trust, are calling for a significant improvement in the way we manage the activities and demands that we make on the

marine environment. Ideally they would like the Government to publish a White Paper on an integrated approach to marine policy and management. An aspect of that approach would be a marine Act to provide the framework for legislation to manage our use of marine resources and provide protection for wildlife and habitats. Such a new approach would improve on previous regulation by integrating the management of the full range of activities that take place at sea, to which a number of hon. Members have referred.

The trusts see the Bill, which aims to protect wildlife and habitats within territorial waters, as one step towards achieving the wide range of improvements that are needed if our seas are to receive the protection and management they deserve. I look forward to discussing with them the outcome of today's debate.

I hope, too, that the trusts will confirm that there could be some benefit in protecting seahorses, which I am keen to see. The National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth is home to the largest collection of seahorse species in the world. Working in collaboration with the university of Plymouth, the NMA carries out research into the diets and consequent growth of seahorses with a view to captive breeding and rearing as a means of eventually minimising the pressure on wild specimens that results from the oriental medicine trade and other forms of exploitation.

Seahorses are particularly susceptible to disturbance of coastal habitats, as they are generally regarded as shallow water species with restricted habitat preferences, such as sea grass beds. The status of the two UK seahorse species is largely unknown, although it is generally felt that they are threatened by a variety of human actions that affect coastal waters. The two species are Hippocampus hippocampus, the short-snouted seahorse, and Hippocampus guttulatus, the long-snouted seahorse.

The south-west region is geographically one of the UK's largest and most sparse. It contains 60 per cent. of England's heritage coastline. It is one of the most rapidly growing regions, due largely to inward migration arising from its attractive environment. We have two national parks on land and parts or all of 12 areas of outstanding natural beauty. Almost a quarter of England's listed buildings are there, as well as more than 1,200 conservation areas. Parts of the region have been designated as special protection areas because of the wildlife and wetlands found there.

Developing the infrastructure for marine conservation can only further enhance the environmental attractions of our region. Indeed, the environment has been identified as one of the key drivers of the regional economy from a number of perspectives. Undoubtedly, a strength of the region is the attraction that a good-quality environment generates, both in its direct impact on tourism and as an attractive location for business.

Mr. Bellingham: The hon. Lady mentions SSSIs in Devon. Which ones does she have in mind in particular?

Linda Gilroy: The flatlands around Torbay. I have forgotten their exact name at the moment, but, as I have said, the marine environment represents the main thrust of the Bill and my interest. I am also representing the views that the Devon Wildlife Trust has expressed to me, and I look forward to developing with the trust a greater knowledge of those wetlands and the birdlife in my area. I have been birdwatching only once in Devon, when I visited the birdwatching area at Dawlish warren, with which the hon. Gentleman may be familiar.

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Does the hon. Lady support the Bill; or, having spoken for 30 minutes, is she really trying to talk it out?

Linda Gilroy: I have almost reached a conclusion. I have been representing very significant interests, as the right hon. Lady will understand, and trying to outline the Bill's impact on my constituency. I will come to my position on the Bill in my concluding remarks, which will be heard very shortly.

Some assessments rate the environmental protection industry as second in potential only to the information and communications technology industry. Ensuring and contributing to sustainable development is a key role for all of us, and I welcome the opportunity that debating the Bill offers to explore how we can make progress on issues of exceptional interest and importance to my constituency. I am sure that the Bill's promoter and, indeed, the Minister will be welcomed if they visit my constituency to find out more about why many people now regard Plymouth as the United Kingdom and European centre for marine science and technology.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge is to be congratulated on his choice of Bill. I am sorry not to see him in his place. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is here."] I beg his pardon. I am particularly pleased that he chose the Bill. He may remember the number that he selected in the ballot. He selected the number that I try to obtain in each ballot—usually successfully—but he just pipped me to the post this year. It was the number that secured me a place in the ballot during the first Session of the first Parliament in which I served. That, of course, involved me in the ill-fated Fireworks Bill, which has the doubtful privilege of holding the record for being the Bill that most nearly reached the statute book without actually doing so, as the last two technical amendments were being debated on its Report stage from the House of Lords when it was talked out. I wish the hon. Gentleman's Bill a better fate.

10.43 am

Virginia Bottomley: I, too, warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on his success in the ballot and, indeed, on his selection of subject. It is a matter of very great importance. I do not wish him to misunderstand my support—I am not demonstrating such abject support simply because he is my Whip. I wondered whether the Whips had anything to do with speech made by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), because we have read much in the newspapers this week about the activities of Whips in political parties, but my support for the Bill is heartfelt and sincere.

Like the hon. Lady, I also have a strong constituency interest. Given that Surrey is landlocked, it might not be thought of as an immediately obvious marine site, but

[Virginia Bottomley]

when I became a Member of Parliament the Institute of Oceanographic Sciences had its headquarters in Wormley. I am sorry that it took sight of its new Member of Parliament and moved to Southampton, but Sir Anthony Laughton and his team were extremely vigorous in their campaigning for such subjects. Of course, the institute continues to make an extremely important contribution.

I am pleased that the hon. Lady mentioned the Eden project, because one of the key aims of many of those Millennium Commission projects was, in fact, to promote sustainability and the environment. I include not only the Eden project, but many of the new forests and cycleways, and even the ill-fated dome, before it was given a dose of new Labour rhetoric, was actually a regeneration project. But the message of regeneration and protecting the environment for the new millennium echoes widely in the wider community.

The primary reason why I am so energetic about such issues is that I have the privilege to have in my constituency the United Kingdom headquarters of the World Wildlife Fund. It has made a very important contribution in raising the priority given to this subject. Robert Napier, its chief executive, leads an excellent team. I particularly mention its communications director, Perdita Hunt, an extremely good lobbyist who ensures that this subject and others are given the priority that they deserve in the House.

The WWF has been calling for some time for a significant improvement in the management of the marine environment and for the delivery of an ecosystem-wide approach. It believes that an aspect of that approach is strong legislation to protect our marine wildlife and the habitats on which it is dependent. In its view, it is also important to integrate that protection with improved legislation for the management of the wider marine environment, as that will ensure that the seas are healthy and clean.

In the WWF's judgment, the Bill provides an opportunity to stimulate parliamentary debate on the need for greater protection and management of the marine environment. It thinks that the protection that the Bill would enforce would be important to species and habitats in the territorial waters of England and Wales. Like others, it thinks that the Bill represents a first step in forging a new approach to the management of our marine environment and the economic and social resources that we gain from it. The idea that the Bill represents a first step is widely echoed.

Again, like the hon. Lady, I congratulate the wildlife trusts on their work. Surrey Wildlife Trust acknowledges the perhaps apparent anomaly in its position. It says:

"Although at first glance, this may not seem to be an issue of direct impact to the residents of Surrey, we should not overlook the impact of our lifestyle on our coastal waters, nor that many Surrey residents will be regular visitors to our beaches."

I was extremely worried to hear that one of the obstacles to the passage of the Bill is the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. I hope that it does not think that fast motorboats, jet skis and water skiing justify preventing the Bill from reaching the statute book. As someone who always spends her holidays in this country and on the Isle of Wight, in a marine environment, I hope that the DCMS will certainly tell the jet skiers, water skiers and others to leave our shores, but that view may just be a reflection of my age.

The Surrey Wildlife Trust argues that this country's system of marine conservation is extraordinarily inadequate. The Bill would provide much-needed protection to the special diversity interest of marine sites. The trust wants the Government to go further to ensure sustainability throughout the United Kingdom's marine environment and to introduce additional measures that meet those wider needs. However, it believes that the Bill should be viewed as a useful stepping-stone towards a much broader range of measures that will be required to achieve the sustainable use of marine resources.

I hope that the Minister will recognise that it is now widely appreciated that the British isles comprise island nations with a maritime heritage of which they can be proud. They also possess one of the highest diversities of marine habitats and species in any European country. It is time for the legislation that protects the marine environment to catch up with some of the interesting and important improvements in land protection.

The Minister will be well aware that, in my earlier days as a junior Environment Minister, I had some involvement in the SSSI programme. My primary concern on SSSIs now is that the A3 improvement at Hindhead should continue to ensure that that SSSI gets the protection that it needs.

Before I am called to order for straying from the subject, let me wish my hon. Friend's Bill well. I know he will be disappointed that I did not mention Worthing lumps, but I suspect that others can refer to them with more knowledge than I can.

At a time when there is often cynicism about what we debate in Parliament, and a lack of interest, many of our priorities do not seem to reflect the priorities of our generation. I think that the Bill has an important future in terms of the stewardship of our planet and the sustainability of our marine areas, and I hope that all Members will support it.

10.50 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I want to follow the important speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett). I hope that, even at this late stage, inquiries can be made into who is behind the failure to grasp the opportunity to do something about an issue that we all want something to be done about.

To establish my credentials, let me quote from *Hansard* of 27 November 1962. The passage is headed "British Territorial Waters (Undersea Development)". In Question 3 to the Prime Minister, I asked whether he would

"appoint a Minister responsible for development underneath the sea within British territorial waters".

Harold Macmillan replied "No, Sir."

Then I asked a very stupid question:

"In the light of the remarkable breaks through in marine science, is not the Prime Minister prepared to look into the future and, so to speak, beyond his own nose"—

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Young puppy!

Mr. Dalyell: Exactly.

I asked the Prime Minister to

"recognise that here is a vast potential for British exploitation in a completely new sphere of industry".

I earnestly went on:

"In particular, will not he consider the possible manufacture of marine equipment for the new sciences in areas such as the north-east of England, Northern Ireland and Scotland?"

Well, I was a young puppy.

Mr. Pound: Insolent, too.

Mr. Dalyell: Insolent—cheeky.

Mr. Pound: No change, then.

Mr. Dalyell: I was put in my place. Harold Macmillan got up and said—in an accent that I cannot imitate—

"This is not a question of looking beyond one's own nose; it is a question of looking three miles under the sea."

The House erupted at my expense.

The Prime Minister went on to give a serious answer. He said:

"I do not think that it would really help to have a single Minister in charge of these very varied methods of exploiting mineral power."

Sir James Duncan—now departed—asked:

"Would it not be enough to put the Minister of Agriculture into a skin-diver's suit?"

Macmillan replied:

"We must not impose undue strains on Ministers."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1962; Vol. 668, c. 203.]

To complete the tale, I should say that the leader of the Labour party, Hugh Gaitskell, was not at all pleased. He said that that would teach me not to ask silly questions. It was the last silly question I asked in the House.

There is, however, a serious aspect to this. May I echo the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish—although I shall express them less eloquently than he did? We naturally understand what the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), to whom a great deal of credit is due, has tried to do, and it is clear that a great many people have worked hard on this, not least the Department. If the Department is prepared to work hard and we all agree that something must be done, surely something should be done. It may not be perfect, but what on earth are House of Commons Committee stages for? Their purpose is to iron out, to allow negotiation, and to get it right.

Given the shortage of parliamentary time, I do not know whether there will ever be another opportunity in the foreseeable future for us to do what we think has to be done very soon. Following what was said by my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I beg those in charge, before 2.30 pm, to go to those who are objecting and say "Do you really know all the facts? Even if you think you do, are you entitled to put a stop to parliamentary discussion on a Bill proposed by the person who has come top of the so-called lottery?"

Responsible Bills should not be snuffed out if they are in the top five. That makes a mockery of private Members' time. I plead with those in charge to go back to Downing street, or wherever it is, and say, "For heaven's sake, change your mind. Let the House of Commons have discussions." If, at the end of the day, the position is not satisfactory, that is an entirely different matter; but the Bill should certainly not be snuffed out at this stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish said that he and I, Lord Hardy of Wath—as he now is—and Ted Graham, led by Denis Howell, had spent hours in Committee speaking at enormous length about Halvergate marshes and a number of other important subjects in order to wring out of Hector Monro and Tom King the principle of marine nature reserves. I do not think that Tom King would recall it any differently. Those in charge became exasperated. They did not want a closure on the Floor of the House, or a guillotine. Eventually, they gave way—quite honourably, but they gave way.

As my hon. Friend said, MNRs have been a terrible disappointment. Earlier I interrupted the hon. Member for Uxbridge, and I will tell him why. An MNR was proposed at Loch Sween, a beautiful loch in Argyllshire. It was ideal, almost top of the list, for an MNR.

Some years after the debate to which I have referred, I went to Loch Sween as a paying spouse with an annual visitation from the Historic Buildings Council of Scotland, of which my wife was a member. Late at night we had a reception, and after a good deal of conviviality it became clear why the MNR at Loch Sween had not gone ahead. In their cups, the locals said "Of course we do not want a marine nature reserve here. If we have one, inspectors will come." I asked "Which inspectors?" They said "The inspectors from the Inland Revenue." They did not want the tax men messing around Loch Sween, poking their noses into their business and asking awkward questions.

There are all sorts of extraneous reasons why MNRs may not have gone ahead. I hope that, following the introduction of the Bill, sense will prevail, and a great deal of trouble will be taken in proceeding with this worthwhile concept. It is vital for fish stocks, and for a number of other reasons eloquently deployed by the hon. Gentleman.

10.59 am

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): It is always a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I was delighted to hear his Macmillanesque comments of 39 years ago.

I want to speak briefly—I realise that my speech will soon be interrupted—to support my hon. Friend the Member for landlocked Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on his excellent Bill, the purpose of which, to put it simply, is to establish, protect and manage nationally important marine areas.

Of the 6,500 SSSIs, only about 300 border seas or estuarial levels, and even they do not go beyond the low tide. I believe that there is an urgent need for marine sites of special interest to be protected. I appreciate that the Bill is confined to England and Wales.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Armed Forces (Deployment)

11 am

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The House will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is in Oman. Earlier this morning, he spoke to the officers and men of headquarters 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines serving in Oman as part of Exercise Saif Sareea 2. I shall inform the House of what he said to them, but first let me say a word or two about Exercise Saif Sareea 2.

The exercise in Oman is reaching its conclusion. Although a full assessment has still to be undertaken, it is fair to say that the exercise has been remarkably successful. More than 21,500 service men and women have been involved, and I pay tribute to them. Their response to Exercise Saif Sareea was typical: for many, it was their first deployment in desert conditions, but they rose to the challenge and met the very high standards that we ask of them. Their skills, determination and professionalism place our armed forces among the very best in the world.

Exercise Saif Sareea 2 was the largest single deployment of British service personnel since the Gulf conflict. Our contribution to the exercise included a naval carrier task group, armoured and commando brigades, about 50 combat aircraft, and three of our four new C17 strategic lift aircraft. The exercise has demonstrated our close friendship with Oman and builds on the long-standing and wide-ranging defence relationship that we enjoy with that country.

We are extremely grateful to Oman for its generosity in hosting the exercise and for the tremendous co-operation at all levels that has developed between our respective armed forces. Force integration training has taken place between our respective navies and air forces and a joint live exercise comprising elements of our respective armies is now drawing to its conclusion. The exercise has proved to be an excellent opportunity to test both our personnel and our equipment in the realistic operational environment of the Omani desert.

By deploying, sustaining and exercising a joint taskforce of medium scale at considerable distance, we have demonstrated key elements of the joint rapid reaction forces concept. Moreover, we have demonstrated our ability to conduct joint and combined operations with a friendly nation in an area that is of key strategic importance. When we began planning Exercise Saif Sareea 2 some four years ago, we wanted to send a clear signal of our commitment to peace and stability in the region. I am sure that the whole House agrees that, through the dedication and skill of our armed forces, we have met that objective with enormous success.

There has been a great deal of speculation in recent weeks—most of it ill-judged and unhelpful—about diverting our forces taking part in Exercise Saif Sareea 2 to conduct operations in and around Afghanistan. We did reassign two submarines from the exercise but, as I hope I made clear earlier, Saif Sareea 2 went ahead essentially as planned. With the end of the exercise in sight, the time has come to decide what force deployments offer the right balance of capabilities to enable us to continue to play a full part in the coalition's military operations. We have rightly made a commitment to our closest ally, the United States, to stand shoulder to shoulder with that nation, and we are determined to do just that.

The House will know that our armed forces have already made a major contribution to the coalition against international terrorism. When the House last debated this grave subject on 16 October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence described our campaign aims. They remain as follows: to bring Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders to justice; to prevent Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network from posing a continuing terrorist threat; and to ensure that Afghanistan ceases to harbour and sustain international terrorism.

At that time, my right hon. Friend also described the forces that we have deployed so far. They are considerable: three submarines and 10 specialized air-to-air refuelling and reconnaissance aircraft. The roles that those forces have played, both in attacking targets in Afghanistan and in providing vital support functions to coalition strike aircraft, remain crucial. So, too, does our decision to allow the United States to use our air base at Diego Garcia.

We must now look ahead to how else we can help in defeating international terrorism. Our current forces are primarily configured to assist in the coalition's air campaign. That campaign will continue and develop over time and so must the capabilities that we assign to it. We have therefore decided to create a large and rebalanced force in the region.

That force is a concrete demonstration of our resolve to see the campaign against international terrorism through to the end. We have said that we are in this for the long haul, and we mean it. The force has therefore been designed to ensure that we are well placed to deal with a wide range of contingencies and to maintain operational flexibility for as long as necessary. It also allows us to accommodate the inevitable changes in the tempo of our military operations.

As I am sure the House recognises, I cannot go into too much detail about how we envisage the new force operating, but as I have said, it will allow us to retain considerable operational flexibility and will greatly widen the scope for future operations. What I can do is describe the forces that we will reassign to Operation Veritas from Exercise Saif Sareea 2 when the exercise finishes next week.

Those forces will comprise the following: the aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious, which will be re-equipped for helicopter operations; the assault ship HMS Fearless; a submarine presence able to launch Tomahawk missiles; the destroyer HMS Southampton; the frigate HMS Cornwall; seven Royal Fleet Auxiliaries—the RFAs Sir Tristram, Sir Percivale, Fort Victoria, Fort Rosalie, Bayleaf, Brambleleaf and Diligence; and four additional support aircraft consisting of Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft and Hercules transport planes.

In addition, some 200 men of 40 Commando Royal Marines, based in Taunton, will be aboard HMS Fearless as the lead elements of an immediately available force to help support operations. The remainder of 40 Commando—about 400 men—will return to the United Kingdom, but will be held at a high readiness to return to the theatre should our operational needs make that necessary. That arrangement will also permit us to rotate companies aboard ship and so guarantee that the whole Commando remains fresh and fully prepared for operations. That powerful force totals some 4,200 personnel in theatre. It represents a major enhancement of the coalition's capabilities.

The threat from an enemy as evil and indiscriminate as international terrorism places everyone in danger. There is no question but that a response to the events of 11 September is necessary. However, we did not take the decision to deploy those forces lightly. No Government ever enter into military operations, with the attendant risks for our service men and women, without the most careful thought.

In the current case, we are especially conscious that the reinforcements are men and women who have already completed a long and demanding exercise, and they have long been separated from their families in this country. I know that that places a great strain on both our service personnel and their families. The knowledge that loved ones are deploying on operations can only increase the anxiety, concern and strain that the service families affected must feel. We will do whatever we can to ensure that those families have the support that they need at this time.

The House will recognise that the deployment of our armed forces is a grave step. We take it in the confident knowledge that by doing so we can depend upon them to make a difference. Our armed forces are special and we are deservedly proud of them. We ask a lot from them and they will not let us down.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I thank the Minister for his statement and his courtesy in supplying a copy in advance.

I fully understand why the Secretary of State cannot be here. His visit to Oman is extremely important and obviously his visit to Saif Sareea is appreciated. Let me first reaffirm the Opposition's support for the Government's continued resolve and determination to change the Taliban Government so that they cease to sustain terrorism, root out their al-Qaeda allies and bring Osama bin Laden to justice. To falter would send a fatal signal of encouragement to the terrorists and those who sustain them, not just in Afghanistan, but around the world.

The Government have taken a serious step. Nevertheless, it is merely a decision to maintain a range of military options. Will the Minister confirm that no decisions about large-scale operational deployments in Afghanistan have been made? Will the Government reassure the House that any such decisions to commit to ground operations in Afghanistan will be based on concrete intelligence and clear and achievable objectives, thereby enabling them to define and maintain clear operational aims?

Her Majesty's Opposition will not compromise the safety of our troops by inviting irresponsible speculation, but will the Minister comment on statements given to *The New York Times* by the Chief of the Defence Staff about the nature of the operations envisaged, which he said might extend to many weeks at a time?

The Secretary of State for International Development has referred to the possible creation of so-called safe areas to assist the aid effort in Afghanistan. If that is part of the plan, is the Minister aware of the aid agencies' concern about the militarisation of the aid programme and that we must therefore win them over on that point if the strategy is to succeed?

I also welcome the Minister's reassurance that the military personnel concerned will not be left in limbo for a lengthy period, thousands of miles from their families and long after they were due to go home. If the deployment proves to be lengthy, do we have the capacity to provide for leave and will replacement forces be available when needed?

What facilities will be provided for the personnel deployed so that they can have full and regular access to telephone and e-mail contact with their families? Will the Minister confirm that every effort will be made to keep their families fully informed ahead of any announcements in the press? He will be aware of how perplexing it is when it appears that the press knows far more than those whose lives are so directly affected. I understand that families have been contacted in advance of the statement, but it follows a lengthy period of speculation which must have been extremely difficult for them.

I congratulate members of the armed forces who have made Exercise Saif Sareea such a success. Does the Minister agree that there are lessons to be learned that are of particular relevance to the logistics of a possible troop deployment in Afghanistan, and that the exercise has, as he said, also proved both the UK's capability to deploy considerable military force over very long distances and, yet again, the sheer prowess and professionalism of our armed forces? We have faith in them. We admire and are proud of them. They deserve nothing less than the unreserved support of the House.

Mr. Ingram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening comments and his closing sentiments. He raised a number of questions, which I shall deal with in turn.

I can confirm that there has been no decision for a large-scale deployment. If there is a change to that, clearly it would be based on best intelligence and what benefits could flow from such a deployment. That is how we have tackled the range of decisions that we have had to take on the campaign as it has developed.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the comments by the Chief of the Defence Staff in an article in *The New York Times*. He was rightly pointing up the changing nature of the tempo of operations and that those operations could continue for weeks at a time or be brief action. I said in my opening statement that it would be inappropriate to go into any detail on that, and the Chief of the Defence Staff did not do so in his comments to *The New York Times*. He rightly pointed out the nature of the way in which operations are likely to develop.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the humanitarian problem and comments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. There is no question but that the humanitarian problem is deep and difficult, especially for those in the area who seek to find answers and for those in the United Nations and the countries that seek to provide aid who work alongside them in the immediate area and elsewhere. The associated problem is the way in which the Taliban are frustrating so much of the movement of humanitarian aid through the country. We must ensure that there is a better environment into which to deliver the aid.

As I have made clear, the military objectives will continue. Those are the main objectives of the coalition and I have set out what we are seeking to achieve, but we are highly conscious of the importance of the humanitarian problem and the very scale of it.

[Mr. Ingram]

The hon. Gentleman also asked about leaving the military in limbo. I can give him assurances on that. We shall do our best to replace troops, given the tempo of operations as they develop, which is why 400 commandos have been returned. They will be able periodically to replace those on board, which is part of the underlying principle.

The hon. Gentleman also raised a question relating to the full welfare package which will be applied. We have made a great deal of effort to try to improve that welfare package so that those out in theatre, whether on exercise or actively deployed, can remain in close communication with their families. However, there will be times when that is simply not possible. Therefore, there is an onus on commanding officers and those who provide welfare support back home to ensure that the families are aware of what is happening.

I share the hon. Gentleman's sentiments about unhelpful speculation. The Secretary of State, to whom I have spoken this morning, made the same point to me. The press and media speculate about the numbers going in and what they will do, but there seems to be an ignorance of the reality of what happens when such comments are made. They can impact adversely on the families back home. I wish that the media would remember what speculation in the television studios and in print means to those of whom we ask so much.

There are lessons to be learned from Saif Sareea 2. It was a major exercise and it is important to refer to it. Many lessons will be learned and we can build on what we have drawn from the exercise.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I, too, thank the Minister for his courtesy in sending me a copy of his statement in advance.

I returned from Oman in the early hours of yesterday morning and I join the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), and the Minister in paying tribute to our forces there. I can tell the House that they are in good order and aware of the tasks that may be required of them. They and their families will welcome this morning's announcement because it will give them an idea of what their immediate future holds, but I must tell the Minister that they have a number of serious concerns about their equipment and I want to raise those with him.

First, after visiting 3 Commando in the desert, I must tell the House that a number of its members are sadly suffering from trench foot, because they have not been issued with desert boots. They were told that they could buy some, but they would not be issued. Can the Minister give an assurance that if they find themselves going into action in Afghanistan and if they require additional kit and equipment, they will have access to that and it will be given to them?

Secondly, there remains a grave concern about the SA80 rifle. It is well known that it has a problem in dusty and in cold conditions. It may be that both are experienced in action. Given that the Army has acquired a number of modified SA80s, which we understand are better, will they be available to the forces if required?

Finally, there has been a great deal of concern about the use of cluster bombs in the campaign. Given that they can cause a danger not only to civilians but to our own forces, which may occupy areas where they have been used, can the Minister give an assurance that we shall not deploy cluster bombs? Can he assess whether it would be possible for the Americans to use an alternative weapon?

Mr. Ingram: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his opening comments. He raised a number of issues specifically on equipment. I will give him this assurance: if our troops are being actively deployed in Afghanistan, they will be given the equipment that they need to carry out any action that they take on our behalf. I shall not enter into debate about desert boots. I, too, was in Oman a few weeks ago and I received a slightly different message, so we have lessons to learn. His question deals with the specifics of that particular exercise, which is different from operational deployment.

On the SA80 rifle and the SA80 mark 2, a modified rifle that the hon. Gentleman understands is better, I give him an absolute assurance that the weapon has been tried and tested in all extreme conditions—not by politicians, but by soldiers. They give me the absolute assurance that it is a first-class rifle. It will be made available to those in the field; we have sufficient numbers to do so.

On cluster bombs, I remind the House that this is a military campaign. Cluster bombs are part of the targeting approach being adopted by the coalition forces. The United States is dropping material that contains submunitions. They are targeted specifically: the particular weapons being used are optimised for use against armour and vehicles, usually in very concentrated numbers. That is the purpose. There is a threat on the ground, and that is how it has been judged best to tackle that.

I understand the sensitivity of the matter, but I again remind all right hon. and hon. Members that this is a military campaign. We are seeking to achieve a military objective. I know that people keep saying it, but we must never forget what happened on 11 September and what could have happened on that day: many more people—tens of thousands—could have lost their lives. The intent of that particular terrorist organisation is to carry forward their attacks on our people.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): My right hon. Friend is right to say that the deployment of British troops at any time is a grave step. Therefore, the House should reflect that and be in a sombre mood.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement has the massive support of my constituents in Middlesbrough, of the people of Teesside and of the people in our country, and that the Government's approach and determination to eradicate and eliminate global-reach, state-sponsored terrorism is right and proper? Is it not right to communicate that majority view, that massive view, in our country to those in our armed forces who are serving now and who may serve in future? Although there may be dissident and siren voices who are entitled to be heard, they should be washed out in the clamour of support for our armed services.

Mr. Ingram: I know that my hon. Friend will accept that I deeply hold the sentiments that he has expressed, and I have expressed them over recent days. It is a grave step to deploy our armed forces, whether for this country alone or as part of a coalition.

There is massive support within this country and internationally for our objectives. Everyone has realised the enormity of what we are facing. If some have not understood that, they should just examine what happened on 11 September and what flows from that. There is a need for all of us who recognise the very valuable role played by our armed forces to keep repeating that point, not just for those who are on the front line and who may be asked to make the ultimate sacrifice, but for the families in and around the areas from where the troops are deployed. They need our support; they need our genuine comfort at this time. That is why I mentioned in my statement the need to ensure that we give maximum support to families, too.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): While we all welcome the Minister's statement, does he agree that what he has announced is nothing more than a rebalancing of an existing force, when most of us had hoped that he might be coming to the House to announce a significant stepping-up in the tempo of operations and, indeed, the deployment of forces on the ground?

What has happened to HMS Ocean, the new commando carrier, which one would have expected to play a significant role? Why is it necessary to convert HMS Illustrious to a helicopter-carrying as well as Harrier-carrying ship? What possible military use could 200 men in a lead force in HMS Fearless be when the main component of the Commando is back at its home base? While I see that it is more desirable to keep troops on a long lead than a short lead, surely that is not evidence of any great desire to step up the campaign, which is what needs to be done.

Mr. Ingram: I do not want to start trading operational decision-making processes. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has considerable knowledge from both his military background and his time in the Ministry of Defence. I am sure that he will recognise that the tempo of demand can rise and fall. It is probably different from anything that we have ever faced before—what has happened in other theatres does not necessarily apply in this theatre. It is why the Chief of the Defence Staff has talked about the varying nature of the type of action that we could take and why I mention the probability of the tempo rising and falling as needs demand.

There are no plans to put large-scale troops on the ground at the present time. That is a military judgment. Obviously, that is in line with any political objectives we may also have, but these matters have to be carefully balanced.

The hon. Gentleman asked about HMS Ocean. That ship is coming back for refit, which is why it has not been retained in theatre. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me about the matter, we can get all the details to him. We do not need to get into a squabble about a particular ship. We have put a very large component of ships in the area, and we believe that that will meet our needs.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the 200 men and the total complement. I have explained that those returning home would be available for immediate deployment if the tempo increased sufficiently to require their presence there. Indeed, that will apply to any other resources we need to put into theatre if needs change.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In his opening statement, my right hon. Friend stressed our friendship with the Government of Oman. Would he care to speculate on why it appears that the Government of Oman are not prepared to allow their territory to be used as a base for operations in Afghanistan?

My right hon. Friend says that we should be conscious of certain things. I ask whether Ministers are conscious of the fact that, on Saturday 17 November, Ramadan begins. Do we have the clear, categorical assurance that there will be no military action during Ramadan? It would be absolute folly in terms of the Islamic and Arab world if we were to conduct military operations during Ramadan.

My right hon. Friend comes back on bin Laden. May it not be, as the BBC World Service seminar, which a number of us attended, suggested, that bin Laden is an elusive venture capitalist of fundamentalist beliefs? If that is the case, what about the intelligence work that should be done in Germany, Britain and America? There are a lot of people who think that the atrocity in Washington and New York was honed and finalised not in Afghanistan, but rather nearer home.

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend raised a number of questions. I shall not speculate on our relationship with Oman, because I have already set out our very close relationship with it, and I do not recognise the way in which he presented the matter.

On Ramadan, my direct answer is no, I will not state what my hon. Friend is asking. The military campaign will continue. On the nature of bin Laden and the al-Qaeda organisation, I am surprised that my hon. Friend asked that question because we have made it clear that every effort is being made to close the economic and financial aspects of that particular organisation.

To undermine an organisation's ability to raise money and use it for nefarious ends is an effective way to deal with terrorism. Every effort is being made in this country and internationally to use the best intelligence available, not just in terms of military intelligence, but also that connected with the financial institutions, to close down that aspect of the terrorist network.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I say to the Minster that I am sure that all right-thinking people will wish success to our armed forces in this most challenging and crucial enterprise on behalf of our freedom and our ultimate democracy? It is much better to employ more troops quickly now than to have a build up later because the mission has not been accomplished as swiftly or as successfully as desired. I hope that he is also bearing in mind the crucial importance of Pakistan's interests. This operation should therefore be concluded by the winter and a relief and reconstruction programme undertaken in Afghanistan to accompany our military operations.

Mr. Ingram: I cannot agree or accept what the hon. Gentleman has said about the nature of the deployment of troops and their use. We say consistently that we have taken the best advice on this and we can get no better advice than that from the chiefs of the defence staff. I would rather accept their judgment than the expression set out by the hon. Gentleman. He is right, however, about our overall objectives in Afghanistan: it is not about the destruction of that country, but about its reconstruction. That remains one of our objectives, not just from a UK

[Mr. Ingram]

or coalition perspective, but from the perspective of the international community. That is why the UN is putting in so much effort to achieve that.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): We are all concerned about the well-being of our forces. Does the greater deployment of our troops mean that bombing may not be as necessary as it was previously and that it might now be limited to the protection of those troops?

Mr. Ingram: I will not set out in detail our future intentions in that respect. I said in my statement that the bombing campaign would continue, that it would be proportionate, targeted and for the specific purposes laid down to achieve the military objectives that we have been discussing this morning. My hon. Friend should take on board that we should not be setting out in detail the nature of this operation. The bombing has achieved major objectives, but if there are still targets required to be taken out by such a bombing campaign that will also be our objective.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): The Minister will be aware that the Select Committee on Defence returned yesterday from a two-day visit to Operation Saif Sareea. I hope that he has already heard that we were hugely impressed, as he was, by the success of that operation, particularly the close working relationship between Oman and United Kingdom forces, which has undoubtedly done much to strengthen the ties between our two countries.

While it is unfortunate that certain deficiencies in our forces have already been exposed by the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch)—and I do not believe that to be helpful to our forces—if we are to be engaged in operations in Afghanistan, it is important that any deficiency in spares must be remedied at the earliest opportunity. In the light of the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Soames), can he tell the House whether the Government have plans to bring other units to a state of high readiness and not just a small contingent of commandos?

Mr. Ingram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments about the valuable lessons that we have learned from Saif Sareea 2. He rightly drew attention to the close relationship between this country and Oman. It is a long and deep relationship and we benefit greatly from it. As for any deficiencies in spares, I do not know specifically what he is referring to, but clearly if we go into operational mode we have to make sure that our troops have the best equipment we can give them and that there are no deficiencies anywhere. I hope that that will assist the hon. Gentleman in understanding that we are learning lessons and making progress. I do not want to speculate on the deployment of other troops, but we have a wide range of troops available in a state of high readiness. That is the purpose of the training and deployment cycle that we apply, so if there is a requirement, we can meet it.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Can the Minister take us a bit further in describing the exact military and political objectives of this operation? Are they to occupy Afghanistan and impose a new Government or are they merely concentrated on an attempt to find bin Laden and his group and then withdraw? What immediate assistance will be given by this increased troop deployment to ensure that food and aid gets through to people who are desperately hungry and starving and that those refugees who are currently trapped behind barbed wire entanglements, unable to escape into Pakistan, will be given some relief? Does he not think that such matters are equally important?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend does not have a monopoly on compassion or concern about humanitarian aid. If he has not understood our military objectives after all the weeks of discussion, I really am surprised. Let me set them out again. They are to bring Osama bin Laden and the other al-Qaeda leaders to justice. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees with that. They are to prevent Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network from posing a continuing terrorist threat. I hope that he agrees with that. They are to ensure that Afghanistan ceases to harbour and sustain international terrorism. I hope that he agrees with that. I also hope that he will give full credit to all the efforts that have been made by this and other Governments in trying to deal with the difficult and deep humanitarian problems in Afghanistan. He should point the finger at those who are causing the problem. International Governments are seeking to pour in millions of pounds in aid—tonnes of food and supplies—and the Taliban are frustrating our objectives in that as well. I would like to hear my hon. Friend criticising those who are stopping aid getting through rather than the Governments who are delivering it.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I thank the Minister for the advance copy of his statement. Can he confirm that a sizeable proportion of the deployment is made up of Scottish service personnel? Does he agree that service men, service women and their families receive a high level of support across Scotland, including that from the Scottish National party? What plans, if any, are there for the deployed troops to assist in the humanitarian effort to help the millions of displaced and starving Afghans, as there was no mention of the humanitarian dimension in his statement?

Mr. Ingram: I do not think that we should set out the nationalities or the particular towns and villages from which each of the troops come. To be honest, that was rather a silly point. They are representing the United Kingdom as part of a coalition and if the hon. Gentleman is supporting its objective, I welcome the support of the SNP, mindful of its policy position on NATO and elsewhere.

I have mentioned the humanitarian effort and its objectives in my responses. I had anticipated that the subject would be raised. Every effort is being made to move forward on the humanitarian front. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development made a major statement in the House the other day. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was present. If he was, he will be aware of the totality of the operation. I hope that he takes on board my point about who is frustrating that effort and joins me, the Government and others who are trying to make progress on that front.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Does the Minister accept that he need not fret overmuch about the

niggling from a tiny minority of Labour Back Benchers when, as the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) pointed out, the Minister and his colleagues in the Ministry have the absolute, wholehearted support of the majority of the House and undoubtedly of the nation? He referred earlier to the Government's concerns about some of the speculation in the media. I think that what will concern many hon. Members is the effect upon the families of those who are deployed when particularly television producers get a quick thrill from shots that do not help the objectives of the alliance and most certainly worry those at home. Service families understand the risks that their family members face, but it does not follow that they are any less concerned about them.

Will the Government therefore take the opportunity not to bully the news media, but to point out to them frankly but firmly that their actions are watched by those who consider themselves to be the enemies of this nation, jeopardise the armed forces who are deployed on our behalf and most certainly worry and indeed frighten their loved ones who are left back at home?

Mr. Ingram: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I do not worry about niggles from any source, whether they are from the Government Back Benches or elsewhere. The Government genuinely welcome debate. I think that it is right in a democracy that people should express all the dimensions that we need to examine, and that that should be done in an open, honest and upfront manner. There is, however, a purpose to debate which is usually to reach a conclusion. When the issues have been examined, they have then to be weighed in the balance. As I said, I ask those who continue to raise some of those issues to question their own judgment, as they have asked us to do. The Government question our own judgment, and they should question theirs.

I do not think that we are guilty of bullying the press; if we were, I think that there would be screaming from the high heavens about it. Nevertheless, I take on board and echo the sentiments that the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway) has expressed about the weight that may be imparted to some comments and about the uncertainty and destabilisation that those comments can cause in the minds not only of those who are on the front lines but of their families. We owe it to everyone at this time to try to be as accurate as possible in imparting information. That is what we are seeking to do in this statement, and what we shall seek to do in further debates and examination as we move forward in this campaign.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): May I may draw my right hon. Friend's attention to yesterday's edition of the Arab language newspaper *Asharq Al-Awsat* which reports that five British fundamentalists were killed at an al-Qaeda base? They were recruited by al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom, and, four weeks ago, one of them, Muhammed Omar, travelled to join bin Laden. Is it not about time that we clamped down on the activities of al-Muhajiroun, which is recruiting British Muslims in that way, and of Omar Bakri Muhammad, both to save the lives of those British Muslims and to prevent them from being a threat to British troops who may still be fighting there?

Mr. Ingram: I compliment my hon. Friend on his very close interest in that very detailed sphere of interest. I know that he studies that aspect of the subject, and he makes very valuable contributions to our understanding of it. It would be wrong for me to comment on press speculation regardless of whether it appears in the foreign press or the domestic press. If there is intelligence to be gathered on what is happening on the ground, it is usually imparted in an open and upfront manner and not as speculation.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) is aware of the Government's efforts specifically to tackle the threat posed by individuals who are part of the al-Qaeda network or any other international terrorist network that is linked to it. Of course that threat resides not only within the United Kingdom but is an international problem. That is why we sometimes need an international response to that threat.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): So far the Minister has given very sketchy answers indeed to questions on humanitarian aid, which was not mentioned at all in his statement. He will remember that 5 million people are at risk of starvation over the winter in Afghanistan. Does he have any plans at all for the military to assist in the delivery of aid, either by changing the nature of the bombing or forming safe corridors for the aid workers?

Mr. Ingram: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), no monopoly of compassion on the issue rests on either the Opposition or Government Benches. I think that we all understand the need to drive forward on the issue. I therefore ask the hon. Lady to do what I have asked others to do: weigh the issues in the balance and then consider whether there is a purpose to the military objective. She has to make that judgment herself. I hope that she will realise that there is such a purpose. If we achieve our objectives, we shall remove not only that organisation and network from Afghanistan but the threat that it poses internationally.

My statement did not address the humanitarian issue because it was not designed for that purpose. We had a major statement only the other day from the Secretary of State for International Development on the issue. If the hon. Lady is trying to imply that the Government are not concerned about that issue, I do not think that she is living in the same world as I am. I anticipated that I would have to respond on the issue, and I have tried in all my replies to do so very specifically, not in a sketchy manner, and to express the depth of the problem that we are dealing with.

We cannot deliver humanitarian aid at the point of a bayonet; that is not the way in which it will be delivered. It has to be delivered using a range of humanitarian efforts, not only from the United Kingdom but from the international community. We are trying to create a stable and benign environment in Afghanistan. That is one of the objectives of the military campaign, and achieving it will enable humanitarian aid to flow through the country freely and without hindrance from the Taliban regime.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I strongly endorse the plea that the Minister has been giving to the mass media to show restrain in what they publish at this delicate time, particularly in relation to speculation on what might happen in the employment of special forces. Surely the media should bear in mind that even a newspaper published in London is now accessible worldwide on the internet, and that bin Laden has not been slow to use western technology against the west.

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

Does the Minister agree, however, that the media have performed a very important role in alerting society as a whole to the nature of the threat that we face by making it clear to world opinion that the horrors we face cannot go unanswered, and by warning us even today that if the Government and our American allies are not successful in our campaign we may even face the threat of nuclear terrorism from bin Laden and his terrible organisation?

Mr. Ingram: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those comments. I think that he is right to say that the media should show restraint and that, equally, they have an important role to play in bringing into the open the enormity of what we face. We are not only dealing with 11 September, as the network's probable intent is to acquire and use weapons of mass destruction. The Prime Minister has made it clear that if the network did get its hands on such material its intent would become very clear. I think that the media are able to get that point across, bolstering all the action that we are taking to tackle the menace and evil that currently exist within Afghanistan.

We hold almost daily briefings either in the United Kingdom or in the United States to set out the various developments. This statement is an addition to that process. There is no paucity of information although, for very good reasons, there are some matters—on detailed operational activities, or to confirm or deny the presence and actions of special forces—on which we will not comment.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): My right hon. Friend has referred on a number of occasions to the very special regard in which we hold our armed services. They are of course even more special to their families. I hope that he will agree that, although I note his remarks about being open and transparent in our debate, we should be measured and careful to base our comments on as much factual information as possible. His door and telephone line have always been open to me on a range of defence issues. Will he confirm that he will always be available to hon. Members on those issues? Will he also say something about the importance that he attaches to hon. Members—particularly those who, like me, come from constituencies containing armed services personnel and families who are in the active arena—keeping him in touch with the concerns of those personnel and families?

Mr. Ingram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those words. She is right about the special regard in which our armed forces are held, probably even more so as a result of what they are being asked to do. We must be measured and careful in what we say in our debates. My hon. Friend is right about that, too. I am sure that all hon. Members recognise that when they raise issues with the Ministry of Defence, whether through me as the Armed Forces Minister, or with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State as regards his responsibilities, or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, we try to be as open and as helpful as we can be. We do not operate a closed-door policy. We recognise that many hon. Members have a key interest in these matters, and even those who do not have armed forces personnel in their area may still have an interest. We want to make sure that hon. Members are kept fully advised and appraised, not just about current issues, but about the wide range of important tasks that we ask our armed forces to perform.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the crews of the Canberras flying out of RAF Marham, who, day in, day out, fly over the target areas in Afghanistan? Often they are the unsung heroes of the campaign. As the deployment will clearly put financial strain on the Ministry of Defence budget, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is vital that when the conflict is over, all our armed forces receive the funding that they deserve?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman is trying to widen the debate a little. There will in due course be debates on the wider issues of the armed forces and no doubt he will express his views then, but I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has heard his comments. With regard to the Canberra crews, my father served in the RAF and he does not think that they are unsung heroes—he constantly sings the praises of the RAF. They do a tremendous job, which sometimes puts them at risk—not just those in the Canberras, but elsewhere. That applies to all our people, in whichever part of the operational activity they are involved. I fully recognise the very valuable work done by the Canberra crews and the important information that they bring back from those flights.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is widespread support for his objectives in the campaign and for the deployment of troops on the ground, and that we all send our hopes and prayers with those troops? But does he agree with the adage that a stitch in time can save nine? Will he get on with the job, get the troops in place and finish the job on this occasion? Will he confirm that one of the key rules of engagement in the campaign will remain minimising the risk to civilians?

Mr. Ingram: We are getting on with the job. That is what the announcement is about this morning. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of all the other efforts designed to achieve our wide-ranging objectives. I accept his remarks about the wide support for those. He need not worry too much—we are getting on with the job. Generals in this place do not match up to the generals, admirals and others who give me advice.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): Does my right hon. Friend anticipate that some of our NATO and Commonwealth allies might deploy forces alongside ours and those of the Americans?

Mr. Ingram: That is an important point. The coalition is increasingly international—not just US-led, with substantial UK support. Right across the international community, countries are offering a wide range of support to achieve our objectives. The threat and the problem are international, so the solution must be international as well.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I welcome the Minister's statement. Will he join me in paying tribute to the crews of the C17s, Tristars and VC10s based at Brize

Norton in my constituency, who play such a vital role in air-to-air refuelling and transport? They provide the lifeblood of operations such as those on which we are about to embark. Can the Minister bring the House up to date about the prospect of serious contributions in the form of troops and material from other NATO and European countries?

Mr. Ingram: On the last point, about 90 countries are currently considering the resources and assets that they could bring into play to assist the coalition of forces. That is considerable. It would be wrong to go into detail. It is for those countries to set out what they are offering. Some has been offered on a close net—privately—to the US, which must consider whether the offers would be beneficial. I could list a wide range of countries, but it would be wrong to do so, because the minute one lists some countries, one forgets others. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that about 90 countries are part of the coalition. I pay tribute to the crews of the aircraft to which he referred. My earlier comments stand. If I had not paid tribute to the RAF, my father would have been very unhappy.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): The Minister mentioned that the deployment would be carried out on the basis of best intelligence. There have been various newspaper reports over recent days analysing the US Rangers' raids. It has been alleged that not only was resistance by the enemy fiercer than expected, but that, perhaps more worryingly, the intelligence that went into those operations was not up to scratch. Although I do not expect the Minister directly to discuss the intelligence reports, will he comment on whether what he describes as "best intelligence" is adequate intelligence for the purpose, now that our troops are potentially going into action?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman is right. I shall not discuss press allegations. When I use the phrase "best intelligence", I mean just that. It is more than adequate. We have put a great deal of effort into it, but there is no such thing as perfect intelligence. The more countries come into the international coalition, the more they bring their resources into play, and the totality of the intelligence grows as a consequence. It is not just in terms of troops and equipment that countries can assist us. Many countries have very good knowledge of certain aspects of that part of the world, and they can assist us in that way as well.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): In his statement, the Minister mentioned press speculation. Much of that centred on 45 Commando based in my constituency, owing to the acknowledged expertise of its members in winter warfare and experience in humanitarian relief efforts. That has caused a great deal of anxiety and concern among service families in my constituency. Although I appreciate that operational decisions must be made quickly, may I have the Minister's assurance that if there is any change in the troops to be deployed in the operation, particularly if any members of 45 Commando are to be deployed, he will keep the families informed and tell them as soon as possible that that will happen? Will he inform the House or advise all hon. Members who have bases in their constituencies of any such changes, so that we may be fully and quickly appraised of changes in troop deployments affecting our constituencies?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point that touches on some of the concerns that have been raised about press speculation, to which I referred as well.

We put a tremendous amount of effort into communicating with families. In advance of the statement, a signal was sent to all the forces which will remain deployed. Families were advised in advance or at the same time as the House. We are very conscious of the importance of that. If there were to be any change, the same rules would apply. It is important to communicate with local Members so that they are fully aware as well and not caught offside by any press comment. I give the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

I will meet the commitment to ensure that families are as best served as possible and provided with as much knowledge, as much in advance as possible, as we can give them.

Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

11.59 am

Sir Sydney Chapman: I was saying an hour ago, before a most important statement, that my hon. Friend's Bill—I welcome him to his Front Bench post, and hope that it is a good omen for his measure—deals with the marine waters of England and Wales. Northern Ireland and Scotland have devolved powers. I hope that those countries will follow us by introducing similar legislation, which is vital to the interests of conservation.

I appreciate that through the Bill my hon. Friend is not trying to interfere with existing European marine sites. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) mentioned one that is near her constituency. My hon. Friend has targeted his Bill correctly.

Many of the Bill's provisions are mirrored in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994. I shall make two rather detailed points. I agree that such matters are perhaps best kept for consideration in Committee, but I would like to give them an airing now.

Clause 1(3) replicates clause 28(3) of the 1981 Act. It provides for one month for public consultation and comment before the Secretary of State or the Welsh Assembly decides whether to designate a marine area. A special case could be made for providing a slightly longer period—perhaps two or three months—for reasons that I might explore in Committee. On the other hand, the Secretary of State in England or the Welsh Assembly have six months to confirm, or otherwise, the designation after hearing comments and public consultations. I believe that that period could be shortened. I see no reason why it should not be limited to three months.

I have a detailed point to raise on clause 7, which relates to areas where the marine sites can be designated. For good reasons, they are restricted to areas seaward of the "mean low water mark" of ordinary tides. I understand the reason for that: it is to avoid any overlap with existing sites of special scientific interest. As there are so few sites bordering esturial waters or the seaside, I suggest that when new areas are designated and they are not adjacent to SSSIs, there should be provision for the designation to go inland to at least the high water mark. Shores can be crucial to maintaining conservation.

I shall support the Bill. I am conscious that it has all-party support. I know that these issues are strengthened by having across-the-Floor support. I pay tribute, for example—this will not be a comprehensive list—to the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) for the tremendous contribution they have made to conservation measures, not least the 1981 Act. The Minister is rightly highly regarded for his interest in conservation matters. It would be a terrible pity and a keen disappointment if this most worthy Bill, which has the noblest of objectives, did not at least proceed to Committee.

Finally, I ask the Minister immediately to consult his right hon. and hon. Friends to ensure that the Government come up with a joined-up approach to this vital measure and ensure that it takes its place on the statute book.

12.4 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): It is a pleasure to follow my north London neighbour, the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), and to support the principles outlined in the Bill. I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), another north London neighbour, on his excellent introduction of his private Member's Bill. As someone who has been relatively lucky in the ballot for private Members' Bills, I believe that he set a high standard for the rest of us to follow. I shall probe his case and raise one or two concerns, but I hope to do so in a way that does not provoke his ire or that of other hon. Members.

I come to the Bill with no great constituency pressure, although the excellent Hertfordshire wildlife trust is keen that I support the Bill, as are one or two other constituents.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman has a Middlesex constituency, so I should just like to point out that it is the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful for that chastisement and vaguely helpful intervention.

My interest in these matters derives partly from the pleasure that I get from kayaking. I believe that Denis Healey said that every politician should have a hinterland; canoeing forms a small part of mine. In that respect, the timing of the Bill is not fantastic, as one could not hope to go sea kayaking at the moment. One would have to go to inland waters such as the Tryweryn or the Dart to get some practice for the summer, when sea kayaking is much more feasible around our coast. In the last seven or eight years, I have very much appreciated the marine life around the coast of Pembrokeshire, the Llyn peninsula near Anglesey and, indeed, the Hebrides. The pleasure of seeing whales, porpoises, seals and sea birds and recognising that their survival depends on our efforts to provide further protection for the marine environment makes me want to support the hon. Member for Uxbridge today.

As my intervention on the hon. Gentleman demonstrated, I have a particular interest in renewable energy. I am lucky enough to chair the parliamentary renewable and sustainable energy group, and the potential for offshore wind farms around our coastline to contribute to our energy needs is huge. As I suggested, the wind industry supports the progress of the Bill, but it wants further discussion of its concerns. It is worried that a network of designated marine reserves would further hinder the development of offshore wind sites at a time when the Government are trying to streamline the consents process for such sites.

Mr. Randall: Will the hon. Gentleman outline why the wind industry thinks that those reserves will be a hindrance?

Mr. Thomas: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I shall do so in a moment.

I have a further point of contact with the Bill through my roots at Aberystwyth university. Nobody who was a student there could fail to be aware of the excellent Friends of Cardigan Bay, and its campaigning work over the years to protect bottlenose dolphins in the bay. To be fair, the Government have not been at all idle in the last

four years in trying to protect the marine environment. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 touched on the marine environment and additional protection for areas of outstanding natural beauty has rightly been incorporated in legislation. Where AONBs are on the coastline, additional protection is provided for the marine environment. That is also true of SSSIs that border our coastline.

Another key dimension of the 2000 Act in relation to the marine environment is the section that makes it an offence recklessly to disturb marine animals. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas)—my namesake—and for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) for their campaigns to get that provision into legislation. Much as I enjoy a jet-ski, I recognise the damage that it can cause and the need for protection. The Government were therefore right to take action.

I commend the Minister for the Environment for an initiative of his that led to a positive Government measure—the United Kingdom's adoption of an internationally agreed strategy under annexe 5 of the Ospar convention to reduce, and indeed eliminate, discharges of hazardous and radioactive substances into the Atlantic. As I understand it, the measure was opposed for some considerable time by the previous Government. The fact that the Government have taken action under the agreement on the conservation of small cetaceans of the Baltic and North seas, to examine further the reasons why porpoises are being caught and their numbers reduced, is also positive. I welcome the development of a UK bycatch response strategy, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall (Mr. Breed).

The process of strengthening environmental regulation of the offshore oil and gas industry was also important. That regulation was tightened in May. However, probably the single most important initiative for the future protection of our marine environment was the establishment of a review of marine nature conservation some two years ago. Its purpose was properly to evaluate the success or failure of marine nature conservation measures. Other hon. Members have mentioned the crucial conclusion of the interim review, which says that the one key option available to us to protect the purely national parts of our marine environment—the marine nature reserves specified in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981—has been a failure, as only three sites in the UK have so far been designated.

Given the length of time that my hon. Friends the Members for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) spent some 20 years ago trying to get the marine nature reserve initiative on to the statute book, I hesitate to ram home the message about its failure. Sadly, however, the review was brutal about the failure of MNRs. It pointed out how bureaucratic the MNR process had become and spoke of its unrealistic reliance on the need for complete consensus before designation could occur. It said that the legislation had been too prescriptive. The failure to designate the Menai straits as a marine nature reserve, despite the considerable effort that has been made in the past few years, is proof of that fact.

There was some doubt in the minds of those who undertook the review about whether the initiative was purely a legislative failure. Some thought that the policy position requiring total agreement to be reached among all the relevant interests before an MNR could be established was clearly a crucial contributory factor in its failure. Some marine waters in British waterways that are of European importance are already protected through their designation as special areas of conservation or special protection areas under the EC habitats and birds directives, to which the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) has already alluded. As I understand it, there are already some 133 marine SPAs and 151 special sites of marine conservation in our territorial waters. They are part of the Natura 2000 network of sites that is being created. The crucial point about them is that they are designated because of their European and international significance. If sites are significant only to our marine environment, they cannot be covered under European directives.

I welcome this week's confirmation that the habitats directive is to be extended to all waters over which we exercise sovereignty, with a 200-mile limit. I also welcome the fact that we are going to be the first European state to incorporate the initiative in legislation.

We have already identified the first possible special area of conservation beyond the 12-mile limit: the Darwin mounds, a site that is situated near the north-west coast of Scotland. That is excellent news. I am told that the Darwin mounds site has a level of biodiversity equivalent to that of a tropical rainforest. Apparently, its importance relates to the substantial population of deep-water coral, Lophelia pertusa, which, for those not expert in Latin, is a cold-water coral. Another factor that gives the site such international importance is that the coral appears to be growing on sand, whereas before the discovery of the site such a phenomenon was widely thought to be impossible.

Clearly, the protection of such internationally important sites beyond the 12-mile limit is further excellent news for the protection of our marine environment. The problem with the habitats directive is that it covers only sites with elements of European significance. For example, two marine areas with special protection can be found on the coast of Wales in Cardigan bay—the Llyn peninsula and Cardigan bay itself. The Llyn peninsula was designated because of the importance of its estuaries and reefs, whereas Cardigan bay was designated because of its 100-plus colony of bottle-nosed dolphins. Other elements of national importance do not have the protection of the habitats directive, so the sub-tidal sea caves at Maen Melltt, which support a variety of sponges and cobblestone habitats, are not protected by the Llyn special area of conservation designation. The area would therefore benefit from the measures that the Bill seeks to introduce.

Just up the coast, there are nationally important marine sites, outside the internationally important sites, that receive no legal protection whatever. The inland sea between Holy island and Anglesey has sub-tidal basins that are extremely important for a range of marine invertebrates. The Skerries is a wonderful area in which to see seabirds, and crucial tidal rapids support a wide range of sea life, again with no legal protection.

Thus marine sites of special scientific interest need to be established to secure further protection and to manage nationally important wildlife sites—even if they are not of European significance. The urgency of the case for action has been chronicled by a number of organisations—the excellent World Wide Fund for Nature published a report in September last year entitled the

[Mr. Thomas]

"Marine Health Check", based on 16 case studies of key species or habitat indicators representing different levels of the marine food chain. The report says:

"Among the habitats seen to be in severe decline are eelgrass meadows, home to the seahorse, which have disappeared from 85 per cent. of the UK's estuaries, and saltmarsh".

That is just one example of the need for action.

An example highlighted by the excellent RSPB, touched on by the hon. Member for Uxbridge and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), is Lyme bay, which has some of the most diverse marine habitats in Devon and Dorset and is known for its rocky reefs. Concern about the reefs has grown ever since local fishermen and divers started to report damage and decreasing catches. Some three years ago, a dive survey confirmed the need for action by nature conservation agencies to protect the most biologically sensitive reefs.

Work is under way in partnership with local fishermen to find an agreed method of promoting and protecting the reefs and the fish in that area, but designation as a marine site of special scientific interest would give added clout to the work. Stronger enforcement action will also be necessary to protect any sites that are designated as marine SSIs. The duty under clause 3 would further the conservation of sites, which is important in that regard. However, there is an issue about the funding for bodies engaged in marine conservation enforcement. Some of the non-governmental organisations that have commented on the Bill are worried about the need for additional funding.

I want to deal with a specific anxiety about the Bill's impact on offshore wind farms, partly in response to an intervention by the hon. Member for Uxbridge. The British Wind Energy Association is keen for the Bill to make progress and for it to be considered in Committee, but it is worried about the law of unintended consequences. Offshore wind farms tend to require shallower waters, which are often potentially important wildlife sites. It points out that the criterion for designating sites of special scientific interest—the terrestrial equivalent of marine sites of special scientific interest—is that the selected area should contain more than 1 per cent. of the British population of a specific species.

Mr. Randall: I am aware of that anxiety. It should not be assumed that the current threshold of 1 per cent. will necessarily be appropriate for the marine environment. It is important to understand that the Bill would not grant any new powers to stop developments in the marine environment.

Mr. Thomas: I agree especially with the second element of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. However, the use of that 1 per cent. threshold until now may help the hon. Gentleman to understand the anxiety throughout the wind energy community, which is nevertheless keen to discuss the matter further with him.

The two most common species on the 18 offshore wind farm sites that the Government have designated so far are the common scoter and the red-throated diver. Their numbers tend to go beyond the threshold. On 10 sites, the threshold is easily reached.

Mr. Randall: Common scoter have almost disappeared as a British breeding bird. Although it may be inconvenient, it is important to conserve that species.

Mr. Thomas: I appreciate that and I support the hon. Gentleman's aim of protecting sea birds, such as the common scoter, which face the threat of extinction. However, we do not want to prevent sensible wind farm development.

The wind energy industry is also worried about the lack of data on much of our marine environment. The possible adoption of the precautionary approach may mean that the sites where wind energy developers have collected data on the marine environment may take on greater importance because of a lack of information on others.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge will also understand that experience of the hunt for onshore wind farm sites shows that the designation of SSSIs and the justified anxiety to protect wildlife in those areas have been used as an excuse—sometimes a genuine excuse—by energy conservatives, who are desperate to stop wind farms.

Mr. Randall: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that SSSIs are valid, or does he believe that such designation should not occur?

Mr. Thomas: Of course they are valid. I was an enthusiastic supporter of the additional measures that the Government introduced in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act to toughen up their protection. I merely make the point to amplify and explain the concern of the wind farm community about the possible designation of marine sites.

I have had experience of the hon. Gentleman's persuasive powers in the context of hospitals, in which we have a mutual interest. I have confidence that he and those working with him will be able to persuade the wind farm community of the need for the Bill to make further progress, and I hope that he will meet them.

Ironically, wind farms may help to bring wildlife benefits by creating no-go areas in the marine environment, which may become havens for wildlife. I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point that no existing organisation would be given new powers under the Bill to prevent marine developments such as wind farms. Nevertheless, I hope that after this discussion he will have a further understanding of the concerns of the wind industry.

I welcome what the hon. Gentleman is seeking to achieve with the Bill. I hope that given the particular anxiety to which I have referred he will meet the wind energy community to try to resolve the issue. I wish the Bill well in its progress through the House.

12.26 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on his presentation of the Bill. Hon. Members have recognised that my hon. Friend has put a vast amount of work into this legislation, with the support of hon. Members from both sides. He rightly emphasised the support given by non-governmental organisations, especially the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

My hon. Friend is a distinguished ornithologist, and he has a specialist interest and knowledge in this area. I congratulate him on the way in which he presented the Bill and on his contributions in the give and take of the debate. The Conservative Front-Bench team welcome the Bill, and we wish it every success and a swift passage.

In the debate so far—I hope that other hon. Members will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—we have had good, short contributions from my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) and my hon. Friends the Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) and for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) in his interventions. We have had experienced contributions from the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett), whom I have had the privilege of hearing on a number of occasions on such subjects, and from the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed). We heard a long, well-read speech from the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), who I assume was in favour of the Bill, although I was not quite sure. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) supported the Bill, but rightly raised concerns that we hope to address.

The basic question is whether my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge has identified a serious gap in nature conservation. I think that we all agree that he has—that is the most important principle that we have established. He has much evidence to support that from the specialist Committees of the House of Commons. I shall not go into great detail, but I shall briefly refer to the 20th report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee on UK biodiversity, of 22 November 2000. Its conclusions said:

"The Government must address the range of problems and inadequacies in their approach to marine biodiversity. As an island nation, the conservation of marine biodiversity should be paramount and the Government should consider whether a new statutory agency is required to deal with marine biodiversity issues."

There is a great deal of other evidence on this subject.

What have the Government done? To be fair, they have moved a considerable way, and I praise them for that. In particular, like other hon. Members, I want to put on the record my appreciation of the work done by the Minister for the Environment, who has a long and distinguished track record in this area. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge, he speaks with a great deal of knowledge.

The Government have identified that a gap exists in nature conversation involving marine wildlife. In 1998, they set up a working party to consider the options to improve protection for marine sites and species, and the interim report of its review of marine nature conservation was published by DEFRA in March 2001. Its most important conclusion was contained in paragraph 153, which states:

"The one option that the report cannot recommend is the retention of the status quo. At the very least, the continuing evolution of marine conservation regulation threatens to make an already complex situation ever more confusing: some rationalisation—even if only at the level of the adoption of more common objectives—is essential. On this matter, there is consensus between conservationists, regulators and regulated."

Many hon. Members know that it is rare to get those three groups together, singing off the same song sheet.

As I have said, the Government have recognised that something needs to be done, and the Minister is on record as saying just that. In fact, in the 13 July edition of *Tribune*, he made this comment on the Government's approach to United Kingdom biodiversity:

"Labour did a lot in its first term to improve the protection of the terrestrial environment. I believe that we need to do much more to protect our oceans and sea—which contain over half of our biodiversity. We are committed to producing a cross-Government, Marine Stewardship Report."

That is excellent news, but many hon. Members and those outside Parliament would argue that we now need to go beyond producing reports. In all such complex situations, the danger is always that we study them to death. Genuine reservations have been raised, but we now need some form of implementation.

I have great faith in the Minister because he has already effectively accepted that something needs to be done. My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge, by introducing the Bill—which he has said does not contain a vast number of rules and regulations—is taking a first but important step on something about which consensus exists in the House. We should bear in mind the comment by the WWF in its update for June 2001:

"There is no national vision or policy for the marine environment. There is no single Government statement on the marine environment which draws together the areas of responsibility in DEFRA, DTI, MOD and others, nor is there any coordination of devolved and non-devolved matters."

By this private Member's Bill, we may be able to bring together all those interested parties. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish implied that several Whitehall Departments had reservations, so ironically, we may well be able to use the Bill as a tool to make a considerable advance in marine wildlife conservation.

I warmly welcome the Bill. It is an excellent example of a private Member's Bill that has all-party support, and it has been proposed by an hon. Member who is much respected on both sides of the House. I hope that the Minister, whom I know feels very sympathetic towards the Bill's aims, will give it Government support. He will undoubtedly flag up reservations, but I hope that we can proceed actively into Committee.

12.34 pm

Mrs. Helen Clark (Peterborough): I, too, welcome the Bill, which has been introduced by the hon. Member for Uxbridge, Mr. Randall, and I deeply congratulate him on doing so.

The need for better protection for marine wildlife is very real, and the arguments in favour of such protection have been rehearsed in the House before. DEFRA is carrying out a review into ways to improve the conservation of the marine environment, and the Bill would help to achieve the objectives of that review, in which the need for more action to protect our nationally important marine wildlife sites has already been recognised.

In February last year, as the House will know, I introduced a Marine Wildlife Protection Bill, with the support of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and others, to tackle the problems of harassment and disturbance of marine wildlife by motorised marine leisure vessels and jet skis. The Bill sought to enable local authorities to stop the use of such vessels in coastal areas,

[Mrs. Helen Clark]

to protect marine wildlife and promote safety, and to make it an offence to disturb marine wildlife. The Bill would also have given local authorities power to designate, on either a temporary or permanent basis, any coastal marine area within their power a motorised marine leisure vessels-free zone.

Since my Bill was considered, we have had the Government's own piece of environmental legislation, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. I was delighted to be chosen to be a member of the Committee. The Act represented a significant advance for nature conservation. As a result of it, intentional or reckless disturbance of whales, dolphins and porpoises is now an offence. My Bill would have addressed that, too.

The Act represented a giant leap forward for terrestrial nature conservation, but its passing into law has meant that, despite one or two improvements such as the example I have just given, protection of the marine environment has fallen yet further behind. The Bill that we are discussing today will, I believe, begin to redress that terrible imbalance.

There is much to be welcomed in the Bill. In particular, it will mean proper and correct enforcement of protection measures through the establishment of management schemes for marine sites of special interest. One of my personal concerns, when I introduced my own Marine Wildlife Protection Bill, was the level of hidden disturbance and, indeed, persecution of marine wildlife. This Bill will tackle those problems head-on, as they should be tackled.

I am also pleased that the Bill will ensure that those with the power to protect our best marine wildlife sites will have to exercise that power. It gives the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales authority to direct the development and implementation of management schemes for marine sites of special interest in cases in which it is felt that not enough is being done to look after those sites. It is right that relevant marine authorities will have to observe their responsibilities to protect our precious marine wildlife. I hope that those measures in Mr. Randall's Bill will be used to tackle the problems posed by motorised marine leisure vessels that I highlighted in my Marine Wildlife Protection Bill, and which were also highlighted very well by *The Sunday Times*.

Early research commissioned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has revealed a significant number of sites around the coasts of Wales and England that would benefit if this Bill became law. I am told that off the Sussex coast is an area called the Royal Sovereign shoals, where a variety of habitats are present. They include a sandstone reef and outcrops of chalk. Local wildlife include a variety of sponges, anemones and starfish, as well as more bizarre-sounding creatures such as the elephant's ear sponge—a new one on me.

Mr. Pound: You'll find one in the Strangers Bar most nights.

Mrs. Clark: Perhaps my hon. Friend would know more about that than I would.

There is also the chimney sponge. However, another important area that will be more familiar to hon. Members is the large expanse of Poole bay, off Dorset. The bay is sheltered from the prevailing southwesterly winds, and is an area of gentle underwater slopes punctuated in places by hard ironstone reefs. Not surprisingly, this sizeable area is home to a rich community of wildlife.

Of particular interest to me are the frequent sightings off Durlston head of bottle-nosed dolphins, common dolphins and pilot whales. There are also significant wintering populations of several bird species, including red-breasted mergansers—a new one to me—and great crested grebes. The Bill offers an exciting opportunity to improve protection for the Royal Sovereign shoals and Poole bay, and for many other sites.

I do not believe—nor does anyone else—that the Bill will solve all the problems facing our marine environment and wildlife, although I hope that I have helped to show that it can and will be a significant step forward. Again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge for introducing it. I hope that the Government will give a commitment that comprehensive marine legislation covering all United Kingdom waters will be forthcoming later in this Parliament. In the meantime, there is no doubt that the Bill takes us in the right direction, and I hope that others will join me in supporting it today and working for it.

12.41 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I am pleased to learn that the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) supports the Bill. I hope that in the few minutes remaining before the end of today's sitting, she will speak to some of her colleagues who have reservations.

Mrs. Helen Clark: Indeed I shall.

Mr. Bellingham: It is only a small point, but perhaps it is time the hon. Lady learned to refer to hon. Members by constituency, not by name.

I welcome the work on the Bill done by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) and the efforts that he has made in promoting it today.

Mrs. Clark: I referred to the hon. Gentleman as the hon. Member for Uxbridge, Mr. Randall. I suggest that the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) listens more carefully.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. We should get on with debating the Bill.

Mr. Bellingham: The hon. Lady and I can discuss that point afterwards in the Bar.

I have an interest in the Bill because my constituency extends over a large section of coastline along the Wash. As several hon. Members have mentioned, this country contains many sites of special scientific interest and other designated sites. My constituency contains a significant number of SSSIs that cover the coastline itself. They run to the low water mark—the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) and the Bill's promoter pointed out that fact. There is therefore a gap in our habitat conservation policy. I shall not repeat what has been said today about the numerous reports that have been produced. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) summed that up very well.

My constituency contains a thriving commercial fishing community, which is based on the inshore fishery. A significant number of fishermen fish out of Lynn fishing fleet. There is also an important plant processing sector based on the inshore fishery, which mainly produces mussels, cockles, whelks and shrimps. The fishery is one of the most important in the country and local people feel strongly about it. They and their families have been fishing it for generations, and their views are highly traditional. Their primary concern is conservation of stocks—to them, that is paramount. They are concerned about other issues, not least control of fisheries and access to their waters, which fall within UK territorial waters.

I am concerned that, at some stage, those waters might one day be opened up to other European Union countries. That would be a disaster. The common fisheries policy has failed dismally to control North sea stocks—just look at the populations of cod, herring and haddock. Those reserves have been hideously depleted. The time has now come for this country to repatriate its fisheries. If we do so, we shall at least have control over a precious resource, which could be managed through bilateral agreements with other EU countries. Our local fishermen feel strongly about that, but they feel particularly strongly that their inshore fishery should not be opened up in any way to other EU countries.

Our fishermen also feel strongly that they must work with other competing interests in the Wash. Obviously, the Bill is highly relevant to that. They already have to work within the confines of a Royal Air Force bombing range on the Wash. At this time of international conflict in particular, when local RAF squadrons are being deployed to the Gulf and flying out of RAF Marham near the Wash on reconnaissance missions over targets in Afghanistan, those ranges play an important role in ensuring that the RAF is properly trained. The fishermen, many of whom are war veterans, understand their importance.

The fishermen also have to work with dredging and alongside the threat of wind farms. I shall say a quick word about dredging.

Mr. Chaytor: Do I understand the hon. Gentleman to have referred to the threat of wind farms? Does he consider wind energy a threat?

Mr. Bellingham: I shall elaborate in a moment, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman accepts that wind farms are a threat to the interests and livelihood of some local fishermen. I support the Bill, however, as do most fishermen in my constituency.

Mrs. Helen Clark: I would like more detail about how the lives and livelihood of local fishermen are threatened by that renewable energy source.

Mr. Bellingham: I shall come to that in a moment, but I must first deal with dredging, if the hon. Lady does not mind. I shall return to her point. The fishermen want to work within the confines of the Bill, but they also have their concerns, which I hope will be addressed.

Worries have been expressed over the past few years about dredging, carried out with permission from the Crown Estate, for the building industry, the replenishment of sea defences and export. About 28 per cent. of all marine-dredged sand and gravel is exported. I want that to be reduced. It is one thing to deplete a precious national resource for our own needs, but its export should be queried.

I understand that new planning guidelines are being introduced for marine dredging, and I would be grateful if the Minister commented on that. The system known as the Government view is to be replaced by more formal planning guidelines, which is important because dredging obviously has an impact on biodiversity. There is a significant short-term impact and recolonisation begins soon after dredging, but it can take up to five years for an area's biological status quo to be restored. That is very important.

In the run-up to the 1997 election, at which time I temporarily left the political arena, there was a significant debate in north-west Norfolk about Docking shoal and Race bank. Local fishermen were concerned as they thought that insufficient account was being taken of their interests. They are also convinced that the significant dredging for sand for the Skegness to Maplethorpe section of sea defences impacted on their industry.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge is so open-minded and I hope that the respective marine authorities that the Bill would introduce have a mechanism to deal specifically with dredging applications. I hope, too, that the new planning guidelines will play a significant role and that the new authority can be involved in shaping them.

On wind farms, the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) pointed out that the Government's objective is for renewable energy to make up 10 per cent. of the UK's electricity requirement by 2010. I understand that the Crown Estate alone has 13 sites on which draft agreements have been entered into, and that two are in my constituency: Cromer and Lynn. On the Crown Estate sites alone, about 480 turbines will be constructed.

I agree with the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) that it is essential that we meet the renewable energy requirement or, indeed, surpass it. We must place as much emphasis as possible on renewable energy. I accept that wind farms will play an important role, and obviously offshore wind farms will play a critical role in providing that energy. My concern relates to the impact that those wind farms will have on inshore fisheries.

Obviously, during construction, those inshore fisheries will be disturbed. The site at Lynn will have 60 turbines. I think that there will be 30 turbines on the Cromer site. It will be a huge construction operation. That will certainly have an impact on local fisheries, including that at King's Lynn. Exclusion zones will, rightly, be in place around wind farms, and we do not yet know what effect propellers on turbines will have on fish shoals and other marine habitats. More research needs to be done.

I am not trying to be negative about wind farms. We must have wind farms, but their location will be crucial. I would like the competent marine authorities to co-opt on to the particular bodies the relevant fishing interests: for example, in my constituency, the Lynn fishermen's co-operative and the eastern sea fisheries committee. When the Bill goes into Committee, we could consider writing in a requirement to give paramount importance to inshore commercial fisheries. There is currently nothing in the Bill about fisheries. I have no doubt that if such a clause is inserted and we have a mechanism whereby the

[Mr. Bellingham]

relevant marine authorities are involved in the planning process—both the Department of Trade and Industry consents for wind farms and the new planning guidelines for dredging—the Bill will have a beneficial effect for inshore fishermen.

I have no hesitation in supporting my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge. He has been fortunate in the ballot.

Mr. Pound: Before the hon. Gentleman moves off the rather strange subject of the problems of wind farming, as one who spent some time before the mast and has rubbed up against a few fishing folk in his daily, I have found that the average fisherman gets a richer crop if there is some obstruction on the sea bed such as a gun turret or ammunition platform. He describes wind farms as a menace to fisheries, and prays in aid the problem of the propellers. Is he concerned about the flying fish quota? How on earth can an aerial propeller cause any problems for marine fishermen?

Mr. Bellingham: I think that we need more research on the matter. I am flagging it up as a potential problem. If the propeller of a large turbine is going around very fast in a high wind, it is bound to create huge ripple effects on the water within its vicinity. I am merely pointing out what a number of fishermen who are far better qualified than me have pointed out—that that could have an effect on shoals coming in. What we surely need is more research. I am not didactic.

Mr. Chaytor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bellingham: Of course I shall because the hon. Gentleman is an expert on wind farms.

Mr. Chaytor: It is very kind of the hon. Gentleman to say that, but it is not true. I was simply curious about the logic of his reasoning. If there is a high wind, it is fairly obvious that there will be more than a ripple effect on the water. Any additional ripple effect by the turbines of a wind farm will surely be absolutely negligible.

Mr. Bellingham: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that there will be a counter ripple effect by the propellers of the turbine. It has been pointed out to me by various fishermen that a man-made system that interferes with the delicate ecosystem may well produce side effects that we are not aware of at the moment. That is why there should be proper research into this.

In conclusion, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge. As the shadow Deputy Leader of the House said, he is highly regarded and respected on both sides of the House. He came first in the ballot and he has put a huge amount of effort and research into the Bill. I am particularly impressed by the extent to which he has discussed the Bill very openly with all the different groups, bodies and organisations involved.

As I pointed out, the Bill is not perfect, but it is certainly an important step forward. We are all aware that there is a critical need to preserve this type of habitat. It is vital that the Bill is given a Second Reading and is discussed in great detail in Committee so that we can improve it and make it acceptable to every organisation involved.

12.56 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on coming first in the ballot and on choosing this Bill to present to the House. I am very pleased that a Conservative Member is promoting such a Bill. The Conservatives' new-found support for environmental policies is most welcome. Perhaps this Bill provides a new interpretation of the concept of clear blue water.

If Conservative Members have not yet read last Saturday's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, I would very much commend to them the article by the editor of *The Ecologist*. It is essentially an appeal to members of the Conservative party, suggesting that in their fundamental review of policies and principles there may be considerable mileage to be gained by taking a much more proactive view in support of environmental policies. In the past, there has been a suspicion that their affection for the environment has been largely due to the fact that some of them owned so much of it. Now there is an opportunity for them to show their support for sustainable development out of genuine principles and care for the wider good of the community.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge has done the House a service in bringing the marine environment to our attention. My constituency is a long way from the sea, so it is important that I speak on behalf of my constituents, some of whom have contacted me on this issue, to demonstrate that it is not just an issue for those of us with coastal constituencies. The marine environment is important to us all. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) said earlier in the debate, the oceans are the drivers of our international climate system and it is completely impossible for us to separate ourselves from what happens in the oceans.

I have a particular interest in what happens in the north-west coastal waters and the Irish sea and I am particularly concerned about the historic levels of contamination of that sea not only from the normal economic processes of extraction, the laying of pipelines and other forms of mineral exploration, but the radioactive emissions that have been pumped out from the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing station in Cumbria for many years. I congratulate the Government—and to some extent the previous Government—on the steps that have been taken in recent years to tighten the regulations over radioactive emissions into the oceans, but we still allow far too much radioactivity and radioactive materials to leak out into the seas around the United Kingdom, and particularly into the Irish sea from Sellafield. I would be very grateful to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Uxbridge on that and grateful if my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment referred to it in his reply to the debate.

I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) that if the Government have any reservations about the detail of the Bill, for example if the Department of Trade and Industry has concerns about the impact on the oil and gas industries, they can be dealt with in Committee and should not lead to the Bill being sabotaged today.

As other hon. Members wish to speak, and as other Bills for consideration today deserve progress, I shall be brief. I hope that all hon. Members in the Chamber will support the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill. I support it for two main reasons, the first of which is the absolute

need to recognise the importance of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. I think that there has been a new public understanding of the issue in recent years. People now appreciate that there has been a drastic loss of wildlife and plant species and that that loss cannot continue. We have to take action to conserve and reverse the loss of biodiversity.

The second main reason that I support the Bill is the opportunities that it will create for greater scientific understanding of what happens in the ocean. I think that many people have started to realise that understanding the secrets of the oceans can provide the key to dealing with the problems facing the continuation of civilised life on earth. Other hon. Members have already mentioned the potential benefits of increasing our understanding of what happens under the sea, including the possibility of generating new sources of renewable energy, and I entirely endorse those comments. We have to gain greater scientific knowledge of what happens in the deeper parts of the ocean.

I should like to raise two issues. Although the hon. Member for Uxbridge may not be able to address them today, I should be grateful if the Minister will address them briefly. The first issue is European legislation, because much of the environmental legislation that has effective or been adopted by the United Kingdom has been driven by Europe. I think that that fact is one of the very good reasons why we should have closer and not more distant links with the European Union. How will the Bill relate to current European legislation on the environment?

Secondly, and returning to the issue of radioactive emissions to the seas surrounding the United Kingdom, because of emissions from the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant, the Irish Government have announced their intention—they may already have taken action—to cite the United Kingdom Government in legal action over a breach of our obligations under the Oslo and Paris—Ospar—convention. That convention seeks to reduce radioactive emissions to the ocean almost to zero. I should be grateful if the hon. Member for Uxbridge will say how his Bill might link with the provisions of the Ospar convention, and if the Minister will say something about the Irish legal challenge—although I appreciate that it might be difficult to say much about it at the moment.

1.2 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) showed great judgment in selecting to promote the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, and he has demonstrated his characteristic eloquence and his great passion for the subject both in his speech and his interventions. It is a most important issue and I welcome his collaborative approach to it. I hope that all hon. Members will accept that, because of his responsible approach to the issue and his diligence in consulting on it very widely, the Bill should be considered in Committee so that all the issues that it raises can be properly explored.

My constituency of Castle Point has important coastal and marine sites and bird colonies of international importance, although I shall not go through their names lest Labour Members challenge me on my knowledge of the subject, which is very small indeed. I am not an expert.

My constituency includes Canvey island and Two Tree island, with its population of avosets, and the coastal areas of Benfleet and Hadleigh. They are most important natural habitats, particularly for marine wildlife and for birds. In the early 1990s, in my first term in the House, I had some success in gaining some protection for those habitats, and I would welcome the opportunity to win more protection for the marine habitats around my constituency. Consequently, I support the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge to enact his Bill. It is certainly a step in the right direction, although I accept that some fine-tuning is necessary. For that reason, I hope that the Bill will go through to a Standing Committee.

On renewable energy, the arguments about wind farms are understandable. I share the concerns that have been expressed and welcome the comfort offered by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) that there should be a great deal more research on the impact of such devices on the marine environment, the fishing industry and so on. It would be nonsense to proceed with such an innovation without doing that research and without knowing the consequences of that action.

I know that hon. Members want to make progress, but I shall raise one more key issue. My hon. Friend the Member for North–West Norfolk mentioned dredging. That issue is important to my local area of south-east Essex, which includes much of the Thames estuary. The proposal from P&O for Shell Haven port development will have consequences yet unfathomed for the marine environment of the Thames estuary and beyond, out to sea. It is proposed to dredge millions of cubic metres of spoil from the sea bed. As my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Norfolk said, not only will that destroy the biodiversity in the local area for at least three to five years, but as dredging must be repeated every three to five years, the local marine environment will never recover. The proposal has not been thought through. I hope that we can focus on it in this place and in other places when the time is right.

I hope that the Bill will proceed to Committee, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge on his initiative.

1.7 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): This morning's debate was, of course, interrupted by a statement at 11 am on the deployment of military forces. Those of us who are regulars on a Friday morning sometimes feel like the poor bloody infantry, because we come to the Chamber armed with our speeches, which we have spent long hours preparing, and sometimes we feel that our commanders are rather like those in the first world war.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gardiner: To a distinguished long-serving member of the infantry, yes.

Mr. Dismore: Does my hon. Friend agree that long hours are spent not only in preparing our speeches, but in delivering them?

Mr. Gardiner: Indeed. All the infantry who came into the Chamber on the Government side this morning

[Mr. Gardiner]

support the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) and wish his Bill well. I came armed with a good many more words than I now intend to speak because I wish it well. I support it fully and fulsomely, and my hon. Friends agree that it is an excellent Bill. If it is talked out, we certainly will not be responsible.

If and when the Bill gets on to the statute book, it will be a major achievement for the hon. Member for Uxbridge and a tribute to the dedication of all those involved in marine wildlife conservation. It will be a triumph for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Marine Conservation Society. They have all lobbied for a long time to address the anomaly between land conservation and marine conservation. I acknowledge the continued commitment of my right hon. Friend the Minister to introduce effective marine legislation. His support from the Government Benches, which I trust will continue today, is welcome.

The Bill is fundamentally sound, and sets out a practical and positive way in which marine sites can be protected. It will fill in the gaps in the protection of the marine environment by designating nationally important sites in the waters around England and Wales, which are not covered by European designations. Earlier this year, the RSPB commissioned research in support of the Bill to highlight marine environments that could receive protection and management. I shall cite just two for their importance.

Dungeness is on a headland on the Kent coast between Folkestone and Hastings. The site is nationally important for populations of great-crested grebes—there are more than a 1,000 birds at that site—and red-throated divers, of which there are more than 300; they feed offshore in winter. The area is also a vital feeding ground in summer for birds, including internationally important breeding populations of common terns, little terns and mediterranean gulls. Sometimes it is right to follow the advice of one's parliamentary researcher, and sometimes it is wrong. When I was filling in the slip for my entry in "Dod's Parliamentary Companion", my researcher advised me most heartily not to say that I was an avid bird watcher. I ignored that advice and am pleased that I share the distinction of being a member of the RSPB with the hon. Member for Uxbridge. I know that he will appreciate the importance of the bird colonies that I have just mentioned.

Another important site is Waldrons reef, offshore to the east of Bognor Regis, where there is an extensive area of sandstone bedrock. Mystery surrounds the origin of the angular boulders that are known as sarcens; some people think that they are glacial deposits, others that they are discarded ballast stones from early shipping. However, the underwater wildlife there includes an amazing collection of 24 species of sponges, as well as cuttlefish, tompot blennies, burrowing anemones, slipper limpets and hermit crabs.

Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) spoke about an article in *The Daily Telegraph*. I shall refer to one published on 13 October 2000 which told a wonderful story about the discovery of a wildlife-rich reef offshore near the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset. Apparently, the reef is the size of 50 football pitches and lies in just 25 m of water; it is not a coral reef but a reef built of ross worms, which construct protective hollows using mud and sea shells. The fact that such amazing natural features are still being discovered around our coasts illustrates perfectly the need for a proper inventory of those sites so that they can be protected.

The Bill has the potential to protect specific species as well as species-rich sites similar to those that I have just outlined. I pay tribute to the research of Mr. Chris Wood into Eunicella verrucosa or the pink sea fan, a species that will undoubtedly benefit from the Bill. Eunicella verrucosa is one of only two sea fans that grow in British waters. It is a soft coral found in south-west England, unlike the northern sea fan, Swiftia pallida, which occurs in western Scotland. It is a slow-growing and long-lived species, which is especially prone to damage caused by fishing gear and careless divers. It is a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 2000 and is one of the marine species for which a biodiversity action plan has been prepared. The aim of the current recording of the sea fan by the Marine Conservation Society is to add to the knowledge of sea fan distribution, habitat and condition and complement other research aimed at preserving the species.

Sea fans are filter feeders and can be found in rocky areas. They are oriented across the current and are sufficiently flexible to withstand quite a bit of buffeting. The problem that the hon. Member for North–West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) highlighted with wind power and the cross currents that it could create will probably not trouble the sea fan too much. Sea fans normally live deeper than any wave surge, so are not usually seen in water shallower than 20 m. Fans grow typically in an open rocky habitat among dead men's fingers and ross coral.

The species is located in the south-west waters of the British isles, but can also be found around the south-western coasts of Europe, the Mediterranean and north-west Africa.

Mr. Chaytor: Does my hon. Friend agree that listing the idiosyncratic habits of obscure species is a technique that is often used by those who wish to delay the progress of a Bill?

Mr. Gardiner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but he will notice that I am speaking at twice my usual rate in order to put on record the reasons why the Bill is important without impeding its progress. I want to allow time for other hon. Members to do exactly the same thing. The Bill deserves our support and I have many sheaves of paper to help me to express that support. I assure him and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I shall make absolutely sure that I try to keep well within time on this occasion.

The pink sea fan is what I call a "sodof". I should point out that I use that term not to try to stop any further interventions, but to explain why the pink sea fan is important. We are all familiar with items that are "bogofs"—buy one, get one free—but the pink sea fan is a "sodof", as people can save one, develop one free. That is the case because it supports a further unique species, the sea fan anemone or amphianthus dohrnii. For the benefit of our *Hansard* reporters, let me say that I shall ensure that they receive the correct spelling. The sea fan anemone is another biodiversity action plan species. This little anemone, which rarely exceeds 1 cm in width, generally attaches itself to the branches of sea fans, although it may also occur on other tall structures such as hydroids and worm tubes. As it normally reproduces

asexually by basal laceration—a process whereby small fragments of tissue tear away from it and regenerate into tiny anemones—its distribution can be patchy and changeable. Where one occurs, there will often be others nearby, but it is difficult for them to spread. Recent information on distribution is limited, but suggests that there are concentrations along the south-western coast. Its small size means that it is likely to be overlooked.

The Bill offers the potential to protect both species. The Marine Conservation Society considers that such protection would be hugely significant for the anemone and could lead to an increase in the number of sites in which it can be found. Both species are threatened by damage caused by unmanaged marine environments. As such, they are excellent examples of why the Bill must be enacted. That is why I have laboured my points at such length.

I could talk further about the reasons why basking sharks will also benefit hugely from the Bill. They are incredible creatures, as anybody who is familiar with the marine environment will know.

Linda Gilroy: May I invite my hon. Friend, and, indeed, all hon. Members, to visit the National Marine Aquarium, where the basking shark is celebrated? I encourage him to continue his peroration about the pink sea fan, which I mentioned earlier. It is exactly the sort of organism that is not captured by current measures, but could be protected by the Bill.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments. The basking shark is an extraordinary creature of which we should be proud, as it inhabits our native waters. It is a filter feeder that mainly consumes plankton. In the UK, basking sharks appear to favour a copepod called calanus finmarchus. Amazingly, they can filter almost 2000 cu m of sea water every single hour that they feed. Let me put that into context: it is the equivalent of an Olympic-size swimming pool of 50 m in length, with eight lanes.

I shall not speak as much as I could about the basking shark. Suffice it to say that the Bill will protect the feeding areas of the shark. I hope that it will provide us with an opportunity to get more information than we currently enjoy about that unusual species.

The Bill will require the sea fisheries committees, the local statutory inshore fisheries management bodies that operate in England and Wales, to be heavily involved in the management of sites set up as a result of the Bill. The SFCs are funded by a levy on local authorities but, with local authority finances under such pressure, funding for SFCs is not always a political priority. Let me mention at this stage that, should the Bill become law—I hope that it does—it is fundamentally important that a review be undertaken of the funding necessary to secure the future of both coastal fisheries and the marine environment.

As SFCs will have a major role to play in ensuring that the Bill works in practice, the case for better funding of the SFCs is stronger than ever. Historically, they have had a role in managing special areas of conservation and sites of special scientific interest. The demands on their resources are for administrative work, including work on management plans, practical work on enforcement and fisheries monitoring.

The Association of Sea Fisheries Committees of England and Wales has for some time been pressing for an arrangement that would share responsibility for SFCs' funding between national and local government. That would maintain SFCs' local base while making them more financially secure. The association is supported in its request for a review of funding by a recent House of Commons Agriculture Committee report on sea fishing, which recommended that

"the funding arrangements for SFCs be re-examined in order to establish a secure, permanent, financial framework within which they can plan and perform their duties".

In view of the SFCs' experience that managing a special area of conservation or an SSSI with a significant marine interest costs some £20,000 a year, I hope that local authorities will receive the funding necessary to fulfil their responsibilities under the Bill.

I shall bring my remarks to a close so that others can speak in support of the Bill. I could not close, however, without speaking as the joint Chair of the all-party parliamentary sport and leisure industry group. I am fully aware that, when new legislation is introduced, there is often concern about the cost of implementing it. I mentioned earlier the costs that may be associated with the SFCs. However, at a time when we are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of eco-tourism, and when we have a new Government Department, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, one of whose aims is to build links between farming, recreation, economic development and a range of activities, we should recognise that the Bill also has the potential to bring financial benefits in eco-tourism.

Linda Gilroy: I wonder whether my hon. Friend noticed from my earlier contribution that the south-west regional development agency has said that eco-tourism is almost as important as information and communications technology to the economy of the south-west, which is pre-eminent in these matters.

Mr. Gardiner: I recognise what my hon. Friend is saying. As she knows from her area, and as many other hon. Members know from theirs, this is an extremely critical time for tourism in England and Wales. It has suffered much in recent months and the industry should realise that the Bill could help in the development of eco-tourism. I hope that the Government, when considering cost implications, will also consider the net benefits that could be achieved from supporting the Bill.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge not on his good fortune for coming first in the ballot—that is a matter of luck—but on his sound judgment in bringing the Bill to the House and on the way in which he has piloted it through. I wish him God speed and a fair wind.

1.24 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): I support the Bill and join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on promoting it.

It is surprising that, as an island nation surrounded by marine life, we have paid so little attention to the sea. The sea is a place of work in terms of fishing and energy, and has historically denoted our boundaries and signified our power. Although Britannia ruled the waves, we spent little time considering what is beneath them. Perhaps that is because we are not blessed with warm climates, and the cold waters put people off trying to understand the sea.

[Mr. Jonathan Djanogly]

Clearly, there is a new appreciation of marine life, the beauty of our environment, the dangers of pollution and the need for a proper environmental balance. On land, much thought has already gone into achieving such a balance and weighing up the rights of industry and those of local people and visitors. The balance between historical and future use has also been considered. However, that cannot be said about our marine environment.

The existing legislative framework is haphazard. There is no shortage of laws to govern activities on our seas: they include legislation on merchant shipping, water resources, water industries and fisheries, and European regulations and various treaties. However, they tend to reflect effects on the marine industries rather than marine life. Indeed, the complexity of our laws often hinders the ability to introduce policies in favour of marine life.

There is therefore a need for legal and policy frameworks to be directed at the protection of habitats and species. However, they need to balance environmental needs, to cater to the needs of industry and those of leisure and to provide a strategic and consistent approach, which has been lacking in the past.

Our thinking about the sea is too disjointed. There have been many significant and worthy projects to clean up the nation's beaches. That has resulted in many excellent beaches, but most of the efforts have been directed at cleaning up the mess from the sea rather than considering the reasons for it. That is a good example of lack of strategy and joined-up thinking.

Debates about fishing policies are also often disjointed. We argue with our neighbouring countries about who has rights over our fish, and we highlight the genuine plight of our fishermen, but we say little about why fish stocks are depleted. We need a framework whereby we can better understand our fish habitats and form our policies in the context of a proper understanding of the environment in which fishing takes place. We can thus prioritise and balance the interests of consumers, fishermen and the environment.

As on land, conservation at sea is about not only protecting beautiful sites but understanding the environment so that we can make proper choices about development. Unlike the sea, little is natural about our land environment. Fields and hedgerows are man's invention, and foxes have to be controlled because we have chickens and lambs. The environment that we enjoy has been moulded over the centuries. As we develop in different ways, our views about the sort of environment that we want have changed. We have developed a regulatory environment to provide a framework for that.

That has not happened in the marine world. It could be said that that was because the sea was inaccessible, but that would undermine the beauty and value of the vast range of habitats and species that exist in our marine environments. I shall not argue in favour of any specific sort of marine environment or weigh up the value of different sorts of habitats or species. However, we must create the regulatory environment for doing that. Indeed, in some local marine environments the national interest may better be served by the presence of oil and gas industries or by carrying out exploration, but that is not the case in many areas. Some areas will be suitable for touristic development of the sea from an environmental point of view, and some will be unsuitable. There needs to be a regulatory environment for the enforcement of policy decisions that also allows the proper consideration of the issues.

The key will be adaptability, which will be even more necessary at sea than on land. For instance, a suitable place to allow fishing this year may not be suitable next year, fish being more transient than, say, cattle. The same point could be used to show that there is a need better to understand the fish habitats around our shores so that we can strategically evaluate fishing in environmental terms.

It is also important to consider the marine environment, how it relates to current sea industries, such as shipping, fishing, oil and gas, and how it relates to the industries of the future. Many hon. Members have referred to that aspect.

Mr. Pound: Before the hon. Gentleman moves off the subject of marine fauna, will he join me in paying tribute to the promoter of the Bill for introducing for the first time in the House a discussion of the worm-like Enteropneusta of the phylum hemichordata, commonly known as the sea squirt? For the first time we have had a sensible discussion on this simple but pleasant creature, which is noted in biology primarily for having undiscernible gonads. We have been educated by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall).

Mr. Djanogly: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it has been a pleasure to hear about sea squirts. I admit to knowing very little about them before this debate.

One of the great impending debates for the House and the nation in the next few years is the future of our energy policy, which could involve harnessing wave or wind energy. Either of those sources of energy used at sea will have important official, aesthetic and habitat implications for the environment of the area in which they are sited, as has been discussed.

It would be preferable to have a clear strategic view of where hundreds, possibly thousands, of windmills are to be positioned, rather than to bumble through on a one-off application basis, which would lack consistency. An effective strategy could save huge costs, would reduce inconsistencies and enable the benefits and disadvantages to be considered on a balanced basis. It should not be assumed that having a proper regulatory framework would work to the disadvantage of sea industries, or the tourism industry.

Linda Gilroy: Would the hon. Gentleman also acknowledge that those interested in marine conservation should be able to accommodate those needs, because climate has a significant impact on our use of energy and on the health of the seas, and of plankton in particular? It would be imperative for us to find such accommodation, and that should not be a difficulty.

Mr. Djanogly: I agree with the hon. Lady. That is another reason why adaptability will be important—as the hon. Lady said, climates affect the sea.

The Bill could also be used to encourage marine-related tourism and to develop educational facilities, which are currently significantly underdeveloped in Britain compared with other countries. At the moment, most

consideration goes into securing rare habitats and species, but the emphasis needs to be changed so that we also encourage the study and enjoyment of the many excellent habitats that are currently thriving but about which we know relatively little because not much data are available.

Where we have identified species or habitats that are considered to be of such national importance that they should be protected, it is necessary that the power exists to enforce that policy if it is to work. Again, that will require flexibility because of the significant variations in habitat movement, as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) has said, and seasonal changes that exist in the sea. The relevant statutory conservation agencies should be able to implement management schemes on a site-by-site basis.

As we are an island nation, the sea is the key part of our national psyche. We should value it as an important part of our environment, and the Bill should provide the mechanism for us to give marine conservation the status that it requires and deserves.

1.35 pm

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on achieving the Second Reading of this important Bill and on initiating a debate that has perhaps occasionally been more educative than we would require or even like. Like Uxbridge, my constituency is landlocked. In fact, it is probably about as far from the sea as any constituency in this country, so I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for presenting a Bill that would ensure that future generations of people from Uxbridge, West Bromwich, East and beyond would enjoy marine habitats for years to come.

I speak in this debate because West Bromwich is the nature capital of the midlands. I am lucky to have at the heart of my constituency the beautiful Sandwell valley—an ancient woodland and green space that has brought pleasure to countless generations of ramblers, anglers, scouts and guides, boaters and pond dippers, amateur botanists and swan watchers. In fact, the valley lies at the centre of the Black Country urban forest, and its important role in black country life has been protected only because of the laws that have enabled us to resist the tarmackers and the bulldozers. I welcome the Bill because it would allow us to extend that protection to our marine environments throughout the country.

Our valley is home to many of England's key species, including the speckled wood butterfly, the pipistrelle bat, the wood anemone and the wood warbler, so the hon. Member for Uxbridge will know that, like him, we in West Bromwich take our wildlife protection seriously. In fact, we have heard that he is a keen ornithologist, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner). I invite them to come, at any time, to join generations of bird watchers who have walked along the streets of West Bromwich to Sandwell valley patiently to spot kingfishers, snipe, grey herons, willow warblers, whitethroats, skylarks, kestrels, green woodpeckers, redshanks, little ringed plovers, shovellers, swifts, sand martins, house martins and swallows.

The provisions for the protection of nationally important sites in England and Wales are substantially strengthened under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Government recognised that they had to take further action to protect SSSIs on land and the species and habitats in them, but I also welcome the Government's recognition that we should do more to protect our marine environment. I understand that DEFRA will publish a marine stewardship report next March because it recognises that today the imbalance between land-based and marine wildlife is greater than ever before.

We should not forget that three out of four of the world's biggest oil spills have threatened the British coast and waters. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) mentioned the salt marshes, three quarters of which have been lost during the past century. Some 50 per cent. of the deaths of the endangered northern right whale—sadly, now extinct in British waters—are caused by being hit by ships in coastal waters, so it is now time to shift our focus to tackling the multitude of problems that face our unique natural environments.

I praise my hon. Friends the Members for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for the work that they did in 1981 in securing the marine nature reserves. I afraid that I was not around on 27 November 1962, when my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow first raised the issue, but the action that some hon. Members have wanted to take has been overdue for some years.

We have had a very good debate today, and it has involved my first foray with the infantry on a Friday. This is my second contribution after my maiden speech, and I welcome the easy ride that Opposition Members have given me, but I shall now sit down and let my right hon. Friend the Minister reply to the debate.

1.40 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I thoroughly agree with the last point made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson). This is one of those debates that, in my opinion, make private Members' days well worth having, not only for the purpose of finding out about obscure marine species such as the sea squirt—sometimes given its Latin designation, of which I have never heard and of which I dare say I shall never hear again—but, mainly, for the purpose of engaging in a serious, non-partisan examination of a very important but relatively neglected issue.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), as sincerely as all who have spoken, on his choice of Bill. Having, as he said, won the lottery, he may not have got the money, but I think he has dealt with all the begging letters and petitions extremely well in coming up with this as his final choice.

The hon. Gentleman made a very fair, balanced, reasonable and supportive speech, to which I shall try to respond in like manner. He did say, however—I noted this particularly—that a much wider strategy than that contained in the Bill was needed if the marine environment is to be fully protected. That is true.

I shall take this opportunity briefly to set out the Government's approach to the marine environment and conservation, because, as others have said, such opportunities regrettably do not occur very often. I am aware from the speeches of Members in all parts of the House that there is a general wish to ensure that we act together to conserve our precious marine biodiversity. The

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

Government entirely share that feeling. Indeed, in a keynote speech in March this year, the Prime Minister set the tone when he said that the Government would launch measures to improve conservation here and abroad, including the preparation of a series of marine stewardship reports. I shall return to that in a moment.

It has been said that some 50 per cent. of Britain's biodiversity—more than 40,000 species—exists in the marine environment. Our oceans and seas cover more than 70 per cent. of the earth's surface. Oceans and seas offer us food from fishing and aquaculture, and opportunities to exploit renewable energy sources such as wind power. I shall return to that later as well. They are an important influence on the climate, and are important in breaking down waste. One speaker referred to the mess coming in from the sea; the mess going out to the sea from the land worries me much more, but there is certainly a problem. On or under the sea bed are minerals and energy supplies.

As others have said, we have made major strides in improving conservation on land, notably in the landmark Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which I was privileged to take through the House. It will give English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales all the tools that they need—I think—to ensure that sights of special scientific interest on land are brought into a favourable condition. The Government, indeed, have set a pretty testing specific target to bring 95 per cent. of them into such a condition by 2010. However, as almost all hon. Members have said, the sea surrounding us deserves similar attention.

We acknowledge that not enough progress has been made on the marine environment. For several reasons, we do not have a comprehensive system of marine protected areas in British waters. One reason is that we do not yet possess the same depth of knowledge about marine ecosystems as we have about the terrestrial environment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) said, we are sometimes unaware of the biodiversity because we cannot see it, so we are not immediately aware when it is lost or damaged.

Another reason is that the marine environment is ecologically more complex: setting the limits of protected areas is problematic in an environment whose nature is fluid and ever changing. A further reason is that the sea has historically, for 2,000 years or more, been available for us to use, exploit and traverse as we please. There are few individual ownership rights over the sea—that should not change—and the uses of the sea are subject to a range of different mechanisms for the management of human activities that has developed over time. A large percentage of those mechanisms are agreed in European and international forums, which I must admit adds to their complexity.

We should not underestimate the problems associated with developing an approach, which the Bill is designed to do, to managing our influences on the marine environment, in recognition of its great ecological value. It would be a mistake to develop a system of protected areas that could give rise to the presumption that the rest of the marine environment was of no concern. To be fair to the hon. Member for Uxbridge, he said no such thing—in fact, he acknowledged the other legitimate interests in our marine environment. Although the designation of protected areas is important, as Minister for the Environment I am the first to say that it is not enough. That is why the Government have already started initiatives to take a broad view of the needs of biodiversity in the marine environment as a whole.

Despite standing by my statement that we have not done enough, we have recently made a good deal of progress in protecting the seas surrounding our coast. Many activities that damage the marine environment have now been banned or brought under tight controls. We no longer dump sewage sludge or low-level radioactive waste in the sea—those initiatives were started under the previous Government. Tighter controls have reduced the amount of mercury and cadmium going into the north-east Atlantic. Furthermore, we have banned the use of many pesticides that are harmful to marine life, and played a full part in European and international efforts to protect the oceans globally.

The Bill, which is about identifying and conserving nationally important marine sites, needs to be seen against the background of the habitats and birds directives, both because they already exist and so must be taken into account, and because their presence adds to the complexity of the mosaic that is our legacy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) gave some details that I can now confirm. To date, within territorial waters, there are 133 marine special protection areas and 151 candidate special areas of conservation. Our best estimate of the total area of coastal and marine Natura 2000 sites is about 1.5 million hectares—a considerable area. The new regulations that we are introducing will place a duty on the Secretary of State to designate SACs and SPAs between 12 nautical miles—the limit of national waters—and 200 nautical miles from baseline. That, too, represents a substantial extension of conservation areas. The UK will be the first EU member to introduce such regulations.

My Department has let a contract with the Joint Nature Conservancy Committee to identify and agree relevant habitats and species in that 12 to 200-mile marine zone, to develop selection criteria and refine habitat definitions and to collate known data on those habitats and species. The committee is due to report in March, after which the Government will move to consider potential site identification.

One Member—my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West, I think—referred to the Darwin mounds, which are interesting. They are likely to be the first candidate for declaration as a special area of conservation once the new marine regulations are in place. The Darwin mounds—this is new to me—are an example of sandy coral mounds and they are no less fascinating for being in the cold, deep waters of the Rockall trough rather than the tropical waters in which we would normally expect coral reefs to reside. They are important not only as species in their own right, but as the habitat for sponges, starfish, worms, sea urchins, sea stars, gastropods, crabs and deep-sea demersal fish. I am amazed to find that all those marine species, let alone the coral mounds to contain them, are so near our shores, but that is a fact.

The key point for the hon. Member for Uxbridge is that we recognise that there may be gaps where data have still to be obtained and reviewed and in the coverage of nationally important marine wildlife and habitats. In our view, that should be addressed by the review of marine nature conservation.

I established that review and the working group to undertake it in 1999 to evaluate the success of previous marine nature conservation measures and to make proposals to improve marine nature conservation. The review is led by my Department and made up of a wide range of stakeholder organisations. I must say that I hate the word "stakeholder", but it applies to the relevant interests. The review includes other Departments, countryside agencies, the non-governmental organisations and, significantly, the commercial and recreational interests, which need to be part of the debate.

I should make a point in parenthesis. Several Members said that three marine nature reserves are designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. There are in fact four: Skomer, Lundy, Strangford Lough and St. Kilda, but that is a small matter of detail.

The working group published its interim report in May. It is a good review that attempted to highlight the full range of options on the way forward, from a complete overhaul of the current system to making minor changes. I am very interested in the working group's proposal of a regional seas pilot scheme in the Irish sea to test some ideas developed during the review. We shall consider that and, if we decide to proceed, we hope that the scheme might start in early 2002, with the results of the pilot available in early 2004.

Several hon. Members referred to the marine stewardship report, which is relevant to the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in March that the Government are to launch measures to improve marine conservation here and abroad, including a series of marine stewardship reports. The first will set out the Government's goals for an integrated and sustainable management of the marine environment across the range of marine sectors.

The views of key stakeholders will be listened to at three workshops, the first of which I chaired in the past week. It was a hard-hitting session, with the commercial and industrial interests and the conservation interests discussing their differences frankly and straightforwardly. Both sides want to find a compatible way forward.

Mr. Dalyell: Can my right hon. Friend give any really heavyweight interests that were critical of the Bill, and the reasons why?

Mr. Meacher: I will come to that. Commercial and industrial interests are undoubtedly concerned about an extension of the designation process. The issue is whether it is possible to find compatibility between those and other interests. As I have explained—I have given the figures—there are already substantial levels of designation, totalling about 1.5 million hectares. It is not surprising that those interests are concerned about the possible impact of future designations. That is a crucial point in relation to the Bill and its future.

We are pursuing internationally agreed strategies under annexe V of the Oslo and Paris convention, which include reducing or eliminating inputs of hazardous and radioactive substances in the north-east Atlantic. Annexe V contains a strategy on the protection and conservation of ecosystems and biological diversity of the marine environment. Another is ACSCOBANS, if I can introduce another ghastly acronym. It stands for the agreement on the conservation of small cetaceans of the Baltic and North seas; ACSCOBANS is a great deal better than having to repeat all that each time.

Mr. Gardiner: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Meacher: I will with some trepidation.

Mr. Gardiner: I rise only to say that Askaban has a far more widely known meaning for all children in the United Kingdom because it is in the Harry Potter books. It is the prison for magical creatures. Since the Minister was referring to such magical creatures, perhaps it is appropriate.

Mr. Meacher: One of the great pleasures is that I learn something every time I attend these debates. I am glad to know that. I missed it in my earlier life.

ACSCOBANS came into force under the previous Government in March 1994. Its aim is to promote the close co-operation between parties with a view to achieving and maintaining a favourable conservation status for small cetaceans in the Baltic and North sea.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Meacher: I am getting a little concerned, but I give way.

Mr. Banks: My right hon. Friend is talking about cetaceans. May I mention crustaceans? We should consider not just the welfare of marine wildlife, as it were, in the marine environment, but how they are subsequently exploited. May I draw his attention to early-day motion 278 on Barney the lobster? The Department is, I hope, working with Bristol university on the development of a crustastun. Will he give his ministerial attention to the welfare of lobsters and how they are cooked?

Mr. Meacher: Sometimes one learns more than one bargained for. I cannot immediately remember the wording of that early-day motion but I know of my hon. Friend's real and deep concern on these matters. I shall look at it and promise to get in touch with him next week. Perhaps we can have some further discussion.

Mr. Dismore: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Meacher: I think my generosity is getting the better of me.

Mr. Dismore: On the issue of cooking lobsters, I understand that Mr. Rick Stein has a theory that, if we keep a lobster in the deep freeze for some time beforehand, it chills it to such a degree that it does not realise it is being cooked.

Mr. Meacher: I think that the Bill is about the preservation of marine species, not the subtleties of slaughtering particularly tasty species.

The UK hosted the third ACSCOBANS meeting in July 2000. I mention that because several hon. Members raised the important question of bycatch. A resolution, which was strongly supported by the UK, setting clear limits on

[Mr. Meacher]

levels of incidental take of small cetaceans was agreed. Bycatch of whales or dolphin species above 1.7 per cent.—I do not know how the figure was arrived at but it is relatively low, I suppose—is regarded as unacceptable. To meet that target, an intergovernmental working group is developing a UK bycatch response strategy.

Biodiversity action plans have been very effective on land and we are now trying to apply them at sea. As part of the UK's biodiversity action plan, there are specific plans for the conservation of 19 species, including six plans for group species—for baleen whales, tooth whales, small dolphins, commercial fish, deep-water fish and marine turtles. A co-ordinated steering group led by my Department is taking forward cetacean action plans working with representatives from non-governmental organisations, other Government Departments, the devolved Administrations, fishermen and other stakeholders.

Let me turn briefly to the World Wildlife Fund oceans recovery campaign. Hon. Members will be aware of that campaign, so I shall take this opportunity to refer to some of its main objectives.

First, it is seeking an improved network of marine protected areas to protect marine wildlife and habitats, and this Bill falls squarely within that aim. It supports the idea of an improved network of marine protection areas, which we are working to achieve through the application of the habitats and birds directives. It also supports the introduction of marine environmental high-risk areas, working under the auspices of the Ospar convention and through the development of ideas under the review of marine nature conservation. We support that objective and several of our initiatives are designed to achieve it.

Secondly, it supports the introduction of fishing-free zones, which is an extremely important proposal. We support the principle of fishing-free zones where they are justified, but we have yet to see the scientific evidence to support their introduction in UK waters. There would also be difficulties with implementation, because under the EU common fisheries policy establishing protected areas in international fisheries requires agreement in the Fisheries Council. Socio-economic effects would also have to be considered, particularly as it is not Government policy to make compensation available as a result of closures put in place to protect stocks.

Having said all that, I return to the hon. Member for Uxbridge and his Bill. I recognise the considerable work that has gone into it and the real commitment that the hon. Gentleman has shown in bringing it to the House today. The principle of taking action to identify and protect the most important marine sites is unquestionably a valuable one. The hon. Member for Mid–Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), who was very generous in his remarks, said that there was a gap in coverage of sensitive areas that will not be covered by designation under the habitats and birds directives. We acknowledge that, but if and when we legislate in this complex area, which is regulated by overlapping regimes and controls, we must make sure that the systems that we introduce do not further complicate an already complex, piecemeal mosaic. The hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk recognised, quite fairly, that we need to rationalise the present rather variegated framework. The question for the Government is whether the Bill is the most appropriate instrument for that purpose. I hope that I carry all hon. Members with me when I say that we must not apply a simplistic solution to a complicated problem.

Legislating in the marine environment is certainly never easy. Several hon. Members have acknowledged that there are still serious unresolved concerns about the Bill. Some of my hon. Friends have drawn attention to this very openly in relation to offshore oil and gas exploration, wind farms, ports development and certain sporting interests.

I also noted that the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) was seeking a derogation in the Bill for the interests of inshore commercial fisheries. That was one example. Additionally, the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) mentioned the need for further research, which I entirely support, to be sure about conservation impacts. Therefore, there are problems. The Government believe that those legitimate interests have to be fully considered before the Bill, perhaps in modified form, can finally proceed.

Bob Spink: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way now.

I want to be as helpful as I can in the light of the virtual consensus on the Bill, but, for the reasons that I have just set out, we cannot support the Bill in its current form. Nevertheless, if it is the will of the House to give the Bill a Second Reading we are content to have further discussions in Committee with the Bill's promoter and sponsors. I hope that it will be understood that I cannot make any commitment at this stage on the Bill's ultimate fate, but we recognise the value of its objectives, the sincerity of its promoter, the manner in which he introduced it today and the support that it has received from hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. We certainly share those concerns and interests and, as I said, we are content to have further deliberations in Committee on the application of its main provisions.

2.6 pm

Mr. Randall: I thank the Minister very sincerely for his comments, and I do not think that any of us could have wished for more than that commitment. Our intention was to have a constructive debate, and that is precisely what we have had today. I hope that we shall have just such a debate in Committee. I also thank hon. Members, both those who are inside and outside the Chamber, for their support on the issue, which is not as simple as it may sometimes seem. I am also grateful for the power of "the infantry", who have been very useful in this debate.

Without taking anything for granted, I hope that the Bill will now be read a Second Time.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Legalisation of Cannabis Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.7 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I pay my compliments to the usual channels for making time available for me to argue in favour of my Legalisation of Cannabis Bill. When I first decided to promote the Bill, I did not think that I would be moving its Second Reading three days after the United Kingdom had seen the greatest change in its drugs policy in more than 22 years.

I can think of at least one of my constituents who will be extremely pleased with the Home Secretary's recent decision. That constituent has suffered since birth from haemophilia, and he has been infected by contaminated blood transfusions, which were provided by the state, with HIV and hepatitis C. He may have been infected also with new variant CJD. To dull the pain of his condition and help him to sleep, he takes cannabis. He does so with the full approval of his doctors as the drugs that they would otherwise prescribe would be too damaging to his liver, which has been weakened by hepatitis C. As hard as I have looked, I have found no justice or rationality in the state's treatment of that man. I am glad that Home Secretary has acknowledged the situation.

Statistics show that 68 per cent. of all drugs arrests are for cannabis use. The situation is absurd. When Commander Brian Paddick introduced his no-arrest policy, which has now been extended effectively nationwide, he said that, in the year prior to its introduction, 82 people in Lambeth had been arrested and charged with cannabis possession. It cost an average of £10,000 and several hours of police officers' time to take each one to court. The average fine for those poor people who were prosecuted was £45 each. If one considers the issue rationally, not with a "drugs is drugs and they must be stamped out at all costs" approach, it becomes clear that that is a massive waste of police time and taxpayers' money.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is therefore to be commended for viewing the matter sensibly and ditching the old "drugs is drugs" attitude. The changes bring us into the mainstream of European policy on cannabis and hopefully signal a change in thinking towards a harm-reduction philosophy and away from a moral crusade using the criminal justice system against recreational drugs. In the Bill, however, I go further than the Home Secretary and argue for the legalisation of cannabis.

I understand that my right hon. Friend says that his move on Tuesday was not a first step towards legalisation, but all over the developed world, with the exception of Sweden and the American Federal Government, Governments are slowly taking incremental steps that can only result in full legalisation. I confidently believe that cannabis will one day be legalised. I even think that here in Westminster, where we are so well provided with late-night bars and cigarette machines, we may one day have our own coffee shop.

The present policy, though an improvement, still has many flaws. Cannabis will remain illegal, and although most police forces will turn a blind eye, that will not solve the other problems that the illegality of cannabis causes. The argument for cannabis remaining illegal rests on the proposition that sometimes people must be forced to be free. Even on that principle, I do not see how keeping cannabis illegal can be justified. It is a substance of which society mildly disapproves and of which the medical profession very mildly disapproves.

The damage done by continued illegality is great. The Home Office has estimated that the retail cannabis market in this country is worth about £1.5 billion a year—a huge sum, given that the total gross domestic product of agriculture in this country is worth only £5 billion. In quantity, the cannabis market is much larger than all the other illegal drug use in the country put together. In terms of profitability, it is more modest. The total drugs market in this country is worth £6 billion.

That has several implications. First, £1.5 billion can pay for a lot of crime. That money maintains and supports organised crime and other activities—not only the promotion of hard drugs, but a range of other criminal activities are effectively subsidised by the illegal cannabis market.

Secondly, it cannot be denied that cannabis is and will remain the initial point of contact for young people with the world of illegal drugs. According to the recent British crime survey, 45 per cent of 16 to 25-year-olds have tried cannabis. That is a very large point of contact. For the vast majority people, cannabis is the only illegal drug that they have tried, except perhaps for a few experiments with other soft drugs, but for some people that is not the case. Because of the relative profitability of other drugs, the drug pushers and gangs have an incentive to turn people who approach them from cannabis to other, more dangerous drugs. Even if they succeed with only a small percentage of people, the profits for them are still great.

As long as the supply of cannabis remains outside the regulation of the state, we will not be able to break the link between soft and hard drugs, although effective decriminalisation will at least help. We have relaxed our attitudes, but we still allow organised crime to dominate a large market and thereby come into contact with a huge number of otherwise law-abiding citizens. Legalisation would solve that problem decisively; it would bring the supply of cannabis under the effective regulation of the state, alongside tobacco and alcohol, and would bring an end to the criminality that prohibition has caused.

I should like to draw parallels between cannabis prohibition and the American experience of alcohol prohibition, as I believe that they are similar and have become even more so. In fact, American prohibition laws were close to laws that now appear to apply in this country. It was not illegal in America during prohibition to possess or consume alcohol, merely an offence to supply or allow premises to be used to brew up. In both cases, a widely used recreational drug was illegal and put beyond the regulation of the state. In America, as with the prohibition of cannabis here, the effects on civic society were deeply corrosive. The murder rate in America during prohibition went up from five in 100,000 people to 10 in 100,000. When prohibition ended, it dropped to 4.5 in 100,000. It remained constant at the lower rate throughout the 1930s, '40s and '50s; it was only in the 1960s, when America and, indeed, the rest of the developed world had a second experience of prohibition as cannabis use began to become popular, that the murder rate rose again.

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

In America, the percentage of spirits consumed during prohibition went up from 40 per cent. to 90 per cent. overnight. After prohibition, hard liquor sales dropped to 40 per cent again. The reason is clear—bootleggers found that spirits were far easier to smuggle and move around, and more profitable to sell. A clear comparison can be made with the drug pushers of today, who find harder drugs more profitable and easier to move around. Even more corrosive in America were the effects on civil life, the disdain of ordinary Americans for the law and the hypocrisy of those charged with implementing a law in which they did not believe and which, in many circumstances, they did not observe themselves.

In addition, there was an enormous growth in organised crime. The greatest fillip that it ever received was being allowed to supply the whole country with alcohol; the damage caused to America has yet to subside fully. In 1960, John F. Kennedy entered the White House. His family's fortune came from his father, "bootlegger Joe", who made his money smuggling alcohol during prohibition. If the accounts that I have read are true, the success of John F. Kennedy in being elected owed much to that money.

The use of cannabis in this country is not as widespread as the use of alcohol was in America during the 1920s and '30s. Similarly, the effects of prohibition on society are not as extreme or harmful, but they are comparable problems. The illegality of cannabis helps organised crime; it encourages criminality and disrespect for the law.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that to legalise is to legitimise, and that to legitimise is to encourage? Is he seeking to do that?

Mr. Jones: I am not seeking to encourage the use of cannabis, but to legalise and legitimise it because the harm caused to society by prohibition is greater than the harm caused to society by the drug itself. That is a balanced argument. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will listen and, perhaps, learn.

I do not want to stress this point too much, but I should say that legalising cannabis would bring great economic benefits to the country. The agriculture sector, which is now in what appears to be a semi-permanent crisis, would be given a cash crop that is eminently growable in this country and would provide a much-needed boost. The Treasury would also benefit. Discounting the benefits from completely eliminating the waste of time and resources spent on prosecuting cannabis suppliers and users, the Library estimates that £1 billion a year could be made from the taxation of cannabis. That money could be spent on our schools and hospitals, and on reducing poverty. Given the Treasury's experience of tobacco taxation, I am confident that it could increase even that £1 billion of revenue.

The major obstacle to legalisation is the problem of one country going it alone on an issue that affects every developed country. The problem is twofold: first, we would have to leave several, admittedly obsolete, international conventions; and secondly, we might have difficulties with drug tourism. It is because of that problem that I am so pleased by the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on Tuesday. As I said, it has brought us into the mainstream of European policy. I believe that it is in conjunction with our European partners, and perhaps liberalising countries such as Canada and New Zealand, that legalisation will happen.

The Netherlands has already driven a coach and horses through the conventions, as would Switzerland if she were a signatory. It is high time that the conventions were re-examined, because the solutions to the drugs problem that were suggested in the early 1970s have not worked and can never do so. Together with other countries, we will need to renegotiate the 1972 UN convention so that we can focus on the drugs that damage our society, and not those such as cannabis, whose illegality causes so much harm.

I hope that I have made it clear that the argument in favour of legalising cannabis does not rest on a principled liberal view about the freedom of the individual, although such a view exists, or on the enthusiasts' belief that cannabis is the solution to the world's problems. Rather, it is a pragmatic argument about how best to reduce the damage to our communities and to society. I do not believe that it is an argument that will carry my Bill into law, but I think that its momentum is now unstoppable. Sooner or later, cannabis will be legalised. The sooner we face up to that fact, the sooner we can stop the deeply corrosive effect that illegality causes to our society.

2.23 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): As one of the Bill's supporters, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) on introducing it to the House and on being given the opportunity to start the debate. Obviously, the Bill in its present form is not the one that will end up on the statute book. However, it is part of the debate for which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has called and to which he contributed significantly in his recent announcement.

Let me say from the beginning that I have never used cannabis. I have no moral objection to its use; it is just one of those things. During my youth, I seemed to be completely untouched by drugs—and also, regrettably, by sex and alcohol. Subsequently, I have been able to make some progress in the latter two areas, but I have still not used cannabis. I make those remarks because we are considering a matter of personal freedoms for individuals. This is not special personal pleading on my part.

I first raised the issue of legalisation in the House more than 10 years ago. I remember the fallout—no one wanted even to discuss the proposal and it was made clear that it was not official Labour party policy. The Government of the time kept trying to make mischief by saying that it was our policy. It was a difficult time to raise the issue in the House, even if it was not necessarily difficult to raise it in the country. In the House, it was being treated as an issue of law and order rather than of personal freedom or health. I even tabled an early-day motion in 1993 calling for a royal commission to study the whole question of the law on cannabis.

I make those points because, as my hon. Friend said, a certain imperative is now driving this matter. Although the Home Secretary has made it clear that the Government are just carrying out a revision, I believe that we are progressing towards the full legalisation of cannabis. It is

right to do so because it is a matter of personal freedom. It is the duty of Governments not to tell people what they should smoke—or, indeed, what they should sniff up their noses—but to intervene where third parties are affected by people's habits.

Mr. Rosindell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: No, I am not giving way.

As my hon. Friend said in reply to a question by the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell), there is no suggestion that people should be encouraged to smoke cannabis. I have never taken cannabis and have not the slightest intention of doing so because I do not want to inhale anything into my lungs. I do not smoke cigarettes either. As for the impact of cannabis as a drug, nicotine and the smoking of cigarettes is far more harmful. Given the impact on the health of individuals who use cannabis compared with that on the health of those who smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, there is no sense whatever in maintaining a law against the use of cannabis. My hon. Friend mentioned the plight of one of his constituents. Doctors can prescribe all sorts of drugs but cannot prescribe cannabis as a means of pain abatement. What nonsense.

What is happening on the ground is also nonsense. If one is waging a war against something—in this case it is a war against drugs—and not winning, the generals should call a halt and re-examine the strategy and tactics. To continue to proceed with them makes no sense. I am glad that the Conservative Opposition are examining their policy in respect of drugs and that a number of prominent Conservative Members have bravely spoken out. We are now having a proper debate and the taboos are dropping away. Once again, Parliament is falling into line with what is practised outside of this place, which makes a great deal of sense.

As I said earlier, what is happening on the ground is that the police are rewriting the law themselves, so that it is being applied differentially throughout the country.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Is it not significant that probation officers, at their conference last week, changed tack from decriminalisation of just cannabis to decriminalisation of all drugs? They are the people in closest contact with the criminal elements.

Mr. Banks: Precisely, because they are charged with carrying out the laws of the land. It is not just a question of Members of Parliament passing laws in this place; we must ensure that the resources are there to enforce the law and that the law itself is enforceable and has not been turned into nonsense.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central should proceed as firmly as he possibly can with his measure. It will not make the progress today that it merits, but this is part of a process which I firmly believe will eventualiy lead to the full legalisation of cannabis.

Mr. Rosindell: The hon. Gentleman talks about personal freedom. Will he examine what personal freedom is left for those who lose their lives through drug-taking and whose families lose a loved one? Does he accept that the taking of cannabis can lead to the taking of other drugs, which can devastate people's lives?

Mr. Banks: Let me answer the last point. The rationale of what the hon. Gentleman has just said can equally be translated into saying that if someone has a dry sherry—the hon. Gentleman looks rather acetic, so perhaps he has done so in the past—that will lead to the individual becoming a total alcoholic. It does not work like that with alcohol and it would not work like that with drugs.

I commend the Bill to the House.

2.29 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) has not given due weight to the Home Secretary's announcement in a Select Committee meeting only a few days ago. It suggests a new approach—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 25 January.

Remaining Private Member's Bill

DIVORCE (RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Mrs. Mary Kelly

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.30 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the case of my constituent, the late Mrs. Mary Kelly, and the treatment that she received at Whiston hospital. I take no pleasure in doing that because it is very distressing. However, I owe it to Mrs. Kelly and her family to outline the appalling treatment that she received at Whiston, and the cavalier way in which the hospital dealt with complaints about it.

I raise the matter at the request of Mrs. Kelly's family and because I believe that the case gives rise to serious anxieties about some of the operations at the hospital. I do not believe that the hospital has learned lessons from the case or that it is making any attempts to learn them. It is the earnest wish of Mrs. Kelly's family that those lessons are learned so that no one else has to suffer in the same way. I pay tribute to the late Mrs. Kelly's husband, her son and her daughter-in-law, who have said that that is their only motivation for raising the matter. Their conduct has been exemplary throughout, and I hope that outlining what happened to Mrs. Kelly will prevent another family from undergoing the same experience.

Mrs. Kelly first saw her general practitioner in April 1998 because she was experiencing chest pains. She was referred to Dr. Ball, a cardiac consultant at Whiston hospital. She met the first obstacle when she was told that there was a 12-month wait even to be seen. She paid for a private consultation, and it will be no surprise to my hon. Friend the Minister that the same consultant who could not see Mrs. Kelly at Whiston hospital was able to see her quickly at a private hospital. That is one of the best arguments for reconsidering consultants' contracts.

After paying for a consultation, Mrs. Kelly was seen again at Whiston hospital where she underwent an ECG in November 1998. The case then began to get complicated. After the ECG, Mrs. Kelly was referred for an angiogram but she and her family believed that she was waiting for surgery. I appreciate that some confusion might arise because angiograms are often described by medical staff as a "surgical procedure". I know the Kelly family; they are intelligent and sensible people. The confusion therefore suggests that communication at Whiston was poor from the beginning.

The problem was compounded by the fact that when Mrs. Kelly rang to ask for the date of the operation, she was always given the standard answer that the wait was 18 months. No one bothered to check what she was waiting for or to explain the position to her. She was an elderly lady, who did not like to make a fuss and so she went on waiting. While she waited, her family saw her transformed from being an outgoing, lively person.

Mrs. Kelly also suffered from osteo-arthritis. She experienced severe chest pains on several occasions and she began to deteriorate. Once she went to the accident and emergency department at Whiston hospital because she was in so much pain, and her family told me that she waited from 5.30 pm until 2.45 am before she was admitted to a ward. During most of that time she was left by herself on a chair in a corner of the A and E department.

That is absolutely appalling. Friends who have worked in A and E tell me that those suffering from chest pains are always a priority, and one of the key procedures is to calm and reassure the patient. Mrs. Kelly was not calmed and reassured by being stuck on a chair in the corner of a busy A and E department on a Saturday night with all the problems that we know such departments are subject to at such times. She was so distressed that on three or four subsequent occasions when she suffered severe pain she refused to go back to Whiston. Ironically, had she done so, she may have increased her priority for the procedures that she was waiting for, but the system worked against her from the beginning.

Mrs. Kelly waited, and while she did so she continued to get worse until she finally had her angiogram in April 2000—two years after she first raised the problem with her GP. Only then was she placed on the waiting list for surgery. It was hoped that she would be operated on within three to four months, but she was not.

Mrs. Kelly went on waiting, and while she was waiting the hospital discovered that she was also in need of an urgent hip operation. Of course, that could not be done until she had had cardiac surgery. It should have increased her priority for that cardiac surgery, but it did not, and the reasons why are hard to discover. The hospital told the family at a meeting in January this year that it was because the rheumatology department had not communicated with the cardiac department.

When the hospital wrote to me on 30 March, it said that it had unified case notes, and that the relevant rheumatological correspondence was available to doctors in the cardiac department. Which was it? Either the two departments did not communicate, or if they did, it did not make any difference.

Mrs. Kelly still waited, often in acute pain. She sometimes suffered vomiting and stomach pains because of the combination of different drugs she was taking for her various conditions. She was admitted to hospital again in August last year. She was issued with a wheelchair, and a once lively, outgoing person became almost completely housebound. She died on 7 October last year, still waiting for her operation.

Mrs. Kelly's case is most distressing. It is the worst that I have encountered since I came into Parliament. It was compounded by the fact that when complaints were made about her case it was difficult to get the management at Whiston to take them seriously. Only Mike Murphy, who became the acting chairman of the trust for a time while this was going on, tried to resolve these complaints, and I pay tribute to him for his efforts.

When Mrs. Kelly's son contacted me in August last year, I wrote to the hospital on 25 August, having followed my usual practice, which most hon. Members follow, of checking first with Mrs. Kelly to see whether she wanted me to take up her case. I received an acknowledgement from the chief executive dated 30 August, and then nothing until 29 September, when I was told that the hospital needed Mrs. Kelly's permission to correspond with me. I understand the need to be cautious in dealing with clinical information, but every other hospital I have ever communicated with knows that MPs do not take up cases unless they are asked to do so, and that in doing so there is implied permission for the hospital to discuss the case.

We still heard nothing, so my office wrote again on 26 October informing Whiston hospital that Mrs. Kelly had died and asking for a reply. We still had no reply, and we wrote again on 6 November. On the same day, my staff rang the chief executive to tell the hospital once again that Mrs. Kelly had died. There was still nothing until 10 November, when we received a fax, which, by a strange coincidence, was a copy of a letter dated 6 November. That letter is instructive about the way in which Whiston hospital was dealing with complaints. I should like to give the House a flavour of that letter. In fact, it was so distressing that at the time I did not dare show it to Mrs. Kelly's family. It said:

"I would like to offer my sincere apologies to Mrs Kelly and her family for the obvious anguish she has endured and would hope that this explanation offers some comfort to her."

It went on to give the standards paragraphs telling me that I had the right to an independent review. Of course, those standard paragraphs are given to a patient who complains, not to a Member of Parliament. The letter was signed by the chief executive, and if that response is sent to a Member of Parliament, I shudder to think what other members of the public receive when they complain.

Since then, there has been much correspondence. Indeed, the regional office of the NHS carried out a review into the complaints, and it sent me a copy, which arrived yesterday—presumably, after I had applied for this Adjournment debate. Meetings between representatives of the hospital and the family have also taken place, but Whiston hospital has still failed to address the real issues in the case, and I hope that my hon. Friend will deal with them in her reply.

Why did Mrs. Kelly wait so long for an angiogram even when she was presenting with increased symptoms during that time? Why did she wait so long in A and E? What is the hospital doing to address the problems there? Why does there seem to be no proper communication between departments treating people in the same hospital? I have seen no attempt to address those problems in all the correspondence that I have received. Indeed, I am forced to conclude that the hospital is concerned with spin rather than substance. Believe it or not, the hospital employs someone called a patient and public relations manager. I do not want hospitals to be concerned with public relations—they are there to treat sick people, but Whiston hospital significantly failed to do so on that occasion.

When I asked why Mrs. Kelly was not told she was on the waiting list for surgery when she rang the hospital, I was given the answer that

"Mrs Kelly . . . was not told that she was not on the waiting list for surgery because at that time she was not on the waiting list for surgery."

First, that was not what she was told and, secondly, I could describe the answer using a completely unparliamentary expression, which I would not be allowed to use here.

I asked what priority Mrs. Kelly was given for her angiogram, and I was told:

"Mrs Kelly was placed on the routine waiting list for coronary angiography. The delay between listing and the performance of the angiogram was due to the fact that at the time, this was the length of the routine waiting list."

But Mrs. Kelly was not routine; she was presenting with further symptoms as time went on.

The trust has no intention of addressing those problems. Even in its response to the review of its complaints procedure, in which 12 recommendations for change were made, the chief executive said that the investigation had found that the trust had satisfactory complaints procedures. Well, if the complaints procedures are satisfactory, I am Dutch! They are certainly not satisfactory.

The tragedy is that the NHS is not like that in most of its manifestations. Recently, two of my very good friends, one of whom my hon. Friend the Minister will know, have been treated for life-threatening conditions in the NHS. They could not have received better treatment or better care. What has happened is not a failure of the NHS; it is failure of the management at that hospital and a complete failure of its communications procedures.

Ironically, yesterday, another report on the hospital was published, dealing with the Michael Abram case. In that report, too, it is clear that the communication and record keeping was not of a sufficiently high standard and that, in many cases, procedures were not followed. That is exactly the same problem, but it will be of no comfort to the Kelly family if those problems are allowed to continue. The problems and the management of the hospital need to be addressed urgently.

The Kelly family believed in the NHS, and they still do. Mr. and Mrs. Kelly worked hard all their lives. They paid their taxes, paid their dues and made no claim on the welfare state. The remaining members of the family have to live with the uncertainty of not knowing whether Mrs. Kelly would be alive today if the hospital had treated her better.

The hospital let her down from the moment when she walked through the door, and continued to let her down even after she was dead. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ensure that it will not be allowed to let down other people, and other families, in the same way.

This hospital must learn the lessons of what has happened, and it must put things right. So far, it has shown no intention of doing so. I hope that the Department will ensure that it does in future, so that there are no more cases like that of Mrs. Kelly.

2.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) for raising this serious matter. I hope that she will convey my condolences to her late constituent's family. I am extremely sorry that the concerns raised by Mrs. Kelly's son and, indeed, the wider family, which my hon. Friend has taken up so assiduously, were not dealt with either promptly or efficiently by St. Helens and Knowsley NHS trust, and I entirely accept what my hon. Friend has said about the family's desire to ensure that improvements are made in the system so that such things do not happen to other people.

In my experience, many families who complain to the health service are not looking for compensation. They do not seek a financial solution; what they want is a genuine acknowledgment of what went wrong, and the changing and strengthening of systems so that disasters do not occur again. Very often, they are looking for a sincere apology from those involved.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

I think that the issue has three main aspects. The first is what has happened to Mrs. Kelly, the second is the inadequacies of the complaints procedure at Whiston hospital, and the third is the question of what action can be taken to ensure that similar tragic cases do not occur.

I fully acknowledge that the time that Mrs. Kelly had to wait for an angiogram was entirely unacceptable. As my hon. Friend said, Mrs. Kelly was placed on a waiting list of between 15 and 17 months. Since then, additional investment has been made in the coronary heart disease service in Merseyside and Cheshire to meet the objectives of the coronary heart disease national service framework. Extra money is being invested for the recruitment of more consultants, and also to increase the number of cardiac catheter laboratories and cardiac theatres where angiograms are carried out.

St. Helens and Knowsley health authority has contributed £810,000 this year to support those initiatives, and a sixth cardiac surgeon was appointed in April this year at the cardiothoracic centre in Liverpool. An additional cardiac catheter laboratory is planned to open in January next year. There will be a sixth cardiac theatre before April next year. All those developments are within the same trust, serving the people of Merseyside and Cheshire.

I entirely accept that all that will give no comfort to Mrs. Kelly's family, but perhaps it will give a degree of reassurance that it has been acknowledged that waiting times for procedures of this kind have been far too long. Hopefully, extra investment in cardiac services will prevent such things from happening again.

As my hon. Friend will know, the Government are currently reviewing the NHS complaints procedure. It is working acceptably for some patients, but there are many examples of less positive experiences. We recently launched a discussion paper examining the whole procedure, and we want to make significant changes next year. However, this is not just about improving the complaints process for individuals; it is about trying to change the way in which the service works, so that the central focus of the NHS is on patients and their families. We want all who work in the NHS—those at the centre, clinicians, and trust management—to try genuinely to put patients' views at the top of their agenda when considering how to provide services, and certainly when considering how to respond to patients and their families. Later this year, we shall make further proposals in an effort to strengthen patient and public participation in the whole health service to make sure that patients get an effective and strong voice in the way in which the service is organised.

My hon. Friend mentioned provision within the trust. I am pleased to say that, instead of appointing a public relations officer, St. Helens and Knowsley trust is to participate in a nationwide initiative to establish a patient advocacy and liaison service. That is not about public relations, but about providing on-the-spot help to resolve problems when they first occur. In many cases, complaints will not reach the dreadful state that Mrs. Kelly's case has reached because people will be able to obtain immediate assistance within the trust involved. St. Helens and Knowsley trust is one of 14 trusts selected to run a pathfinder project for PALS. I understand that the trust has appointed a PALS manager in advance of the launch, which is to take place on 1 November. I hope that it gives my hon. Friend and her constituents some comfort to know that in future there will be on-the-spot help to resolve such issues.

Profound concern has been voiced about the way in which the complaint relating to Mrs. Kelly was handled by the trust. As my hon. Friend has said, the matter was taken up by the NHS north west regional office, which carried out an investigation. The regional director said that

"the handling of this matter was not of an acceptable standard".

He was satisfied that both my hon. Friend and the Kelly family

"should have received a better response from the trust"

and said that he would write to my hon. Friend explaining that and offering her an apology. In addition, he would ensure that the trust apologised to Mrs. Kelly's family.

An immediate independent review of complaints arrangements within the trust was ordered. The review team finalised its report in July, concluding that the introduction of new arrangements had improved quality. However, the team made 12 recommendations which the trust has accepted and is in the process of implementing. Those include changing the organisation of correspondence, reviewing the use of standard paragraphs in correspondence—which, as my hon. Friend pointed out, is entirely inappropriate—monitoring complaints responses and carrying out a systematic review of complainants' views on how their complaint is proceeding. That will provide a real check at every stage on whether people are content with the handling of their complaint.

Progress against that action plan will be reviewed by the regional office to ensure that all the recommended changes are implemented. I am pleased to say that my hon. Friend's intervention regarding the Kelly case has proved to be a catalyst, driving action within the trust to improve its performance.

Helen Jones: Will my hon. Friend confirm that as well as carrying out a review of the complaints procedure, the hospital will establish a strategy for learning lessons from complaints about its clinical governance and procedures? It is not solely a matter of apologising and dealing with a complaint from a particular person, but one of learning lessons to improve the way in which the hospital is run.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right. We are trying to instil throughout the NHS the principle of being an organisation with a memory, so that when such cases arise, clinicians, managers and other staff do not gloss over them but learn from them and absorb principles of good practice into future organisation.

I have some remarks about clinical governance that should give my hon. Friend some comfort about the future of the trust. I do not doubt that in the Kelly case the complaints procedure failed Mrs. Kelly's family and my hon. Friend. That underlines the importance of changing the way in which the public and patients are involved in the NHS.

As a consequence of the concerns that have been raised, I have asked the NHS north west regional office to bring to the attention of the Commission for Health Improvement the details and outcome of the independent review of complaints handling by the trust. We shall ensure that consideration of complaints and how well the trust learns from them is brought into the wider review of clinical governance that CHI assessors are due to undertake at the trust in mid-November.

My hon. Friend has also raised concerns about mental health services in the trust. An independent report was published on 23 October, which clearly highlights failings in the system of care and concerns about the management of care in supporting mental health services in St. Helens and Knowsley, although it emphasises that the professional staff involved in a particular patient's care could not have predicted what happened.

In the light of that incident, the health authority and the trust have developed an action plan to ensure that local mental health services meet the needs of all patients. Subject to public consultation and ministerial approval, mental health services will transfer from St. Helens and Knowsley trust to Warrington Community Health Care NHS trust on 1 November. That is a transitional step towards ultimately transferring services to a specialist mental health trust, which is where they ought to be and which will cover the wider area.

The Commission for Health Improvement has a routine review of St. Helens and Knowsley trust scheduled for mid-November. However, in line with a recommendation of the mental health report, St. Helens and Knowsley health authority has written to the commission to request that the routine review be expanded to consider clinical governance arrangements. That will involve taking a much wider view of mental health services in the trust.

I have asked the commission to consider the complaints procedure to ensure that the organisation learns from its experiences. The commission's review and its reports will provide us with a great deal of extremely useful information in respect of monitoring and, I hope, improving services available from the trust to local people.

My hon. Friend has done the House and the NHS a great deal of good in raising those issues robustly and directly. It is crucial that we deal openly and transparently with matters that go wrong in the health service. The fullest possible information should be put in the public domain and people and their families should keep their dignity and be shown respect. They should be made to feel that their experience has not gone unremarked and unrecorded and they should not think that we have failed to act.

We have a responsibility to do our best to ensure that similar tragedies do not happen in future. Although it is impossible to say that such incidents will never happen again, I hope that it is some comfort to Mrs. Kelly's family, who fought with determination and commitment to get action taken, that we are absolutely determined that a full review of the trust will be carried out and that action will be taken, not just to improve services but to ensure that it responds properly to complaints.

Complaints are a serious matter for the NHS. We must learn to improve the services that we provide and we should not be afraid to acknowledge our shortcomings or to put in place improvements to drive up standards so that we can treat people such as Mrs. Kelly much better.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 29 October 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Missile Defence

1. **Harry Cohen** (Leyton and Wanstead): What discussions he has had with the US Administration on missile defence since July; and if he will make a statement. [8349]

5. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What recent discussions he has had with his US counterpart on national missile defence. [8353]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I discussed missile defence with the United States Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, most recently on 22 August. There have been regular contacts between officials. I have consistently made it clear that we share US concerns about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and that we shall continue to work together to tackle the potential threat with a comprehensive strategy. However, it remains the case that the US has not decided how it wishes to proceed with missile defence and has made no request for the use of facilities in the United Kingdom.

Harry Cohen: What does the Minister know about the implications for missile defence of the Shanghai agreement between Presidents Bush and Putin and indeed of President Bush's visit to China? Even if some type of deal is done between those states, will not the United States's missile defence project make the world a far more dangerous place—not only because of an increase in the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons in non-nuclear states, the direct militarisation of states and the likelihood of more non-state terrorists undertaking asymmetrical attacks, but because of an increase in the proliferation of nuclear weapons—

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is only so much that the Minister can take.

Mr. Hoon: I am sure that my hon. Friend welcomes the discussions that have taken place between the United States and Russia on a range of different subjects, probably most of which he mentioned in his question. What is important is that both Russia and the United States have set out their thinking on missile defensive systems. We have encouraged both countries to engage in a constructive dialogue such as has taken place between NATO members and Russia. Those discussions will continue and we strongly support them.

Paul Flynn: Would not the world be a far safer place if the star wars money were invested in conflict resolution and confidence-building measures between the nations? Star wars has been accurately described as a Maginot line in the skies. Can the Secretary of State explain how a terrorist or other enemy armed with the Ebola virus or the smallpox virus would be affected by star wars and could be persuaded not to turn our cities into biological Armageddons?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is knowledgeable about these matters, and he knows that in fact the specific proposals we are discussing on missile defence are not the star wars proposals of a previous United States President. How the United States proposes to spend its taxpayers' dollars is obviously a matter for the United States. As for my hon. Friend's more specific question, I simply do not accept the argument that fanatics who are prepared to take lethal chemicals in a suitcase into public places are any less dangerous, or require us to be any less on our guard, than those who are prepared to launch ballistic missiles. I do not find that argument at all persuasive.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The Secretary of State is being a bit less clear than the Prime Minister was last week when he bluntly said:

"I do not agree with those who are opposed"—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 273.]

to ballistic missile defence, including the 200-odd Labour Members who signed an early-day motion against it. If the Government are committed in principle to ballistic missile defence—which is what the Prime Minister's press secretary said before the summer—will the Secretary of State now have the courage of his convictions and stand up and make the case for ballistic missile defence in principle?

Mr. Hoon: We have set out our position very clearly on a number of occasions. If the hon. Gentleman has followed the subject closely, he will be aware that the United States is considering a range of different ways of dealing with the threat. In those circumstances, it makes sense for the United Kingdom to await a specific proposal from the United States and a specific request.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Did the right hon. Gentleman, in his discussions on missile defence, consider the situation in Israel and Palestine, where missiles and projectiles have been going to and fro? Did he consider the possibility that there would be much less need for a missile defence system if there was an effective settlement in Palestine and the Palestinian territories adjacent to Israel? Is he aware that that issue is the key concern of most Arab nations?

Mr. Hoon: That is an ingenious way of asking a foreign policy question. Nevertheless, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that we find a way back to the negotiating table in relation to the middle east

peace process. The Prime Minister, the President of the United States and other members of the international community have accordingly been using their efforts, both directly in the region and by telephone, to achieve the types of discussion that are necessary to reinvigorate the peace process.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the research findings of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are evaluated and considered in any further discussions that he has with the USA? As he may be aware, those findings suggest that if a rocket from what is considered to be a rogue nation were taken out by a missile at the boost stage, although the missile might well disable the rocket, the warhead itself could continue zinging through the sky and land in Europe. The findings also suggest that even if a laser could be fitted on a 747 aircraft, although the laser might disable the rocket, the warhead itself might be left to go zinging across the sky. Will he ensure that that is discussed, and will he impress upon the Americans that, if the research is evaluated and found correct, that would make Europe a much more dangerous place?

Mr. Hoon: I am aware of research into the implications for the boost phase means of providing for missile defence. That is why the United States is looking at a range of alternatives. There are those who recognise the benefits of boost phase, in that it is possible to hit a larger vehicle travelling more slowly, but as my hon. Friend has pointed out, other difficulties result from that. That is why such a careful evaluation of the respective merits of the options available is being undertaken.

Terrorism

2. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What plans he has to undertake a review of defence policy, to take account of the latest assessment of the terrorist threat. [8350]

10. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): If he will make a statement on changes to defence priorities since 1998 under the strategic defence review. [8358]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): We have no plans to conduct a new review of defence policy. The security priorities and defence missions set out in the strategic defence review remain valid. The SDR left the armed forces well placed to participate in the campaign against international terrorism, but we need to look harder at asymmetric threats of the kind that we saw on 11 September and ensure that we have the right concepts, forces and capabilities to deal with them. This is the work that I have put in hand already.

Dr. Lewis: That answer is not quite on all fours with the Secretary of State's previous pronouncement that the attacks on the United States provided an opportunity, if necessary, to "rebalance our existing efforts". Does he accept that the response to terrorism—the military response over which he has control—will be very expensive? Can he assure the House that the money that will have to be spent on our military response to terrorism will not be diverted from other necessary military capabilities as set out in the strategic defence review, which he has just confirmed is still valid?

Mr. Hoon: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. The work in hand is designed to examine the way in which our existing capabilities, many of which were well prepared for the kind of threat that we saw on 11 September, will nevertheless need further adjustment and rebalancing in the light of those threats. Much of the work done for the strategic defence review on ensuring that our armed forces were rapidly deployable is precisely the kind of work that is necessary to deal with a terrorist threat. None the less, more work needs to be completed. That is why I judge it necessary to conduct that further work within the Ministry of Defence.

Barbara Follett: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the British armed forces' ability to respond to the threats posed by the post-11 September situation has been greatly enhanced by the 1997 strategic defence review? Does he not think that now is the time to build on that success?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with my hon. Friend. As I said, we are building on the work of the strategic defence review. We shall add what I have described as an extra chapter, to ensure that we can deal specifically with asymmetric threats of the kind that we saw on 11 September.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Royal Marines' winter 1999 exercise was cancelled as a result of financial constraints. Can he give us an assurance that there will be not only a proper analysis of the combat effectiveness of our troops and their ability to deal with the current threat but an increase in the resources made available to meet the many commitments that the Government have undertaken? Does he have any response to what Brigadier Lane said today about the effectiveness of his Royal Marines, whom the Secretary of State has charged with the task of leading the spearhead into Afghanistan?

Mr. Hoon: I had the opportunity to see the Royal Marines as they completed the exercise in Oman last week—an exercise that tested our ability to deploy forces rapidly right across the range of capability. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Royal Marines, in particular, much appreciated that. There was no doubt in their minds about their combat effectiveness or their readiness to take action. I am sure that if he looks carefully at what their commanding officer said—what he actually said to the "Today" programme, as opposed to what he was interpreted as saying—he will see that there is little doubt that the Royal Marines stand ready to deal with any threat, whenever it might arise.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) had not left the Defence Committee and been shunted into a corner of the Opposition Whips Office, he would have been able to participate directly in the first inquiry of the Committee into the same subject on which he has just asked his question? I have talked to the hon. Gentleman, who is my friend—although I am ashamed to admit he is—and I would be grateful if my

right hon. Friend would give me and the Defence Committee some indication of the timetable of his little inquiry into what tweaking needs to be done to the SDR to bring it into line with the increase in the threat to the UK home base as a result of the events of 11 September.

Mr. Hoon: I anticipate that the work will follow the lines of the SDR. I want it to be open, and to give all hon. Members the opportunity to make representations, even from the redoubtable fastnesses of the Opposition Whips Office. I am sure that communication can reach and emerge from there, and I want everyone who has the opportunity to think deeply about the subject to contribute to what is an important debate for defence in this country. I would anticipate that we would be ready to publish conclusions in the spring of next year.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does the Secretary of State agree that our splendid armed forces have one most disturbing weakness, which lies in defence medical services? After the Government decided to close the only military hospital, at Haslar, we are now 75 per cent. short in some key specialties such as surgery and anaesthetics. Will the Government review the decision to close the hospital? That is not only a local issue but a matter of serious national concern.

Mr. Hoon: I would be a little more sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's complaints if he had addressed them to those who were responsible for running down the defence medical services so catastrophically. If he in fact did so, I am grateful for his continuing observations on the problem. We need to address the issue and improve the services. Much effort and many resources are going into that, but that will not involve any review of the decision on Haslar, because part of the importance of the work that we are doing is to ensure that we can provide medical services to our armed forces across the board and across the country.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): Under the defence policy review and in light of the proposed cessation of the manufacturing of propellant by BAE Systems in Bishopton, can my right hon. Friend guarantee that alternative supplies of tested and safe propellants are in place to safeguard the interests of our armed forces? Can he further tell the House whether the Ministry of Defence has reconsidered the strategic implications of the cessation of manufacturing at the sole remaining UK propellant factory following the events of 11 September?

Mr. Hoon: I understand why my hon. Friend has raised the issue, and he is right to do so on behalf of his considerable constituency interest. However, I assure him that we have considered the matter on several occasions and I have every confidence in the arrangements for providing security of ammunition to our armed forces.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Will the Secretary of State send our best wishes to the Royal Welch Fusilier who was seriously injured in Northern Ireland on Friday night? I am sure that we all wish him a speedy recovery.

I reiterate our support for the Government in their determination and resolve to support the US in its campaign to defeat international terrorism. I also assure the Secretary of State that we expected the campaign to be protracted, we never believed that civilian casualties could be avoided, and we are prepared to support the Government through periods of difficulty and uncertainty. However, does he agree that it is essential to avoid the mixed messages that have been causing serious concern about the direction of the campaign in recent days?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's good wishes and will ensure that they are passed on; I appreciate his support. He has made his case in a straightforward way. However, I do not accept that there have been mixed messages. It is a hallmark of a democracy that different people can at different times give differing views. I do not believe that it is helpful at this time for these different emphases to be subject to the microscopic examination that from time to time occurs.

I do not believe that mixed messages have been given. Our campaign aims have been set out clearly and the military means of achieving them have equally been set out clearly and on a regular basis.

Mr. Jenkin: In that case, may I press the right hon. Gentleman on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) regarding the comments of Brigadier Roger Lane, the commander of 3 Commando Brigade? The Minister of State told the House on Friday that the lead elements of this force will be "immediately available" and those comments were echoed by Sir Michael Boyce, Chief of the Defence Staff, who said that they were "ready now". However, Brigadier Lane appears to be giving contrary indications about the need for further training and the lack of intelligence. Can the Secretary of State use this opportunity to clarify the intended overall message?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to say that I believe that Brigadier Lane's comments were deliberately taken out of context in a most unhelpful way. He was referring to the importance for any military operation of having members of the armed forces prepared for that specific operation. There is no doubt that the Royal Marines, as I saw for myself on Friday, remain at the highest state of readiness. They will continue to maintain that state, and I have no difficulty in saying that they are immediately available for operations. The point is that they need the necessary level of preparation to deal with any specific operation as it arises. That would be true for any members of the armed forces in any situation. It is only prudent to allow that preparation to take place.

Mr. Jenkin: Perhaps the lesson is that Ministers should not use officers in the field for high-level political messages—those should be reserved for Ministers.

Will the Secretary of State clarify the overall objectives of the campaign against international terrorism? The objectives published on 16 October include bringing Osama bin Laden to justice and destroying the terrorist networks of al-Qaeda, as mentioned by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) on the radio this morning. In addition, objective (d) states:

"assuming that Mullah Omar will not comply with the US ultimatum, we require sufficient change in the leadership—"

that is, in the leadership of the Government of Afghanistan. Moreover, the Chief of the Defence Staff made it clear that he would regard it as "extraordinarily difficult" to achieve the military objectives unless the Taliban regime "folded". That seems extremely clear. Can the Secretary of State therefore reiterate that all four of the immediate objectives, as published on 16 October, remain immediate objectives, including that of changing the Taliban regime?

Mr. Hoon: Yes, I can give that confirmation. On regime change, we gave the Taliban regime every opportunity to give up Osama bin Laden, to stop allowing the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation to use Afghanistan as a base for terrorism and to abandon their support for attacks on other countries. Every opportunity was afforded and so far, at any rate, Mullah Omar and the Taliban leadership have not accepted those opportunities. That is why it is important that part of our military aims involves the replacement of the leadership of Afghanistan by a Government who are not prepared to support either Osama bin Laden or terrorism in general.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

3. **Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): If he will make a statement on progress in nuclear non-proliferation. [8351]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Government have always regarded the prevention of nuclear proliferation as having the highest importance. The way ahead for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament was set out at the successful nuclear non-proliferation treaty review conference last year.

The United Kingdom played a key role in achieving a positive outcome to that conference, and we have been following through the actions agreed there. Agreed international priorities are to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and to stop nuclear testing, both by observing the existing moratorium and through the comprehensive test ban treaty.

Lynne Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. What assessment have the Government made of the US Government's refusal to ratify the comprehensive test ban treaty, their stated wish to abandon the anti-ballistic missile treaty and their continuing efforts to develop national missile defence? What are the effects of those on nuclear proliferation?

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State dealt with those points in previous answers. We are involved in a comprehensive review of all matters, following 11 September. Clearly, we can take considerable comfort from the active role played by the US in engaging with its allies and countries with which it would not previously have engaged. We are now in a new international environment and progress can be made on the back of that.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, given the development of an increasingly pragmatic and more sustainable and sensible relationship with Russia, the forthcoming meeting between Presidents Bush and Putin represents a solid opportunity to come to a proper agreement on a balanced and verifiable reduction to a much lower level of nuclear warheads on both sides?

Mr. Ingram: The answer is a broad yes. We can all take encouragement from those discussions, not only with Russia but with other countries across the board. We are in a new environment, as I commented earlier, and much strength can be taken from that.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Looking ahead 30 years, the MOD sees the threat of a missile attack with weapons of mass destruction as a low risk. Surely after 11 September we should see that, practically and tactically, the real and immediate danger is the surreptitiously smuggled weapon. We should be concentrating on the risk that, for example, a van in Parliament square containing a nuclear weapon could obliterate Westminster and Whitehall.

Mr. Ingram: I can assure the House that we ignore no threats—from wherever they may come.

Colchester Garrison

4. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): What progress has been made on the development of the new garrison at Colchester. [8352]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Negotiations with the preferred bidder, RMPA Services Ltd., are continuing. I expect that a contract will be let by the middle of 2002. That is, of course, subject to the granting of the necessary planning consents.

Bob Russell: The scheme for the new barracks is greatly welcome, but the Minister must be aware of the considerable concern about the design and quality of the accommodation. Is that not a direct result of the private finance initiative, whereby the companies are involved in order to make a profit, and is it not at the expense of providing the best possible accommodation for the best army in the world?

Mr. Ingram: The answer to that is no.

Royal Air Force

6. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): If he will make a statement on defence policy priorities for the UK air force; and how they have changed since the strategic defence review was published in 1998. [8354]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The measures affecting the Royal Air Force that emerged from the strategic defence review are being implemented. Lessons learned from the Kosovo campaign about precision attack and communications have been, and are being, put into practice through the procurement of Maverick missiles, precision-guided bombs and secure air-to-air communications equipment.

I announced in January that we had concluded that the joint strike fighter represented the best option to meet our needs for a future joint combat aircraft. On Friday, it was announced that Lockheed Martin had been selected as the

prime contractor. That is good news for our armed forces, including the Royal Air Force, and good news for British industry.

Mr. Borrow: I welcome the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. Many thousands of BAE workers at Samlesbury and Warton, who will be involved with the joint strike fighter in future years, are really pleased about the announcement made on Friday. Can my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State give the House details of the number of jobs that will be created or sustained either locally in Lancashire or more widely in the north-west of England?

Mr. Hoon: The decision to proceed with Lockheed Martin could secure as much as £3 billion for the United Kingdom's economy in the engineering and manufacturing development phase, but a further £24 billion is in prospect for the downstream production activities. On the employment front, it is likely that the EMD phase will sustain or create some 3,500 jobs in high-technology areas such my hon. Friend's. When the production and support phases begin in a few years' time, that could rise to at least 8,500 jobs. Overseas sales of the aircraft will provide additional industrial opportunities when the time comes.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Secretary of State will recall that an overflight ban on commercial aircraft was imposed over London after the events of 11 September. That ban has now been lifted. Will the right hon. Gentleman use this opportunity to explain precisely what role the Royal Air Force now has in the protection of London—and, indeed, the House, perhaps between 3 pm and 3.30 pm on Wednesdays—and exactly how aircraft could be shot down over London without causing considerable damage to Greater London?

Mr. Hoon: I can assure hon. Members that the RAF remains on 24-hour standby to deal with any airborne threat to the United Kingdom, but I am sure that the House will understand why it would not be entirely sensible for me go into any more specific detail about that.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Can the Secretary of State confirm that, since the strategic defence review, there has been a very welcome increase in the number of ethnic minority recruits to the RAF? In that context, would this country's media not do well to give more prominence to that fact than to the rantings of the lunatics of al-Muhajiroun and what they are saying today?

Mr. Hoon: I certainly believe that the armed forces have achieved some considerable success in recruiting from ethnic minorities right across the board. Yesterday, I saw figures for Army recruitment in the latest quarter, and they are excellent, but our armed forces recognise that they still have a good way to go to ensure that they are fully representative of the community that they serve so well.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): On Friday's welcome announcement about the joint strike fighter—or F35, as we must now call her—does the Secretary of State agree that it is not only good news for the defence industry but provides at least one settled design for a possible aircraft for the future aircraft carrier? Does he also agree that operations in the Arabian sea demonstrate once again the flexibility of carrier operations? Can he confirm that, when the joint strike fighter comes into operation in the RAF, it will have a full suite of weapons, including Meteor?

Mr. Hoon: Obviously, I agree with all the various points that the hon. Gentleman made about the opportunities that the joint strike fighter will provide for British industry and, indeed, the RAF, giving it a state-of-the-art piece of equipment, which will serve this country well for a very long time to come. On specific weapons, I do not think it right to anticipate the next phase of design, which is under way, but certainly the designers will look hard at the ways in which Meteor could be incorporated in that aircraft.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Following the announcement and the north-west's success with the joint strike fighter aircraft, will my right hon. Friend consider the position of the A400M, over which there is a question mark following the Italians possibly buying the Boeing C130?

Mr. Hoon: I assure my hon. Friend that there is no question mark over the A400M—certainly not as a result of any difficulties in Italy. Those who have already committed themselves to the A400M are more than sufficient to meet the expectations of the manufacturers and, indeed, the current price, so I do not envisage any decision in Italy affecting that. Obviously, we are concerned about the fact that there is a continuing question mark over Italy's participation, but I understand that Italy has yet to make a decision.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does the Secretary of State agree that if it is to be a long haul in Afghanistan, as the Prime Minister predicts, the provision of transport planes is one of the most important things that we can do for the RAF? We welcome the answer that he gave his hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) but will he tell the House, without equivocation, whether a construction contract will be signed for the A400M before Christmas?

Mr. Hoon: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. We are pleased to see him where he is and hope that he stays there for a very long time.

On the point about transport aircraft, Exercise Saif Sareen demonstrated the enormous importance of strategic heavy lift to the armed forces. The range of aircraft now available to the armed forces means that we are beginning to find a comprehensive solution to the problem which other countries need to address as well. That is why we and other countries are enthusiastic supporters of the A400M. However, it would not be sensible for me to give specific indications as to when a contract will be signed. Nevertheless, I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is an absolute determination among those who have committed to A400M to sign as soon as possible.

Radiation Workers

7. **Mr. Jonathan Shaw** (Chatham and Aylesford): What steps he is taking to monitor the health of radiation workers. [8355]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): In accordance with the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999, the Ministry of Defence ensures that an appointed doctor reviews at least once every year the health of radiation workers over the age of 18 who are likely to exceed three-tenths of any statutory annual dose limit. Other radiation workers would be subject to a health review only if they exceeded a statutory dose limit, or worked with ionising radiations under conditions laid down by the appointed doctor. Although there is no legal requirement to review the health of former radiation workers, the MOD contributes to the National Registry of Radiation Workers, providing data for epidemiological studies.

Mr. Shaw: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Since 1984, when Chatham dockyard's nuclear refit facility closed, there has been concern in the Medway towns that many of the facility's former workers could have contracted cancer as a direct result of their work. Progress has been made in terms of compensation and information, and I am grateful for my hon. Friend's assistance on that. However, is he prepared to accept that, until there is further progress in assisting that group of workers, they should have access to the screening process to which he has just referred?

Dr. Moonie: I should explain that the health monitoring that workers undergo is a form of health promotion and would therefore be of little value to the people that my hon. Friend mentioned. They would be far better placed waiting to see whether they develop symptoms of any kind and going to their own doctor. However, I am well aware of the work that my hon. Friend has put in on behalf of his constituents with such concerns, and I shall be very happy to discuss the matter in depth with him if he so wishes.

Tactical Communications

8. **Jane Griffiths** (Reading, East): What progress has been made to improve tactical communications for the armed forces in the last 12 months. [8356]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Significant progress has been made in improving our tactical communications capabilities over the last 12 months. In March, a contract was placed for delivery next year of a new secure deployable communications system called Cormorant, which will improve the capability of the joint rapid reaction force to co-ordinate sea, land and air operations in operational theatres. Since then, we have also fitted NATO-compatible secure radios to aircraft to improve their effectiveness and interoperability with allies.

A contract for the Bowman secure radio for both voice and data was let on schedule last month and this programme is on track to start delivery in 2004. In addition, we are about to deliver a new communications system to the Royal Navy to improve operations with the small sea boats used for enforcing embargoes in the Gulf.

Jane Griffiths: My hon. Friend will know of my disappointment and that of my constituents at the fact that many of them lost their jobs as a result of the Bowman contract not being awarded to Thales. However, as the personal role radio was split from the Bowman contract, will he let me know what progress has been made in supplying those radios to operational forces—in particular, to the Royal Marines?

Dr. Moonie: We have trialled personal role radios with the Royal Marines on Exercise Saif Sareea 2 in Oman. All the feedback—both from maintainers and operators—has been highly positive and we look forward to the full delivery of personal role radios by March 2002.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Now that the Bowman combat radio contract has been let, will the Minister assure me that the in-service date of early 2004 will be maintained?

Dr. Moonie: So far I am happy to say that the programme is well within the specified time. I certainly hope to meet that date.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Does the Secretary of State agree that aerial surveillance is one of the most important forms of intelligence for all the armed forces? I join my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) in sending my condolences to the family of the young member of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. Friday night's incident disgusted the people of Northern Ireland, and if it was carried out by loyalist terrorists we remain disgusted by it.

Does the Secretary of State realise that our community—the law-abiding community—is worried that the Weston Park objective, to cease using helicopters except for training purposes, will seriously jeopardise intelligence gathering in places such as north Belfast? It is only by helicopter surveillance that we will prevent dreadful incidents like the one in north Belfast from happening again.

Dr. Moonie: We have absolutely no worries about the security or value of our intelligence gathering in Northern Ireland.

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): I met Royal Marines last week in Oman who were using the new personal radio and they spoke highly of it. Does not that compare favourably with the spectacular failure of the tactical communications programme under the previous Government?

Dr. Moonie: My hon. Friend will be well aware that I am rarely dilatory in claiming successes for smart procurement. I am happy to say that so far the procurement of personal radios and procurement under the Bowman contract appear to be well on target, which is exactly the result that we predicted that smart procurement would have.

Missile Defence

11. **Mr. David Atkinson** (Bournemouth, East): What discussions he has had with his Russian counterpart on the missile defence of Europe; and if he will make a statement. [8361]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I met my Russian counterpart, Sergei Ivanov, most recently on 9 October. We discussed a number of issues of mutual concern, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. There is a continuous dialogue between NATO and Russia on the scope for increased co-operation in tackling proliferation and on theatre missile defences. We welcome this.

Mr. Atkinson: As Europe remains defenceless against ballistic missile attack, and the events of 11 September must make us more vigilant, what detailed consideration have NATO and the Western European Union given to Russia's proposals for theatre missile defence of Europe, in addition to discussions between Presidents Putin and Bush? When does the Secretary of State expect decisions to be made on the outcome of that?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that Russia's proposals are being carefully considered in NATO and by the WEU. NATO will discuss their implications in due course. However, I cannot put a timetable on that because it depends on NATO's internal deliberations.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Would not this proposal constitute nuclear proliferation? If national missile defence goes ahead, would not Europe be America's first line of defence? If indeed we are engaged in a new struggle against international terrorism and in the creation of a new world order, should we not turn away from the excessive sums that are put into such developments and try to find a new way to tackle the problem?

Mr. Hoon: I am afraid that I do not accept my hon. Friend's reasoning. As part of its approach to the development of missile defence, the United States has indicated a willingness to contemplate deep cuts in its nuclear arsenal. Rather than contributing to nuclear proliferation, missile defence would substantially reduce the number of missiles, probably in both the United States and, we hope, Russia.

Terrorism

12. **Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): Which nations have committed their armed forces for combat deployment in fighting the war against terrorism. [8362]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): As well as the United Kingdom, we understand that direct military support is being offered to the United States by countries including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Spain, Turkey and Ukraine. NATO has also deployed forces in support of the coalition.

Mrs. Browning: While the global alliance to fight terrorism, which was brought about by diplomatic effort before any military deployment in Afghanistan, is very important, does the Secretary of State accept that if this is to be a protracted campaign, it is important also that the United States and the United Kingdom do not become isolated in global opinion? Given the long list of countries that he has just read to the House, will he ensure that, in deployment, this does not simply become an Anglo-American operation; otherwise there is a danger that over a long period the international coalition could fragment?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with the hon. Lady. It is important that those countries should not only commit themselves to providing members of their armed forces but do so when the operational circumstances are right. I can demonstrate why that is so important by reference to the deployment of AWACS aircrews, because some 12 nationalities are represented among those crews, and they are actively participating in the campaign today. It is therefore important that we continue to maintain international solidarity in our response to the appalling events in the United States on 11 September.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): In view of the impressive list of countries which he has just read out, does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a good time to remind some of the commentators from whom we heard over the weekend that a core aim of the international community is to have a Government in Afghanistan who do not allow their territory to be used to train people on suicide missions to fly passenger aircraft into buildings? That is why there is such an impressive list of countries offering military support. It would be helpful if some outside commentators remembered that a core aim is to deal with the establishment and maintenance of training camps in countries such as Afghanistan.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is right, and indeed one of the military aims that has been achieved is the destruction of a number of terrorist training facilities in Afghanistan. They have been rendered incapable of being used for terrorist purposes, certainly in the near future. That is why it is important that we maintain the unity of the coalition to deal with threats to our security, particularly those arising in Afghanistan.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Does the Secretary of State accept that the only realistic prospect for replacing the Taliban as the Government of Afghanistan is the land victory of the Northern Alliance forces? Would it therefore be appropriate for other nations' combat forces directly to contribute to that objective now?

Mr. Hoon: The contribution of the Northern Alliance land forces is in relation to the continuing need to put pressure on the Taliban regime. That pressure comes, obviously, from the Northern Alliance, but equally from aerial attacks and operations such as those conducted by the United States recently on the ground in and around Kandahar. A range of means is being used to put pressure on the Taliban, and although the Northern Alliance is an important part of that, it is not the only part.

Clive Efford (Eltham): My right hon. Friend will be aware that aid agencies estimate that about 2.2 million more Afghan people are about to be made homeless as a result of the action that is being taken. What action is he taking to plan for the future and to increase aid to Afghanistan to meet the needs of those refugees?

What consideration has been given to asking a country that is not directly involved in the conflict to try to broker an arrangement to deliver additional aid to areas away from the conflict, so that people will receive more aid at this crucial time?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that 2.2 million people have lost their homes as a result of any coalition activity. Many people had left their homes long before 11 September, and the refugee problem in Afghanistan has largely been caused by a lack of rainfall for several years. However, the international community has recognised a long-term responsibility to the people of Afghanistan. This country has provided more than £60 million of assistance, which continues to go to refugees in camps in Afghanistan. We continue to recognise our responsibility to ensure that there should not be suffering in that country. I have to say to my hon. Friend that that undertaking would be far easier to uphold if we did not suffer the interference and deliberate disruption of aid supplies by the Taliban regime.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Given that we are at the forefront of our share of the campaign, will the Secretary of State confirm the role of the Royal Marines? Why was it decided to keep HMS Fearless, not HMS Ocean, on post? Will he confirm that technical or mechanical problems are not related to the return of HMS Ocean to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hoon: HMS Ocean does not face the mechanical difficulties to which the hon. Gentleman refers. There is a routine programme of maintenance. The decision on which ship should remain in and around the theatre wholly reflected both existing plans and the need to ensure rotation of available equipment and the crews responsible for that equipment. It is necessary to take decisions for the longer term, not simply to decide which ship should remain. Had we chosen to place HMS Ocean rather than HMS Fearless on station, he could have asked the same question the other way round. HMS Ocean will play its part in the campaign in due course.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As my right hon. Friend knows, there is considerable distaste in the House and outside about the use of cluster bombs in the war. What influence can he exert on the United States to persuade it not to use cluster bombs, given that we in this country fought so hard over the years to get rid of land mines?

Mr. Hoon: Cluster bombs are a weapon that was used in Kosovo and has been used on a limited number of occasions so far in Afghanistan to deal with a specific military threat—armoured vehicles. They are not used against civilian populations and the number of occasions on which they have been used in Afghanistan is, as I said, extremely limited. Cluster bombs are in no way comparable to land mines. They are not defined as land mines in any international agreement and their use is wholly lawful. Unless and until there is a better means of dealing with the threat posed by armoured vehicles, the UK and the US will continue to use them.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): There are service men and women now serving on Operation Veritas who had hoped to be at home this Christmas. The officer commanding B Company, 40 Commando has said:

"There's been an awful lot of speculation since September 11, some of it jingoistic and possibly a little bit too upbeat. I think it has caused some worry for the families back in the UK."

Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to comment on the welfare package that is available to our service men, given that they undertake this mission on our behalf not as part of some clash of civilisations, but to liberate ordinary Muslims from abominable tyranny and to lift the threat of terror from the whole world?

Mr. Hoon: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. I thank him for his thoughtful question, not least because when I was in Oman on Thursday, Friday and Saturday last week, I received a number of complaints from members of the armed forces about speculation in newspapers back here that was affecting them. The telephone calls element of the welfare package appears to have been working quite well because they were clearly concerned about the impact that some of those speculative headlines had had on their families. The hon. Gentleman is right to raise those questions. There are issues relating to the welfare package that we will need to address at the end of the exercise. Conversations with several members of the armed forces caused me to become concerned that—at least initially—the package had not worked as well as it should.

The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the importance of our action to maintain support for the wider Islamic community. Islam is a religion of tolerance, understanding and compassion, and it is important that we share that with members of the Islamic community who are equally committed to dealing with the threat of international terrorism.

Education (Understanding the Armed Forces)

13. **Paul Clark** (Gillingham): What measures he is taking to further understanding of the armed forces in schools. [8363]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Defence, and the skills and experiences of the armed forces in particular, have an important part to play in supporting education in schools. It is also important that young people—the voters and taxpayers of tomorrow—should have a general awareness of defence. We already do a lot of work with schools through our service presentation teams and the cadet forces, and by providing publications and other materials. We intend to expand that effort by increasing the number of teams, appointing a schools adviser in the Ministry of Defence, setting up a schools page on our website and developing material for teachers and pupils. All that will be linked into the curriculum.

Paul Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. I welcome the appointment of a schools adviser. Many, if not all, of us will know that teachers and schools are the first line, as they are the gateway to opportunities for our young people who are entering the world of work. However, can he reassure the House that this is not a one-off, isolated measure? Will he also reassure us that the Department for Education and Skills, together with the Ministry of Defence, is already taking steps to ensure

that our young people recognise the value of our armed forces to society and to help with the recruitment of first-class youngsters to the armed forces—especially the Corps of Royal Engineers in my constituency?

Dr. Moonie: Yes. I am delighted to say that, in addition to the measures that I have described, we also have a programme called outreach, in which cadet forces work with youngsters who may have problems in order to introduce them to life in the cadets. The programme has had remarkable success in producing recruits to the armed forces. We have also developed a concept called skill force, whereby experienced instructors visit schools and help kids with particular problems to develop self-esteem and a range of skills and abilities on which they would otherwise miss out. I assure my hon. Friend that we take a very close interest in the help that we can give schools and are always looking for ways in which we can add to it.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Will the Minister outline what special initiatives have been taken since 11 September to capitalise for recruitment purposes on the very high profile of the armed forces?

Dr. Moonie: As I said, we have an on-going programme of development that involves an increase in the number of presentations made to schools. We have not considered it appropriate to take any further measures, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that interest in the armed forces remains very high.

Royal Navy

14. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): What plans he has to review his Department's strategy on the Navy. [8364]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) in an earlier answer, we will be conducting work designed to ensure that our concepts, force structures and capabilities, including those of the Royal Navy, are exactly those that we need to meet the challenge of the kind of asymmetric threat that we saw on 11 September. That work will look both at the defence of the UK and at our capability to counter and deter terrorism abroad.

John Robertson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that the constant review of how we deal with situations such as Kosovo and Afghanistan, especially in relation to our Navy, is of paramount importance? Will he make a statement at a later date on what has been learned from the present conflict and on how he sees the future of the Navy?

Mr. Ingram: With regard to the latter point, we are entering a process of considering the challenge posed by the asymmetric threat that we experienced on 11 September. That was presaged anyway in the strategic defence review. Clearly, we will need to engage as many people as possible in understanding the extent of that problem. At the end of the process, a statement will be required as to how we go forward in terms of a new chapter of the strategic defence review.

On the Navy, we remain committed to the two ALSLs—alternative landing ship logistics—that are to be built at Govan and the type 45 orders announced earlier this year. Discussions are continuing to finalise certain aspects of those contracts, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to discuss the matter further when they are announced.

Hawk Contract

15. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will make a statement on the ways in which the Department is helping BAE Systems in its representations to the Government of India on the Hawk contract. [8365]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Ministers and officials continue to take every opportunity to support BAE Systems' proposals for the supply of the Hawk to India. Negotiations between the company and the Indian Government continue.

Mr. Jack: At a time when aerospace workers at BAE Systems in my constituency are rejoicing at the news of the joint strike fighter announcement, they have not forgotten that the contract with India seems to have been marched up to the top of the hill of agreement and down again at least half a dozen times in the recent past.

I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for doing much to represent the interest of our aerospace workers in the contractual discussions with the Indian Government. However, can the Minister give any idea of the likely timing of the Indian Government's further commitment to and consideration of the project?

Dr. Moonie: I greatly sympathise with the workers in the Hawk factory, but I cannot enlighten the right hon. Gentleman much further. We are making every effort to persuade the Indian Government to take up the contract, and we are well aware of its importance to the workers in his constituency.

Asylum, Migration and Citizenship

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on asylum, migration and citizenship.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Geneva convention on refugees, to which the United Kingdom is proud to be a signatory. We will uphold our fundamental moral obligations to protect those who flee persecution while protecting our national boundaries and integrity.

The world is a very different place from that of 50 years ago. At the beginning of the year, there were around 12 million refugees worldwide. Such global movements are a challenge to all nations. Alongside our European partners, we must establish an asylum and immigration system that can respond effectively to the pressure that we face.

Steps, which I intend to extend, have already been taken to root out the organised criminal gangs who are responsible for the barbaric trade of trafficking in people. The gross exploitation of those in greatest need is unacceptable. It is crucial that our approach leads to radical change at home, creating trust among the people of our country, and conveys a message that is clearly understood in the rest of the world. It must be crystal clear and tough, thus sending a signal to everyone that the United Kingdom is not a soft touch.

Significant improvements have been made in recent years. Staff in the immigration and nationality directorate have worked tirelessly to deal with the backlog of claims. In the past financial year, 132,000 decisions were made, surpassing the 79,000 applications. The new civil penalties and carriers' liability have already cut illegal entry into the United Kingdom. Substantial investment, which I announced last month, in new equipment for surveillance and border controls will reinforce that work.

I pay warm tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), and his Ministers. They inherited a terrible mess and made huge improvements. However, much remains to be done. That is why I do not intend to tinker with the existing system, but to introduce radical and fundamental reform.

The reviews of voucher and dispersal policy that I am publishing today demonstrate that the current system has suffered from genuine problems. I have placed copies of the reviews in the Vote Office and the Library. The system is too slow, vulnerable to fraud, and felt to be unfair by asylum seekers and local communities. Many people work illegally while claiming support or sub-letting their accommodation. Other accommodation is paid for, but not used.

As the House is painfully aware, there have been social tensions in neighbourhoods across the country and considerable pressures on local education, social and GP services. We need a seamless asylum service, from initial decision through appeal to integration or removal. It must be clear, fast and well administered.

It is my intention to publish a White Paper and, subsequently, legislation, which will provide a comprehensive approach to asylum, nationality and immigration. At the heart of my asylum proposals is the presumption that, from the moment people present themselves, they will be tracked as well as supported.

There will be three key elements to the structure: induction, accommodation and reporting, and fast-track removal or integration. In addition, the fast-tracking of straightforward cases at Oakington will continue. The application process will be streamlined and integrated.

We will develop a small network of induction centres in which people will be accommodated after application to facilitate screening, health checks and identification procedures. After induction, asylum seekers, whether receiving support or not, will have to make themselves regularly available at new-style reporting centres. We will phase in that process.

Crucially, by the end of next year, a proportion of first-time asylum seekers will be offered a place in new accommodation centres, which we are trialling. We will establish 3,000 places, offering full board, education and health facilities. Those in accommodation centres will receive a small cash allowance. Those refusing to take up such a place would disqualify themselves from support.

Decisions about the long-term mix of facilities will be taken in the light of emerging evidence, here and abroad, about what works. Subject to that, our aim is to phase out the current system of support and dispersal.

While the trial is being evaluated, those receiving support will be subject to a robust new regime. Instead of the standard acknowledgement letter, which is used for identification, smart cards will be phased in from January to ensure entitlement. That will guarantee identification and tackle fraud. Using new biometric techniques, including fingerprinting and photographs, we will provide both security and certainty.

Further steps will be taken to improve the current voucher system. The value of voucher support will be uprated as soon as possible in line with the April 2001 income support increases for adults and the increase announced for children last week. Within the total of support available, the cash allowance will be increased from £10 to £14.

We recognise that in revising the existing voucher system, we need to establish a long-term robust solution. Induction, accommodation and removal centres clearly remove the need for vouchers for those assigned a place. I can tell the House that once the new smart cards are introduced, the voucher system will be superseded. By early autumn next year, we will have established a robust, but less socially divisive scheme.

I am exploring with colleagues the potential for automated credit transfer and other mechanisms to provide financial support for asylum seekers. Although we are not reversing the principle of dispersal away from London and the south-east, we will improve consultation with and the involvement of local authorities and others.

It is crucial that private providers give proper notice to local authorities when asylum seekers are dispersed to an area. We will develop a stronger regional structure as part of a more devolved and decentralised process, and greater co-ordination with voluntary organisations. However, none of those changes will work effectively unless we drastically speed up the system. I therefore intend to tackle head-on the backlog, including those cases waiting for appeals. The Lord Chancellor and I intend to improve significantly the throughput of appeals.

First, we will cut out multiple opportunities for delay. Secondly, we will streamline any further right of appeal, limited to a point of law. Thirdly, we will increase the

capacity of the adjudication service by 50 per cent., from the current 4,000 to 6,000 cases a month. From next month, the capacity will increase to 4,500, and by next November to 6,000.

Where a claim to asylum is granted we will improve the integration procedures. Where an appeal has failed, my intention is to streamline the process for removal. Those who have no right to stay must leave the country immediately. *[Interruption.]*

We currently have 1,900 detention places, which we will have increased to 2,800 by the spring of next year. I intend that we should expand the capacity by a further 40 per cent. to 4,000 places. Those will become secure removal centres. *[Interruption.]* Asylum seekers will no longer be held in mainstream prison places; I can confirm that from January next year that practice will cease. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members please give the Home Secretary an opportunity to make his statement. This is an important matter.

Hon. Members: Or be removed.

Mr. Blunkett: We shall be looking to remove even more Conservative Members at the next general election.

I announced earlier this month my proposals for sensible, controlled legal migration into this country. That will enable people with skills to enter our country legitimately to work. In addition, we will explore the establishment, with the European Union and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, of agreed gateways to take nominated refugees from outside the country. That has been an anomaly for many years, leading to the scenes at ports and Eurotunnel facilities.

We will also take action to root out illegal working. Those working in our country illegally are being exploited by unscrupulous gangmasters and employers, in conditions that undermine the minimum wage and fair conditions, and at the same time defraud the tax and national insurance system.

The Prime Minister has recently announced a cross-departmental working group under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend Lord Rooker. He will bring forward proposals for stamping out illegal employment, which will be combined with wider policies to remove the incentive to traffickers, and the pull factor created by the opportunity of employment.

I believe that we can also do more to give practical help to people seeking to settle here, in addition to the men and women seeking refugee status. The White Paper will address their language needs, together with education for citizenship. I shall also be looking to enhance the importance of naturalisation.

Finally, I can also announce that a discussion paper on the review of family visitor appeals has been published today. Copies of that paper will also be placed in the Vote Office and the Library.

This is a substantial package of measures that will fundamentally overhaul our asylum and immigration policy. It is a rational approach to a rapidly changing situation. I believe that it will send a message to the rest of the world that this country is not open to abuse, but nor is it a fortress Britain. We are not rejecting economic migrants, refugees from persecution or those seeking to visit our shores.

Implementation of my policies will take time; but in time they will work in the interests of us all.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I thank the Home Secretary for his courtesy in giving us sight of the statement.

Does the Home Secretary recognise that we and he have shared aspirations? Does he understand that many of us on both sides of the House are here today only because our own relatives sought and obtained refuge from persecution? Does he accept that we regard the provision of a safe haven for the innocent victims of persecution as one of the highest duties of the British state? Does he agree that the first purpose of our asylum system should therefore be to establish quickly and definitively who are the innocent victims of persecution, and to provide them with a safe home? Does he agree that its second purpose should be to ensure that others who are not victims of persecution cannot use application for asylum as a way of getting around the normal immigration rules?

Is the Home Secretary aware of this statement?

"The problem with the asylum system is being sorted out".—[*Official Report*, 19 April 2000; Vol. 348, c. 974.]

Is he aware that it was made 18 months ago by his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister? Is he aware that it contrasts rather strangely with his own statement to the press that the system today is a complete mess? Notwithstanding his touching tribute to the Foreign Secretary, does he now accept that the mess that we have today is in great part due to the failure of his predecessor to respond effectively to sustained criticism of the system of vouchers and very wide dispersals by Conservative Members, and by highly respected organisations throughout the country?

Let us turn to the future. Does the Home Secretary acknowledge that the new system of accommodation centres that he hopes eventually to make universal will work only if those centres contain all the people and facilities required to provide fast and fair decisions? Does he agree that it is a scandal that we currently have more than 300 people detained for more than 100 days, many without even an initial determination, and that the time taken to process applications in the new centres will have to be far shorter than that?

What steps will the Home Secretary take to consult people about the siting of the new induction, reporting, accommodation and removal centres, and to reduce public hostility? Can he tell us how he will judge whether the accommodation centres are working, and whether they should replace the reporting centres? Can he tell us what he will do about the total backlog of more than 40,000 people now awaiting an initial determination, about the estimated 50,000 now awaiting an appeal hearing, and about the tens of thousands of asylum seekers who have simply disappeared?

We understand that under the Home Secretary's plans, financial assistance to asylum seekers who are offered places in accommodation centres will be available only within those centres. That, we understand, is intended as an incentive for people to remain in the accommodation centres; but what incentive to remain is there for people whose aim is to find work in the black economy,

[Mr. Oliver Letwin]

rather than to obtain financial assistance from the state? When does the Home Secretary intend to present his proposals on the black economy?

By what proportion will the right hon. Gentleman's proposals on work permits increase the number of people—90,000—who currently enter the country each year on the basis of such permits? What assessment has he made of the proportion of asylum seekers who are not eligible for asylum, but who will be eligible for work permits under his new scheme? Does he really believe that the bulk of the problem relates to highly skilled people?

The whole country will hope that the Home Secretary has at last begun to address a problem that the Government have so far lamentably failed to address. The whole country will hope that his new proposals will establish a civilised, humane and effective system. Does he agree that whether that is indeed the case will depend heavily on the answers to those questions?

Mr. Blunkett: I strongly welcome the opening statement by the hon. Gentleman that one of our agreed highest duties is to offer a safe haven for those who are at risk of persecution and death. I am just glad that he on behalf of his party has changed entirely the language, tune and policy that it adopted.

I am sorry that, having given the hon. Gentleman time to read my statement, he has been unable to grasp some of its key elements—for example, the black economy. I seek to assist as well those who do not claim asylum, who are working in the economy unknown and unmonitored and who are often unable to get basic rights in our country. Those in accommodation centres—I hope very much that the new programme will resolve the issue—will be there precisely because they have sought help, need accommodation, a roof over their heads and support for themselves and their families, so the incentive to be there is self-evident. The incentive to leave the accommodation centre if their appeal fails is dealt with by the fact that we will deliver appeal decisions at the reporting centre or accommodation centre, and then take people to the new removal centres. In that way, we will avoid the calamity of having to go into communities to root people out from their homes.

I hope that sorting out that problem can be seen as building on what has taken place over the 18 months to which the hon. Gentleman referred, following the Prime Minister's statement. Eighteen months ago, the then Home Secretary commenced the process of dramatically increasing the facility of the immigration and nationality directorate. Four thousand extra people are now employed to do the job that was not done under the Conservatives. Through the fingerprinting facilities, we know who is in the country, who is making multiple applications, and who is making applications having left the country and come back under a different guise. None of that information was available until the then Home Secretary put the investment in place. Removal centres did not exist at all under the Government of the hon. Gentleman and his friends. We need no lectures about why something did not work from those who purchased a computer system that failed within 12 months of its installation.

Induction centres that will avoid dispersal along the coast into bed-and-breakfast accommodation, but draw people together into unified sites will be a benefit to local people, not a threat. Accommodation centres across the country will be welcomed because they avoid pressure on local services. Rapid removal will make it possible for us to deliver a humane system, but with a clear message to the rest of the world that we are not prepared to be taken for granted.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I welcome the Home Secretary's assurance that the use of prisons to detain asylum seekers is to cease, and his decision to phase out the hated voucher system, but what assurance can he give that the smart cards will work, given the unhappy history of Government information technology projects?

Everyone understands that the number of removals will have to increase greatly for the system to be credible, but what steps, if any, is the Home Secretary taking to ensure that removals are handled as sensitively as possible, especially in cases where children are involved, given that many of the people, who may not be deserving asylum applicants, may return home to destitution?

Mr. Blunkett: I stand here slightly humbled because the Home Office's record on technology has not been one of the greatest. We are all aware of that especially after my predecessor sorted out both the passport issue and other technological hiccups. Having learned that lesson, we are very clear indeed that by phasing in the new system from January, not only can we make it work but make it work so much better than the current letters system, which is grossly open to fraud. There are examples of people selling multiple copies of a letter, of no clear identification being provided and of entitlements not being clear. We want to ensure in the new system that there is trust in the community and that those who are receiving help deserve it and can receive it with dignity.

The same applies in relation to removals. We did not step up removals activity over the summer—we did not have an effective working system then—precisely to ensure that we did not have scenes of families with young children being pulled out of blocks of flats. As a result of the new protocol, together with links with the police service and the ability to track people through reporting centres, we shall be able to operate the system better.

The ultimate message is this, "If you want to be in our country and have something to offer, but know in your heart that you are not a refugee from persecution, the new economic migration proposals will enable you to achieve that goal." By next spring, the work permit system will have enabled 150,000 people to receive permission to be in our country and to work here.

I pay tribute to the staff who are turning round two thirds of applications in 24 hours and 90 per cent. of applications in five days. If the rest of my Department and the IND can come anywhere near that sophisticated administration we shall all be very glad.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Home Secretary will know, as I told him in a conversation earlier this year, that his principles and general proposals will have a welcome from those on the Liberal Benches. I should therefore be grateful to hear him express a desire to ensure that the principles are not only very clear, so that people from abroad can understand them, but humane and scrupulously fair.

The Home Secretary is right to say that, in 1997, the incoming Labour Government inherited a mess. Both the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 and the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 had failed very badly. However, the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 was an equal disaster. Is not today's announcement therefore a somewhat belated announcement that the voucher system was both degrading and inefficient, as it not only failed to deter people but costed more than alternatives, and that the dispersal system invented by the Home Secretary's predecessor was completely unsuccessful? Therefore, after a very unfortunate experience, surely it is clear that the provisions that were introduced less than three years ago by the Home Secretary's predecessor are being fundamentally replaced by his own much better ones.

The proposals on induction and reception centres are hugely welcome. Liberal Democrats Members have been advocating such proposals for years, not least because the arrangements used by the Dutch and the Finns and best practice across Europe show that they have worked very successfully elsewhere. Can the Home Secretary explain—as he is very keen that his Department works well—why it always takes the Home Office so long to learn the lessons from other countries and from the failures of the past?

Does the right hon. Gentleman's announcement on the replacement of vouchers by smart cards herald movement towards a general entitlement card for immigrants or for people more generally? What is the timetable for reception centres to be established and for vouchers to disappear entirely? Will he guarantee that there will always be an entitlement to appeal against refusal of asylum?

Does the Home Secretary's interesting statement about working with the European Union and the UNHCR mean that it will be possible for people to make a case for asylum from abroad, and does it mean that we will increase resettlement from other countries as the UN has asked us to do? As the Government want to make the new system cost efficient, will those who have to wait here for the final determination of their case, who have great skill and a willingness to offer it to the British nation, be able to work and contribute to the state rather than be a cost to it as has been the nonsense of the system so far?

Mr. Blunkett: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's opening statement. I must say that I missed his policy advocation of induction and accommodation centres, but I am always willing to work in parallel with him on such matters. We may have come to the same decision at the same time.

The answer to the question about those who come in with external applications through the UNHCR is yes, that is my intention. It will take some time to implement, but I believe that it is the right thing to do, to stop people hanging under trucks and coming through in tankers.

The voucher scheme will be superseded by next September. It will take that long for us to bring in the necessary orders in the House and deal with the revisions in the existing contract system.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about induction and accommodation is that we will be able to offer people support, but not to permit them to work while waiting for their appeals. Once somebody had started a permanent job, it would be even more difficult to remove them if they turned out to be an economic migrant rather than a refugee.

Yes, we are intent, as the hon. Gentleman said at the beginning of his question, on ensuring that we have a humane and acceptable system that treats people well and speeds up their applications, but which also ensures that if they are granted leave to remain, or refugee status, they are integrated fully and properly in the community.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, simply because I have been in the House for 31 years, I have probably dealt with more immigration and asylum cases than any other Member of the House? Is he further aware that the leading members of the ethnic minority communities with whom I work in my constituency find it easy to distinguish with clarity between those who flee from oppression, and those who—egged on by crooked immigration advisers and disreputable solicitors such as Thornhill Ince, against which I have lodged a complaint with the Law Society today—use applications for asylum as a device when they have come here illegally, overstayed as visitors and then married as a further device, and will spin out any way of trying to stay here? Those leading members of the ethnic minority community in my constituency would wish my right hon. Friend to treat those who are fleeing from oppression with compassion and generosity—as he invariably does—but to give the others short shrift.

Mr. Blunkett: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. We need a much more robust system, following the delivery of the smart card, which is not a forerunner to anything, but simply a means of dealing with a particular problem. The smart card and the reporting centres will enable us to get a grip on where people are at any time, and what they are doing. Above all, they will allow us to carry through a determination to remove someone who has come into the country fraudulently, often abandoning the person whom they married or came to marry.

I also agree with my right hon. Friend that, as I said last Thursday evening in a lecture, those who believe that their profession is merely a trade rather than a profession should be very clear about that.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): It would be wholly wrong not to preface my question by welcoming this damascene conversion, and the Home Secretary's frank admission that a system that only five months ago the electorate were told was working perfectly, is not working at all. However, I want to ask him a specific question. Among all his statistics about accommodation centres, he announced a very substantial expansion of the detention estate. When that expansion is complete and all the places are available, what percentage of new asylum seekers will be detained in secure accommodation until the outcome of their cases?

Mr. Blunkett: For new asylum seekers, the Oakington facility will remain, but all others will go through the normal process of induction and then accommodation, unless they have committed a crime, are suspected of having committed a crime or are affected by the measures that I shall introduce in a few weeks on anti-terrorism. Should their asylum applications fail, or for some other reason they fall foul of the law or are not eligible to be in

[Mr. Blunkett]

the country, they will be placed in the new removal centres. The 4,000 places in the removal centres will allow us to do that effectively. As my predecessor spelled out on many occasions to the right hon. Lady, we could not afford to have everybody in secure detention, even if we wanted to. We do not want to, because they are people who are applying for legitimate refugee status and not people who have committed a crime. It would be churlish not to welcome her opening statement, but I shall examine the road to Damascus carefully because it doubtless has many pitfalls.

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement this afternoon, especially of the phasing out and eventual abolition of the much hated voucher system. It was hated for two main reasons. The first was the degrading and stigmatising effect that it had on those people who had to use the vouchers, and the second—and more important—was the very low level at which that benefit was paid. It equated to 70 per cent. of income support. When the new smart card is introduced, can the level be set at 100 per cent. of income support, so that poor and vulnerable people do not continue to be paid unacceptable and miserly levels of benefit?

Mr. Blunkett: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I have already said this afternoon that we will uprate the amounts as per the income support changes. Children will, of course, receive 100 per cent. of income support levels. We have no current plans to change the 70 per cent. level, although I have changed the ratio to £14 cash instead of the £10 currently paid. I appreciate the concerns that have been raised about the 70 per cent. ratio and that is why the accommodation centres will be so crucial. They will, of course, offer the full board, lodging and support system, plus the pocket money that will enable people to live comfortably.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Home Secretary will know from the debate in Westminster Hall last week that I welcome the introduction of reception centres more generally for those applying for asylum. Does he intend that those accommodation centres, as he now terms them, will be established using the powers under the Immigration Act 1971 and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999—which allow the Secretary of State to do so by order—for those granted temporary admission? Does he intend that the Oakington centre in my constituency should remain a place of detention legally or will it, too, be a reception centre using those powers instead of remaining a place of detention with all the difficulties of legal challenges that might ensue?

Mr. Blunkett: On the latter point, leave was granted to appeal to the House of Lords—as the hon. Gentleman will know, being so close to the situation. It is not my intention to address that issue this afternoon, except that I did say that we intended to continue to use Oakington for those entering the country for whom detention and fast-tracking is appropriate. On the other point, both the 1971 and 1999 Acts facilitate the setting up of accommodation centres. Should any legal challenge arise on the obligation to take up such a place if offered or the denial of financial support to an individual or family, we will legislate in the Bill that I announced in my statement.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): As one of the few hon. Members who argued against the introduction of the voucher system, I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement that it will be scrapped and that we will return to a cash-based system delivered through the smart cards. In relation to his proposals on reception centres, which will take some time to phase in—they will need to be built and that will not happen overnight—what will be the implications for the continuation of the National Asylum Support Service?

If NASS is to continue supporting significant numbers of people for some time, as seems likely, what can be done to improve its efficiency while it continues? In addition, what can be done to deal with the many people who are still being looked after by local authorities?

Mr. Blunkett: I appreciate the thrust of my hon. Friend's question. Multiple systems have operated for a long time and will continue to do so. That is inevitable, whatever system is introduced and whatever the speed of change. Therefore, it is crucial, as outlined in the dispersal and support review that we published today, to ensure that measures are taken on regional decentralisation, streamlining administration and co-ordination with local authorities and voluntary organisations. The system should be geared effectively towards ensuring that we take the service out; that is what we are doing in the appeals and support process in Scotland, rather than flying people from Scotland to London. Those measures, together with a toughening and tightening up with regard to private providers—whose service and accommodation, although often satisfactory, has in some instances been deeply unsatisfactory—will be the prime concern of the next 12 months.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Home Secretary said a moment ago that he wanted to reduce multiple opportunities for delay in the courts, streamline the appeals system and achieve a 50 per cent. increase in the system's capacity. To achieve those laudable aims, will he not need the co-operation and support of the judiciary and the legal profession, 99.9 per cent. of whose members are interested in the efficient and humane administration of justice and in faithfully applying the laws passed by this House and Parliament as a whole? Does he not think it unwise and counter-productive to spend too much time insulting and making offensive remarks about the very people whose co-operation he will need to achieve the new policy?

Mr. Blunkett: I am not going to enter into banter about one of our more powerful pressure groups. Last week, I quoted Professor Sir William Wade and recommended "Administrative Law" to which I referred. Of course we need the co-operation of the judiciary. They will co-operate with us because, like me, they are doing their best to ensure that the system works. However, the massive increase in the capacity of the adjudication system will be welcomed not only by asylum seekers but by those operating it. Speeding up the process, taking out

opportunities for considerable delay, including judicial review, and allowing on a point of law a further appeal seem to us eminently reasonable.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Home Secretary has made a detailed statement which will require detailed appraisal. Obviously, the whole House welcomes the review. I speak as someone who served on the Committee stage of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and voted against it, largely because of the arrangements for vouchers and forced dispersal.

I have three questions for my right hon. Friend. First, are the proposed reporting centres intended to supersede or run alongside existing arrangements for some categories of immigrant and asylum seeker to report to the police? Secondly, I understand that smart cards are entitlement cards. Will supposed asylum seekers be stopped on the street and asked for their card? Finally, to repeat what was said earlier, removals look clean and simple on paper but in a diverse community such as mine in Hackney, the police are anxious to have a considered approach to the subject. They are well aware of the tensions and disorder that could arise from removals involving families with small children being dragged out of tower blocks.

Mr. Blunkett: On the latter point my hon. Friend is correct. That is why the protocol signed with the police in September is crucially about ensuring that the process is handled with great sensitivity. I entirely take that point.

The cards would not allow people to be stopped in the street; they are not about policing. On my hon. Friend's first question, we are trying to speed up the system and make it more humane, not to ensure that what we put in place will make life more difficult for people who are already struggling.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): May I first congratulate the Home Secretary on the skill as well as the speed with which he has so far executed, on taking office, this necessary policy U-turn, and also on the way in which he carried out the necessary formalities of praising his predecessor, the present Foreign Secretary, which he did with taste but without excessive enthusiasm?

I return to the question put by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about the large number of applications from people who have been resident in this country for many years, but who are probably illegally overstaying as visitors; who have probably acquired a partner, a residence and some kind of job; who apply for asylum when pressure is exerted on them; and who are usually granted not asylum but indefinite leave to remain. How will the Home Secretary's policy statement actually affect such cases? Presumably they will not be removed to accommodation centres to be processed. Does he propose that a higher proportion of such cases should in future be removed rather than given indefinite leave to remain, and how does he intend to achieve that?

Mr. Blunkett: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has not lost his touch, although I remind him that if, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had given some of the resources that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor gave my predecessor to invest in the system, it might have worked much better.

I think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman refers to exceptional leave to remain, often granted when it is not safe to return someone to their country of origin. In those circumstances, we would obviously not place people in a detention removal centre. However, there is a real issue underlying this point: ensuring that our actions globally are intent on opening up those countries again so that people can be returned safely to them. That is why exceptional leave to remain rather than asylum status has historically been granted.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Does the Home Secretary realise that many local authorities, such as mine, will welcome the radical changes that he proposed today, especially those for the accommodation units which will relieve the difficult housing situation in boroughs such as mine where it has been possible to transfer very few people? We welcome that. Will he give us more detail on how he will speed up the current huge backlog? Much of what he said refers to what will happen in future. How does he think that we can speed up the process practically for the thousands of people—hundreds in my constituency—who are awaiting decisions and have been told that they may have to wait for at least another year?

Mr. Blunkett: We should accord the staff at the immigration and nationality directorate praise for their achievements last year. They reduced the initial backlog of cases to be heard from 103,000 to 43,000—a remarkable achievement. If we can do the same in relation to streamlining the whole system so that it works coherently from induction through to removal, and ensuring that the administration of the support system is equally effective, we shall achieve what my hon. Friend rightly seeks—an efficient system, not only on paper but in practice.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): If an illegal immigrant arrives in this country from an EU country, cannot it be presumed that they are arriving from a safe haven? Consequently, will the Government seek to amend the Dublin convention so that, for example, an illegal immigrant to this country from France can immediately be sent back there and France would have to admit them?

Mr. Blunkett: For the past four and a half months I have been gleaning facts as fast as I can, and it is an interesting but little known fact that we actually return just under 6,000 people to France every year—speedily and often before they manage to cry asylum. I hope that we shall continue to be able to do that in the case of illegal immigrants. But let us take the Dublin convention head on. First, a Conservative Government signed it in 1990. Secondly, a Conservative Government failed to get it amended when it was clear that it would have a perverse result in the United Kingdom. Thirdly, yes, we are seeking to amend it. The Commission has published a draft directive. We hope that we can toughen up the proposal and that we can get other countries to agree to it, given that proving where someone came from and whether or not they really did have a safe haven in the countries that they passed through is something on which the whole House would unite because the lack of such proof makes a mockery of any organised and rational immigration and asylum policy.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): I thank the Home Secretary for his statement and for his assurances that the

[Mr. Gwyn Prosser]

dispersal of asylum seekers from places such as Dover and the Kent coast will continue and that vouchers will be phased out. I welcome the proposals on induction, accommodation and removal centres, but will he take care in considering whether places such as Dover, which have borne a heavy burden in the past four years and are already earmarked to receive removal centres, are really the sort of areas where one wants to put induction and accommodation centres? Will he share the burden when he looks around the estate?

Mr. Blunkett: It is crucial that dispersal from the coastal area and the entry points is not only effective but seen to be so. That is why the induction centres will help enormously. Instead of spot bed- and-breakfast accommodation, with all that that involves in terms of people hanging about on the streets, it will be possible, in the months ahead, to pull people together in a way that not only has some coherence for them but relieves those local communities.

I take the point entirely about removal centres and the transfer of one set of accommodation to a new use. I got the message from my hon. Friend very clearly. I pay tribute to him again for the stand that he has taken during the past few years in very difficult circumstances.

Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome most of the Home Secretary's statement, but may I press him on one issue? Why does he not allow asylum seekers to enter gainful employment while they are waiting for their applications to be determined? That would not only give them self-respect and dignity but reduce the call on the taxpayer, end the opportunity for some of our media to be so inflammatory about this issue and equip asylum seekers with skills if and when their applications were successful. Why will he not do that?

Mr. Blunkett: Because it is precisely the belief that asylum seekers can work here, coupled with the English language, that is such a pull factor in their coming to this country. That is recognised very clearly by all our European partners. Every time I meet them, they rub it in very heavily that people think they will get a different deal. Well, they will get a different deal in terms of welcome and support, but not in terms of being treated as economic migrants when they are refugees.

Refugees often suffer from trauma, they have often been tortured, and they have often fled from the most desperate circumstances. They are not the same as doctors, nurses and engineers whom we wish to attract through the work permit system. I make the point again—and we have to do so internationally—that if people want to come and work here and contribute they will be welcome, but if people are refugees they will be treated as refugees applying for asylum status and, although they may choose to volunteer to provide support to their own community and those outside it, they cannot expect to be treated as though they are not asylum seekers but economic migrants in the first few months of being here.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): How long does my right hon. Friend envisage the induction process will take? Did I understand him correctly to say that if asylum seekers refuse to move to an accommodation centre, they will have no support of any kind? Many asylum seekers in my constituency have friends, family and strong community links there. Will the proposed changes affect those whose applications are already in the system?

Mr. Blunkett: It is expected that induction will take seven to 10 days. My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that it is not administratively possible to restart people's claims, so those who are already here will have to be dealt with speedily within the existing framework. Initially, under the induction system, a proportion of first-time applicants will be offered places in accommodation centres. If they decline, they are saying, "Thank you very much. We don't need support." Some 30 per cent. of those coming in for asylum do not claim support and a further 20 per cent. claim voucher-only support. If people are genuinely in desperate need, we do not think it is unfair to ask them either to opt for an accommodation place or to decide to live with family or in their community.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Will the Home Secretary tell us more about his proposal for greater co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and with the European Union? In particular, has he any thoughts on the remarks of Mr. Ruud Lubbers, the former Dutch Prime Minister who is head of the UNHCR? On 1 September, he said that he thought that the right way forward was to have a quota for every member state and that the appropriate quota for the United Kingdom was 200,000, which is well over double what we had last year.

Mr. Blunkett: It is a good job that we, and not Ruud, are running the system. We have no intention of introducing quotas of that nature, but we think that a combined, co-ordinated system that accepts those with genuine refugee status who would otherwise have to find clandestine means of reaching our shores makes sense. That is particularly so, given the developments that have taken place and the work that has been done by the Australian Government in similar circumstances. We do not refuse to take anyone but do not simply invite anyone to try for refugee status.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): In view of my right hon. Friend's wish to improve the integration of those granted permanent residence, will he hold discussions with his colleagues in other Departments to ensure a consistency of approach towards support for higher education? One of my constituents has been granted permanent residence, has a degree in physics and has accepted a place to train as a radiographer—a skill that is in great shortage, particularly in my area—but is being treated as an overseas student, so he cannot take up that opportunity. However, if he wished to undergo teacher training, he would be treated as a home student. I shall write to the Secretary of State for Health, but I would be grateful for any support that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary could give in this case.

Mr. Blunkett: I have a feeling that I must have brought about the alternation at what is now the Department for Education and Skills when I was hanging about there. I will obviously raise this issue with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to see whether there is

anything that we can do. However, there remain residency provisions in terms of support for education. We need to consider the integration process more widely and that is why, in the dispersal and support reviews, I have announced that we shall extend to 28 days the support that is given to those who gain refugee status. It has not been possible for us and the other support services to sort out such cases sufficiently quickly, and that has caused real problems for those who have been granted status to remain in this country but have found themselves without support of any type.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): First, in response to the Home Secretary's remarks on the Dublin and Geneva conventions, may I say that those of us who represent Kent constituencies do not have too much difficulty working out whether an asylum seeker has come from a safe haven? Most of them arrive on the Dover ferry or through the channel tunnel—those forms of transport originate in France and France is a safe haven.

The Home Secretary's hubris this afternoon has been breath taking. He is right to say that he inherited a shambles, but he inherited it from his immediate predecessor who has taken asylum in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. However, now that the Home Secretary has recognised that all the Government's policies, particularly the disastrous dispersal programme, have failed to date and now that he has begun to adopt at least some of the measures suggested by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), will he accept that there is fundamental difference between us? Some of us believe in secure reception centres while he believes in walk-in, walk-out ones. An asylum seeker arriving in the United Kingdom will go to a secure reception where he receives food, clothing and rest after his weary travel, but what is to stop him disappearing? The Home Secretary describes the system as "robust"—that is today's word—but some of us regard it as flaccid.

Mr. Blunkett: There is a cynic in every family. Given the location of the hon. Gentleman's constituency, I honestly wonder what his constituents would think about someone who wishes to wave away dispersal altogether. He should think seriously about advocating the complete abolition of dispersal and describing it as "disastrous". Without it, the coastal area of south-east England would have been overwhelmed. Everyone knows that. We do not believe that it is feasible, practical or financially viable to detain everyone who enters the country; nor is it acceptable or legal to do so, either in this country or under international conventions. No other country does that. That is why we have not considered it.

The notion—let me tackle this head on—that people who arrive as refugees want to rest in an inn somewhere for seven to 10 days and then take themselves off beggars belief. People who apply for asylum want permanent status in this country. That is why they do not come here and disappear illegally. By having the smart card and reporting and accommodation centres, we can not only track them but support them through to the time when they either stay as a welcome refugee or are speedily removed.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to call everyone who is standing. The Home Secretary has been on his feet for an hour. If questions are short and sharp, I shall be able to call everyone.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I welcome most of the proposals in the statement which might help to relieve the burden on such constituencies as mine. However, we all know that the devil is in the detail. Can the Home Secretary assure me that asylum seekers will have access to proper advice and representation in induction and accommodation centres?

Mr. Blunkett: The support for legal advice, which is funded substantially from public funds, will be available. Direct support for health care and education and to meet individuals' needs, including those with major emotional problems, will be dealt with in the accommodation centres.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Will the Home Secretary explain how the introduction of a smart card will improve on the present system of allocating a unique and identifiable national insurance number, without which no asylum seeker can obtain benefits or a job? Given that his right hon. Friend at the Department for Work and Pensions has decided to abolish plans for an entitlement card for the rest of the population, was the Home Secretary not dangerously near misleading the House when he suggested that the essence of the new system was the introduction of fingerprinting? Will he confirm—no doubt he will want to apologise to the House—that fingerprinting of asylum seekers has been the practice for a number of years?

Mr. Blunkett: Let me get this straight. When I visit Croydon—as, I am sure, the right hon. Gentleman has—and look at the ID system, people there explain that the electronic computerised fingerprinting facility that is linked to ports and other reception areas now enables a record to be kept of everyone's fingerprints. That was not possible under the previous system.

Mr. Lilley: It was.

Mr. Blunkett: It was not. There is no point arguing about it because it is a simple fact. We are still compiling a record of the totality of asylum claimants so that they cannot multiple claim or come back into the country under a different name and not be detected. I am not going into the history of the Department of Social Security's entitlement card; suffice it to say that our proposed card will have a strip to entitle people to the support that they seek and the cash that they get. It will be impossible to forge because of the biometric use of technology, to which I referred earlier.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Home Secretary must be aware that 1,800 people are being held in prisons, police stations and detention centres under immigration law without any charge being made against them. How many does he expect to be held in secure detention in reception or

[Jeremy Corbyn]

removal centres? Does not he accept that the current figure is way above the average figure for any comparable European country that is receiving asylum seekers?

Mr. Blunkett: There are approximately 940 people in prison, half of whom have not committed, or are not accused of committing, a crime. They will all be removed from prison, or the prison places will be superseded, by the end of January. We do not envisage that anyone in the induction or accommodation centres will be held in detention.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Home Secretary accept that the rights of genuine asylum seekers and the workability of our asylum system have consistently been undermined by the many people who claim political asylum in the full knowledge that, eventually, their claim will be turned down, but that by then they will have been able to disappear into British society? If he accepts that, what possible incentive can there be for such people to report to his voluntary accommodation centres in the full knowledge that when their asylum claim is turned down, they will immediately be transferred to a compulsory removal centre for deportation? Does not that criticism strike at the heart of the entire scheme?

Mr. Blunkett: It would if people did what the hon. Gentleman is describing. If people want to work illegally in this country, they do not apply for asylum at all; they simply work illegally. That is why we set up the interdepartmental working group to examine that problem and tackle it head on. If someone applies for asylum, it is self-evident that they will see their application through. That is why we have the backlog of appeals that I am dealing with today by allocating, with the Lord Chancellor, another £62 million for next year to speed up the process. Self-evidently, at the heart of the matter, to use the hon. Gentleman's phrase, lies the fact that if asylum seekers disappeared into the system, people would not appeal, we would not have a backlog and I would not be taking this action.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Will he ensure that any new system meets the needs of unaccompanied children, whether they are in a new induction centre or have had their asylum application refused?

Mr. Blunkett: The answer is yes. We are spending a very large sum—£95 million—on dealing with unaccompanied minors. I want, with our European partners, to use the security services to track and identify traffickers, and to find out how they are moving minors across continents and bringing them to our country. Those children are not, as someone said recently, walking alone through the forests of Germany and France; they are being exploited by others.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Home Secretary finished on the very point that I wanted to raise with him. At the beginning of his statement, he touched on the subject of the evil men and, probably, women who traffic in human beings. Will he say more about what practical steps he proposes to take, with European partners and security forces throughout Europe, to get to the heart of that problem? It seems to me that if we can put into a concerted, focused effort all the energy that we are rightly putting into a coalition against terrorists in the caves of Afghanistan, we can do an awful lot more to root out those few men and women who are responsible for peddling human beings and causing suffering and misery.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely with that. I raised that issue at the two Home Affairs Councils that I have attended this autumn. I believe that the effort applies to drug traffickers as well as to people traffickers. We are making available extra investment, and we are working bilaterally with the French in the western Balkans to enhance border controls in the accession countries, rather than just concentrating on the existing 15 members of the European Union. I hope that for a number of those accession countries, that investment will be the forerunner for substantial resources from the European Union.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I welcome the demise of the voucher system. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there will be no detention element in the reception centres that he has described? Will he ensure that gender guidelines will be considered by those working and providing advice at the centres? Will he assure me that the smart card, and the entitlement that it brings, will not work in reverse, causing problems, for example, for an asylum seeker who arrives at a hospital seeking treatment and who does not have a smart card?

Mr. Blunkett: First, other than delivery of the service at Oakington that I described, detention of those who have not committed an offence will be confined to removal centres. We shall develop that policy as the new elements are introduced. Secondly, staff at induction centres will ascertain and check individual needs as well as provide advice.

Thirdly, I hope that the card will be perceived as an entitlement. People who have not got it with them will be treated, just as those without a driving licence are entitled to produce it at a later date. The card is not a check for such purposes, but an entitlement that will allow us to obtain correct identification and enable people to operate the system fairly.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Last year, there were 100,000, or slightly fewer, applications for asylum, of which 85 or 90 per cent. have been or will be refused; and of those people refused, perhaps one in 10 have been or will be removed. In addition, it is estimated that as many as 100,000 illegal immigrants enter this country each year. What estimate has the Home Office made of the number of failed asylum seekers and illegal immigrants in the country? Does the Home Secretary intend that all those people should be removed to show that he is, as he puts it, tough? What extra resources will he give the authorities that will carry out those removals? Finally, will he pledge that there will be no universal amnesty for illegal immigrants in this country?

Mr. Blunkett: I am not pledging anything that I have not announced this afternoon. Of initial claims, 75 per cent. fail and 80 per cent. of those who go to appeal have their appeal dismissed. Those are the figures. We do not

have accurate figures on those who are living and working illegally in this country. That is precisely why we set up the working group to get a grip on the issue.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the Home Secretary's proposals mean that the gross exploitation of vulnerable asylum seekers currently taking place in the Landmark and the Inn on the Park in Everton, Liverpool will cease permanently? Will he review the role and operation of the National Asylum Support Service, especially in respect of a possible conflict in its role as a body that both awards and monitors contracts with the private sector?

Mr. Blunkett: While we are trialling and evaluating the new forms of accommodation, we will need, as the reviews indicate, to get a grip on those things that have been going wrong in NASS. I am painfully aware of the difficulties in Liverpool. I hope that we can iron out the problems quickly and sort out the contractual arrangements that have been entered into.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): When the Home Secretary's new system is fully operational, what incentive will there be for an asylum seeker whose appeal has failed not to disappear into the community, given that he will know that at that stage he faces detention prior to removal? Surely under the new scheme such an individual would have an incentive to disappear into the community as soon as he received notification of the failure of his appeal and before he could be detained?

Mr. Blunkett: He would, but that is why I am introducing a system whereby appeals decisions will be delivered in person rather than sent out in an envelope, and those who receive a refusal of their appeal will be accompanied, either to pick up their possessions or directly to the removal centre. As that begins to operate, we will be able to develop a system that would otherwise continue to undershoot expectations.

It is worth noting that there has been a substantial improvement in the number of removals. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn was Home Secretary, removals were increased by 100 per cent. or more on the number that had been inherited.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): In addition to dealing with the traffickers and gangmasters, will my right hon. Friend take action against those unscrupulous individuals and organisations who provide wrongful immigration advice to many people both here and abroad, and seek thereby to exploit people who are trying to build a better life for themselves and their families in this country? Will he give the House an assurance that the generous support so far given to authorities such as Kent county council and to public services such as the police and the national health service, which needed those extra resources to deal with the extra burden of asylum seekers, will continue to be provided until his new radical reforms are fully operational?

Mr. Blunkett: I cannot promise that they will get all the support that they request, but we will continue to provide the backing and support that are required to ensure that they can continue doing their job for the wider community and for people who are approaching them as asylum seekers. My hon. Friend will know that one of the other measures taken by my predecessor was the registration requirement in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. That is now taking effect. I hope that there will be a substantial clampdown on people who abuse the refugees who seek help from them by fraudulently pretending that they are eligible to give advice.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): May I join the chorus of welcome for my right hon. Friend's statement? It will be especially welcomed if it leads to a system that is more humane as well as more efficient. He will have anticipated that his announcement about the need for accommodation centres for some 3,000 asylum seekers will inevitably have caused uncertainty and apprehension in communities where the establishment of such centres is being proposed. Those communities include High Ercall and surrounding villages in my constituency, where the Angel Group, which is one of the Home Office providers, has made such a proposal. I know that he cannot be site-specific, but can he offer some clarification as to the number of centres that he seeks, their size and how soon he requires them to be operational?

Mr. Blunkett: Perhaps I should say on the record that any provider would be very unwise to speculate by buying up property, land or accommodation in the belief that we will simply take on the proposal. To make the new centres viable and to allow provision of support services on health, education and the like, we believe that they should have 750 places. The first four centres, making up the 3,000 places, will be established on that basis. Those from the voluntary and private sectors who genuinely want to collaborate and co-operate with us will be very welcome but no one needs to be under any illusion. People cannot simply present themselves and expect to recoup investment that they have laid out in anticipation, perhaps prompted by newspapers, that we will take on their proposed centre.

Martin Linton (Battersea): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on having acted on the unanimous suggestion made by the Select Committee on Home Affairs earlier this year that he should consider introducing entitlement cards? Does he envisage that the cards will help asylum seekers to get the public services and rights at work to which they are entitled, as well as helping him to supersede the voucher and dispersal systems?

Mr. Blunkett: I should make it clear that the card will not help with rights at work until people have been here for six months, otherwise I shall be in some difficulty. However, it will entitle them to confidence in themselves and the ability to present the card without feeling like second-class citizens in the way that people have described. The card may be also used more imaginatively in future, as a way of accessing other support.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): My right hon. Friend has already taken the significant step of ensuring inclusion in the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are in care. While acknowledging that a great deal of money is being spent on meeting the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, will his

[Mr. Hilton Dawson]

review consider that such children are often looked after in inadequate circumstances under section 17 of the Children Act 1989? Would not bringing those young people into the looked-after system not only perhaps be even cheaper but introduce more scrutiny, as well as ensuring security and better care for these vulnerable young people?

Mr. Blunkett: With my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health sitting on the Front Bench, I shall be careful not to suggest accommodating asylum-seeking minors in children's homes. There are major problems not only with the appropriateness but with the practicalities of doing that. We must ensure that appropriate dispersal of young people through social services works well. However, we must also consider stemming the tide of those who make their way to this country unaccompanied or find family when they are eventually granted leave to remain. That matter is difficult to tackle, but we must face up to it.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I have many constituents from ethnic minority backgrounds with proper and full rights to stay in this country. Will the Home Secretary assure me that they will not be asked repeatedly to show an entitlement card that they neither have nor need?

Mr. Blunkett: The answer is absolutely no—the card is for a specific purpose. As I said earlier, it will supersede the letter, which is unsatisfactory, not secure and clearly leads to fraud in many cases. It is not a suitable method for people to demonstrate their rights to the support that we offer them. Getting the balance right will mean, at last, a welcome and a trust in our communities and a clear understanding in the rest of the world. If we can achieve both together, we will have got it right.

Mr. Speaker: The Home Secretary has answered questions for more than an hour and 20 minutes and I believe that the House would want me to thank him.

The Home Secretary knows of my interest in the matter that the House has been discussing. I welcome vouchers being abolished because, as I know from experience in my constituency, they take away people's dignity.

Points of Order

4.52 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given prior notice of this point of order to you and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

On 5 October, I tabled a written question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about alleged underspending on several public services, notably education and health. Twenty-four days later, I had not received a parliamentary answer from any Treasury Minister. Yet on 26 October, last Friday, a detailed briefing about precisely such underspending in several Departments was curiously and inexplicably provided to *The Independent*.

The sin of gross parliamentary discourtesy—that is, providing information calculatedly to a newspaper in advance, instead of giving the House an answer—has been compounded by another. On 24 October, I tabled a written question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about corporation tax. In column 261 of *Hansard*, I received what might be described as a desultory reply from the Chief Secretary, followed by an exhortation to consult the Inland Revenue website for further and better particulars.

That proved a disappointing exercise because the relevant page is entitled "Inland Revenue Missing Page", and states:

"The page you want either no longer exists, or has been moved."

I am not an unduly suspicious character, but that raises the question of whether the page went absent without leave or, true to Treasury fashion, was removed by stealth. Either way, it is grossly unsatisfactory.

Has any Treasury Minister asked to make a statement on the matter? If not, will you give your verdict, Mr. Speaker, on that gross Government ineptitude?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot advise the hon. Gentleman about the missing page. However, if sufficient information is available for a press conference, an hon. Member who tables a parliamentary question should be able to get a proper answer. I hope that the Minister concerned takes note.

Orders of the Day

Adoption and Children Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.55 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has a simple aim: to ensure that every child in our society has the best possible start in life through the opportunities that flow from growing up in a stable and loving family. When children cannot live with their birth parents, I believe that society shares a responsibility to ensure that each child's life circumstances do not then limit their life chances. A kind and loving family is the rock on which society discharges that responsibility.

Adoption can mean a new start in life for many children, in particular children who have been in care. As every hon. Member knows, the opportunity to grow up in a stable family environment has not always been available to looked-after children who, for one reason or another, cannot live with their natural families. Adoption has too often been considered a last resort for those children when it should have been considered as the first response.

Not only the children have lost out, because society as a whole has paid a high price for that failure. At any one time, local councils look after nearly 60,000 children. More than six out of 10 leave care at 16 without a single qualification. Almost four in 10 male prisoners under 21 have been looked after at some stage in their lives. A quarter of people sleeping rough on the streets of London have been in care. That is not a failure of the child in care; it is a failure of the system of care, yet research has constantly shown over many years how adoption can overcome many of those problems.

Children adopted when they are more than six months old generally make good progress throughout childhood and into adulthood. They do considerably better than children who remained in the care system throughout most of their childhood. For those reasons, the Government are determined that more children in care should benefit from the improved life chances afforded by adoption.

By 2005, over the level of adoptions in 1999–2000, we aim for at least a 40 per cent. increase in the number of looked-after children who find adoptive parents. To achieve or exceed that target, we must fundamentally change the adoption system. Quite simply, it is letting down too many of our most vulnerable children.

Children stay in the care system far longer than they should. Almost 30,000 have been in care continuously for two years or more, and, too often, despite the best intentions of all those involved in the care system, they end up being passed from pillar to post. Nearly one in five looked-after children have three or more placements with different families in a single year. Some have six or more. These, remember, are precisely the children who already have a troubled history of family instability.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the Secretary of State giving way so early in his speech. I know that social workers and others have had difficulties, but is there not also a mindset that might have to be changed?

A friend of mine adopted a second child, having taken a long time to adopt the first. The second child was allocated after doing well with the family, but three weeks or so later it was discovered that the child had spina bifida. The adoption worker asked to take the child back. My friend said no and is looking after the child.

Does the Bill represent a move to change the mindset of those responsible for adoption? I have come across a situation in which adoption would not be considered unless the hope of infertility treatment was given up while infertility treatment could not be guaranteed if people went for adoption. Surely that is not the way to deal with people who could care for children in need.

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Similar examples could be cited by many Members from their constituency experience and far too many potential adoptive families face precisely such Catch-22 situations. We must streamline the process. The most important measure in the Bill is simple and self-evident; it is so self-evident and such a common-sense change that one would have thought that it would not have required legislation. The Bill will ensure that in every decision on adoption the paramount interest is that of the child. The child's interest must come first. Those responsible by and large do a good job for potential adoptive parents and children waiting to be adopted, but as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the attitude and culture have too often not been in the best interests of the child. We must change the culture, but I do not pretend that merely by changing the law we can change the culture, because the problem is more deep-seated. I believe that the necessary precondition for a change in attitude or culture is the change in the law that we propose.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I am sure that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues will be aware of the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of John Anthony Smith in King's College hospital in December 1999, and of the part 8 review carried out by Alyson Leslie on behalf of Brighton and Hove city council and West Sussex county council as a result of that death. The review talks of the need for adoption assessment to be more robust and investigative. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the review's findings will be fully taken into account in the further consideration of the Bill as it proceeds through the House?

Mr. Milburn: Yes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I can give him a number of assurances. John Smith's death was tragic and dreadful. I know that my hon. Friend has closely followed the events that led up to conclusion of the review.

First, the social services inspectorate will have a close watching brief to ensure that the conclusions of the independent review that have been published are fully implemented in my hon. Friend's local authority. Secondly, there will be a full scale SSI inspection of the Brighton and Hove local authority, which I expect to begin in April next year. More broadly, we must ensure quality and high standards in every part of the adoption process, not just in assessment.

[Mr. Milburn]

Last year, we published for consultation—and are beginning to implement from this year—new national standards that will apply to the adoption process in all parts of the country. Those standards are long overdue, and I hope that, together with the legal changes that we propose in the Bill, they will help prevent a tragedy such as that to which my hon. Friend referred.

The problems faced in the adoption process are partly due to the fact that local authority performance is too varied across the country. In some councils, 10 per cent. of looked-after children are adopted, whereas in others the figure is less than 2 per cent. Overall, the adoption system, including the courts, is too slow and bureaucratic: it is opaque and often unfair. Potential parents wait on average nine and a half months from being accepted as an adopter to having a child placed with them. The average time taken for a looked-after child to be adopted is two years and nine months—an eternity in a child's eyes.

There has, of course, been some improvement in recent years. As we concentrate on the problems, it is also worth bearing in mind some of the advances that have taken place. Even though the total time spent in care prior to adoption is still far too long, it has been falling over recent years. I am pleased to be able to report that still further progress has been made since I came to this House last December when the adoption White Paper was published. There has been a significant increase in the number of children adopted from care for the second year in a row. More than 300 extra children were adopted in 2000–01 compared with 1999–2000. Through the quality protects programme, there has been an increase of almost 40 per cent. in the number of adoptions from care since March 1999.

However, this is no time for those involved to rest on their laurels. Despite those recent improvements, the adoption system is still in need of far-reaching change. That is why we have introduced a series of measures to reform adoption practice, and to make adoption a better and more attractive option for more families.

First, we published new adoption standards, including target maximum waiting times for the securing of a permanent new family for looked-after children, which will apply in all parts of the country. Secondly, we are increasing financial support for the adoption service, investing an extra £66 million over this year and the two that will follow it, over and above the £51 million that councils tell us they currently spend on adoption services. Thirdly, we plan to introduce new rights to give adoptive parents paid adoption leave, and access to benefits that are currently available only to natural parents.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): In such difficult circumstances, grandparents are often among those who step in, and a considerable financial strain may be placed on them. They may have made provision for their retirement and suddenly find themselves bringing up grandchildren and having to deal with various problems, possibly including drug abuse. Will anything in the Bill assist such people financially? Will they receive allowances in the longer term? Financial help is available to foster parents, but not to adoptive parents.

Mr. Milburn: That is true. When a child enters a new adoptive family, it is often hard going. Things have changed since the 1950s and 1960s, when most adopted children were babies under one year old. Today, that applies to only about 10 per cent. Most are older kids, and many are pretty difficult. A huge strain is placed on adoptive families, the overwhelming majority of whom do a brilliant job. We should record our thanks not just to adoptive parents but, as the hon. Gentleman implied, to wider families.

One of the new provisions in the Bill is the granting of more support to adoptive families, including—for the first time—financial support. It is important for everyone's needs to be assessed properly, not just those of adoptive parents but those of the wider family.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I welcome what the Secretary of State has said, but let me give an example from my constituency. A woman of 71 is rearing a grandchild on her own, and doing a number of part-time jobs to support him. She is having trouble persuading anyone in the benefits system that she should receive some recognition beyond the basic provision of child benefit for performing a role that is relieving the taxpayer of a potentially enormous burden.

Mr. Milburn: If the hon. Gentleman writes to me about the specifics of the case, either I or the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), will look into it. It seems to me, however, that that is a duty that the social services authority in his area, Kent county council, should be discharging. If it is not, I will gladly investigate; but the social services authority should co-ordinate the various kinds of input that should be being made.

The steps that we have taken so far are designed to make adoption easier and quicker, but, as we all know, adoption is a legal process. Securing lasting improvements in adoption services therefore requires far-reaching legal change, and that is what the Bill seeks to achieve. The British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering said of it:

"this is a once in a generation chance to improve the adoption service provided for children".

Current adoption legislation, the Adoption Act 1976, is outdated. Some of it, indeed, is based on 1950s legislation. It is also inconsistent with the Children Act 1989. This Bill seeks to overhaul completely the legal framework for adoption in England and Wales. Some of its measures apply to Scotland, and some may in future also apply to Northern Ireland.

The Bill draws on the draft Adoption Bill first introduced in 1996. It also goes further than the Adoption and Children Bill that we introduced in March this year, which fell when the general election was called. I place on record my gratitude for the contribution that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House made in the Select Committee that considered the first Bill. I believe that the current Bill is better because of them. Indeed, the House authorities would do well to look at the Select Committee approach for Bills that by and large command cross-party support. There will be differences about detail, but when there is consensus on the general thrust, such an approach should be taken because it makes for better legislation.

I propose to build on the approach that we took when the Bill was first introduced by seeking leave to send the Bill to a Special Standing Committee. That will provide

an opportunity for those outside the House with real expertise in this area to give their views on the new measures that we propose.

It may be helpful to highlight some of the main provisions of the Bill. Adoption is and must be first and foremost a service for children. Clause 1 makes the welfare of the child, in childhood and later life, the paramount consideration for the court or adoption agency in making any decision relating to adoption. That brings the law on adoption for the first time into line with the law in the Children Acts.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Pursuing the entirely laudable aim of extending the use of adoption to children in the care system will mean that older children will be adopted from care. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the voices of those older children will be heard loudly and clearly throughout the adoption process?

Mr. Milburn: That is extremely important. I will come later to the special provisions in the Bill for that category of looked-after children. At the moment, there is a harsh choice for older kids in the adoption system: they must either go through mainstream adoption and therefore sever all legal ties with the birth family, or stay in care or foster care. That is why we have looked at introducing the special guardianship order to open up some more choices. That will be particularly pertinent to older children who perhaps do not want to sever links or legal ties with their birth family.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): When I have discussions with older children in care, they often tell me that they do not want to go to a family because they have had dreadful experiences of family life and much prefer to remain in good-quality residential care. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that, in listening to the voice of the child, he recognises that for some children residential care is the right answer? There are many good-quality residential homes that look after children.

Mr. Milburn: That is broadly right. There will always be some children for whom that sort of care is appropriate and right, but we must change the starting point for how we make decisions. For me, the starting point should be about trying to provide permanence, stability, and a loving and caring family for the child. Sometimes, the system has not operated in that way.

My hon. Friend is right that there will be different circumstances for different individuals. For some, adoption or the special guardianship order will not be the right route, but our starting point should be that we will seek for children in care precisely what we seek for our own children: a loving family and some permanence in their lives.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Will my right hon. Friend explain why an unmarried couple might not provide a loving family for an adopted child? The child should be put first. If the most suitable family are unmarried parents—perhaps a couple with children of their own in a long-established relationship—meet all other criteria and are absolutely right for that particular child, why does the couple have to be married?

Mr. Milburn: We should debate those issues. The Bill provides an opportunity for precisely that. The Bill does not alter in any way, shape or form the current law, which says that single people or married couples are the only ones who can adopt. With all due respect to my hon. Friend, who is very knowledgeable about these issues, ultimately it is not for her, me or any other right hon. or hon. Member to decide who is or is not an appropriate prospective parent. That must be for the courts. It is important, however, that we debate those issues.

As my hon. Friend knows, last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) introduced new proposals on registerable partnerships in her Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill. It is important that the Government consider our response to them and any implications that they might have for current or future adoption law. I think that we should debate those issues, and the Special Standing Committee will provide an opportunity for that. We shall undoubtedly hear many different representations, and we shall then have to respond to them.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): We should debate those issues, and I hope to say something on them tonight.

The Secretary of State has not answered the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley). The Government introduced the Bill, and in opening this debate, he should express the Government's view on their current proposals. Is it the Government's view that the legislation should be passed in its current form or amended?

Mr. Milburn: Although we would not have introduced the legislation unless we believed that these were broadly the right proposals—that must be the case—we want to commit the Bill to a Special Standing Committee precisely so that we can invite views from outside the House. Undoubtedly, that Committee will hear many different views, and ultimately it and the Government will have to decide whether the Bill's current proposals are the right way forward. It is sensible to debate those issues rather than pretend that they do not exist.

It is in the interests of the child that delays to adoption be designed out of the system. Children should not be left waiting indefinitely for the so-called perfect family on spurious grounds or because of a perverse sense of what is politically correct. The House will be aware of cases in which prospective adopters have been told that they cannot adopt apparently because they are too old, too overweight or even too middle class. Whatever the warped logic of those who introduce those blanket bans, the fact is that such bans fail to put the interests of the child first. Such bans put prejudice first, and that must fundamentally change. Our national standards made it clear that they have no place in a modern adoption system.

The Bill goes further than that by making it clear that although all agencies must of course give due consideration to the child's background while placing a child for adoption, there is none the less an obligation on the courts and all the other agencies involved to bear it in mind at all times that delay is likely to prejudice rather than enhance the child's welfare. Of course the best adoptive placement for a child would reflect religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural or linguistic heritage, but such a placement is best only if it can be found

[Mr. Milburn]

without unnecessary or harmful delay. What counts, and what the Bill enshrines, is that the interests of the child must come first.

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way again. Although that was the fourth or fifth occasion on which we have had those welcome remarks from a Minister, the Bill still does not specifically address that issue. Clause 1 makes it clear that the wishes of the child are paramount, but clause 1(5) presents a long shopping list including

"the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background."

Is it not possible, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have asked, to include at the end of clause 1(5) the words "except in so far as that might lead to unnecessary delay in finding a suitable placement"?

Mr. Milburn: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to serve on the Standing Committee—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) tells me that he does. If so, the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) is welcome to table whatever amendments he likes. Such considerations are in the Bill because they are important—but not so important that they must be followed to the detriment of the interests of the child. As we make clear in our national standards, which we want all adoption agencies and local authorities to adopt, in the end, it is the interests of the child that must count. They must come first. Personally, I cannot see why a child should be detained—for detention it too often is—in care, simply because the search for the so-called perfect family goes on. We must change that attitude now.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I shall give way one more time, but then I must make progress.

Mr. Shaw: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a danger of sending mixed messages to social workers undertaking assessments? We heard earlier about the harrowing case mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), and we must ensure that rigorous assessments are undertaken. At the same time, we say that we do not want to put unnecessary hurdles in the way of potential adopters and we want to speed the process. We all welcome that, but is my right hon. Friend confident that the national guidelines will satisfy both those potentially conflicting aims?

Mr. Milburn: I do not think that there is a conflict between those two objectives. Indeed, I could point to evidence from some local authorities with very high standards that do not take short cuts on quality but still undertake the adoption process in a timely manner. We have to get the balance right, and I do not think that it is right yet. Too many children languish in care when they need to be placed with an adoptive family that can give them the stability that they need in their lives.

If the hon. Member for Canterbury cares to look at the very first clause in the Bill, "Considerations applying to the exercise of powers", he will see that subsection (3) says:

"The court or adoption agency must at all times bear in mind that, in general, any delay in coming to the decision is likely to prejudice the child's welfare."

That is right, and we expect not only the courts but all those engaged in the process of adoption to give due recognition to our proposals for legal changes.

As a key part of our drive to reduce delay in the adoption process, we have already established an adoption register for England and Wales. The register holds information on children waiting to be adopted, and on approved adoptive families across the country waiting to adopt. The information on the register will be used to suggest families for a child where a local match cannot be found within an agreed time, or where the child needs to move away from the area. The Bill places the register on a statutory footing. It also provides the flexibility to expand the register to cover alternative forms of permanent placement for children.

The register on its own, however, will not make adoption easier or quicker. The legal process itself can be laborious, slow and frustrating for all concerned. Unnecessary delays are not in the interests of prospective adopters or those of the child, so the Bill includes further measures to cut delays in the legal process by requiring courts to draw up timetables for adoption cases and issue any directions necessary to ensure that the timetables are met.

As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), adoption will not be suitable for all children. Older children may not want legal separation from their birth parents, even though they may not want to live with them. Adoption may not be the best option for other children, such as those who are being cared for permanently by members of their wider family.

At present, children have only one choice of legal permanence outside the care system: mainstream adoption. The Bill introduces a further choice: new special guardianship orders. They give permanence to the child, by giving day-to-day responsibility for his or her care to the special guardian without severing all legal ties with the birth family. That new flexibility will give new opportunities to children who have been bypassed by the current adoption laws.

In the interest of the child, I am also determined to tighten the controls on advertising, payments and intercountry adoption. Right hon. and hon. Members will recall the internet twins case earlier this year. Adoption is a service for children, not for profit. It should happen in the interests of the child, not as some form of commercial transaction.

The Bill therefore makes a number of major changes to the laws on intercountry adoption. It will build on the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999. We have already actioned provisions in the 1999 Act to make it an offence for a British resident to bring a child from another country into the UK for the purpose of adoption, unless they are already approved adopters. It is also now illegal for anyone other than a local authority or a registered voluntary adoption agency to assess and approve prospective adopters. Privately commissioned home studies can now no longer be accepted as part of the adoption process.

The Bill goes further in strengthening the law on intercountry adoptions. First, it will introduce a new offence where a child is brought into the UK after being adopted overseas by a British resident within the previous six months without the adopters following the proper approved procedure. Secondly, it will put in place tougher penalties for those not following the proper procedures. The maximum penalty for those adopting overseas or bringing a child into the country for the purposes of adoption will be raised from three months' imprisonment at present to a maximum of 12 months. Those who break the law could face the maximum jail sentence, an unlimited fine or both.

Thirdly, the Bill includes a new provision that will allow the Government to ensure that adoption orders made overseas will be recognised in the UK only when the systems in the overseas country meet criteria set out in regulations here. The criteria will include ensuring that proper consents have been given by the birth parents, that the prospective adopters are suitable to adopt and that profit has not been made.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Why have the Government chosen a six-month gap, as the Secretary of State just mentioned? Why not three months or nine? Was there a legal reason for that choice?

Mr. Milburn: Six months seemed an appropriate half-way house to us, but I am happy for the issue to be discussed because it is important and needs to be examined during the passage of the Bill. As the hon. Gentleman knows, at present we have a list of eligible countries—the so-called designated list—that includes the US. Several countries propose to adopt the Hague convention on the protection of children. Indeed, we hope to be able to ratify that convention some time next year. The US has not yet ratified the convention and we will need to ensure that there is no gap between those countries that have adopted the Hague convention and those that have not, which might inadvertently put children at risk. Following the internet twins case, we have reviewed the designated list and will introduce measures if we think that that is appropriate.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I intended to ask a similar question to that asked by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), and I did not understand the Secretary of State's answer about the six-month limit. I would be grateful if that point could be clarified in Committee, or preferably before, because it was raised with me by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), who cannot be present for this debate. He wanted to know where the six-month limit came from because he was the sponsor of the original Bill.

Mr. Milburn: I am happy for the point to be clarified in the debate today or in Committee. I presume that the hon. Gentleman is another volunteer for the Committee.

The Bill takes two further steps better to protect the welfare of children from exploitation. It will introduce tougher penalties for those who seek to circumvent the safeguards for arranging adoptions and payments for domestic and intercountry adoptions. It will double the penalties, with up to six months in prison, a £10,000 fine or both. Importantly, it introduces new safeguards for advertising children for adoption. Advertising can, of course, be an effective method of encouraging more people to come forward to adopt, but this activity must be properly regulated in the interests of the children concerned.

The Bill, therefore, amends the existing restrictions on advertising in the Adoption Act 1976. Anyone other than an approved adoption agency who publishes or distributes an advertisement for the adoption of a child in England and Wales will be guilty of an offence. On conviction, the individual would be liable for imprisonment for up to three months or a fine of £5,000 or both.

Offline and, importantly, online advertising through the internet will be subject to the new restrictions. Advertising via the internet will need to be compatible with the e-commerce directive on which the Government are consulting. When that consultation is complete, we will ensure that the Bill reflects it appropriately.

Most children are adopted from this country rather than from countries abroad, but adoption support services across the country are patchy and inconsistent. Too often, adoptive families feel that they have to fight the system. It is little wonder, then, that nearly one in 10 adoptive placements break down before the child is legally adopted. Children with special needs or challenging backgrounds in particular become less likely to be adopted because of inadequate support for their prospective adoptive parents. Children in search of adoptive parents have often already gone through at least one family breakdown. In my view, the system cannot continue to let those children or their prospective families down.

The families deserve more support. The Bill tackles the postcode lottery in adoption support services. To ensure that high quality services are available everywhere, the Bill requires adoption support agencies to register with the National Care Standards Commission in England and the National Assembly in Wales. Provision of adoption support services outside this regulatory framework will become a criminal offence.

The Bill also introduces a new duty on local authorities across the country to make arrangements for the provision of adoption support services, including financial support. There will also be a duty to provide a support service for special guardianship placements.

The Bill includes a new right for all those directly affected by adoption to an assessment of their needs for adoption support services. It establishes a new independent review mechanism that will be available for prospective adopters who feel that they are being turned down unfairly. We will consult a wide range of agencies and organisations in developing the independent review mechanism and the regulations to underpin it.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I welcome the fact that the Bill provides for a duty on adoption service providers to provide an assessment service, but it does not provide for a duty on adoption services to provide a service once the assessment has been made. Is that not likely to result in a postcode lottery in the provision of services?

Mr. Milburn: Some local authorities make appropriate adoption support services available, including a proper assessment of need, and they should all do so. Ultimately, however, the local authorities run the service, not me or any of us, so they must decide who needs what level of support.

[Mr. Milburn]

We will consult widely on eligibility criteria and publish guidance in due course about how financial support, in particular, should operate. Some families will have a greater need than others; that is simple and self-evident. Ultimately, local authorities must take those decisions, which is why we are making available specific extra resources for them, certainly in England, to ensure that they can discharge their functions. The £66 million that we are putting in over this year, next year and the year after will be a considerable boost to local authority coffers when it comes to adoption services. Out of that, they will need to enact the new provisions and decide which families should receive financial support, and at what level.

Mr. Dawson: I accept all that my right hon. Friend has said. Would it be appropriate to have an independent review mechanism for people who are turned down for adoption support along the same lines as that provided for prospective adopters?

Mr. Milburn: There are two important points. First, there is an existing complaints procedure, as my hon. Friend knows. We have listened to representations about the creation of a new adoption ombudsman and our view is that adoption is in essence a mainstream social services function. It thus seems right that if there are complaints about specific aspects of decision making in relation to adoption they should be dealt with through the mainstream complaints procedures. Incidentally, I think that those procedures need sharpening—they need to be quicker. As he well knows, it can take months, if not longer, to deal with complaints. That builds delay into the procedures—into the very process of ensuring that a potential adoptive family is matched with a child for adoption.

Secondly, we are introducing an independent review mechanism under the Bill. That concerns not so much the level of adoption allowances for families but, for example, whether a family has been inappropriately turned down as adopters. At present, the system does not incorporate such independence. As my hon. Friend and I know from our constituency experience, that is a real source of grievance for many prospective adopters. It is right that we build in independent review throughout the system, whether of the provision of information to adopted children about their birth families, or of decisions to place a child with a particular family. They are difficult issues.

Hon. Members often criticise local authorities and others who discharge such functions—sometimes even the Government make such criticisms—but we should make no bones about the fact that they do a difficult job. The issues are difficult and emotionally fraught. Not only must we get the process—and the law in regard to who should or should not be adopted—right, we must build in independent safeguards throughout the system. That is what we have tried to do. We shall be happy to hear views on how the Bill's provisions for independent review could be strengthened.

Comprehensive reform of adoption law is long overdue. Children and families can be affected throughout their lives by delay and dysfunction in the adoption system. The Bill seeks to take action on both fronts.

The Bill is part of a wider package of measures that the Government are taking to improve opportunities for children in our society. Whatever their family structure and whatever their family history, children only get one chance to grow up. Loving and stable families are the basis for the strong society that we want to create. So we will continue to invest resources to improve the life chances of children and families, whatever their background or circumstances, through measures such as the working families tax credit, the minimum wage, sure start, quality protects, family-friendly employment legislation and this Bill.

Our ambition for any child must be the same as our ambition for every child, and the same as our ambition for our own children: a safe and sound family life, where children are loved and given the support to do well for themselves and to grow up to be responsible and loving adults; a stable and permanent future, with the security of parents whose sole interests are the welfare of that child; and a decent start in life, with each generation of adults seeking a better future for the next. Those values underpin the Bill. The measure is better for the scrutiny that it has already received in the House. I believe that it will considerably enhance the life chances of some of the most vulnerable children in our society.

I commend the Bill to the House.

5.39 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): There will be a large measure of agreement about the Bill on both sides of the House. Certainly, a change in the adoption law has been a long time evolving. The Bill has its origins in the Conservative Government's review that took place in 1992, which, as the Secretary of State correctly said, resulted in a draft Bill in 1996. I want to take this opportunity to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) for her private Member's Bill, which gave a push to adoption reform last year.

I add my thanks to those who served on and gave evidence to the Select Committee that considered the Adoption and Children Bill in the previous Parliament. We would all do very well to learn the lessons of a Bill that was given a good deal of pre-legislative scrutiny. Almost all hon. Members would recognise that a better Bill is now in front of us than was considered previously. It has been a very useful constitutional exercise.

Notwithstanding the broad agreement in the House, adoption legislation is always very difficult because it represents a complex balance of interests—a balance between the rights of the adopters and the birth parents, with the interests of the child always paramount. That balance also involves speed of access, with a rigorous commitment to quality in assessment. Adoption also involves balancing the geographical mismatch between those parents who want to adopt a child and the children who are put up for adoption, with the minimum possible disruption to the child. That is especially important where children may not have contact with their natural parents, but may have contact with members of their extended family. Minimal disruption is very much to be hoped for in those cases. That is especially true when there is contact with natural siblings, which needs to be maintained wherever possible.

We very much welcome the presumption in the Bill that delay is generally prejudicial to the child's welfare. That is all the more important because the proportion of

children adopted from care has increased from 7 per cent. in 1975 to more than 50 per cent. now. However, I am sure that the Secretary of State would want me to reassert that speed is by no means the most important aspect of adoption and that, in this legislative process, we must focus on the appropriateness of the placing and the outcome for the child.

It is right to aim for higher levels of adoption, but an obsession with targets for local authorities, which are under pressure to meet their numbers, will not necessarily produce a better system. As we have seen in other areas, the Government have a rigid obsession with numerical targets. I hope that the Minister who responds to the debate will give us a guarantee that there will be no question of imposing financial or other penalties where local authorities fail to meet adoption targets set by central Government.

As has been said already, we fully understand the decision to give due consideration to a child's racial and cultural origins. That is especially true where the child is older and may have a very clear view of who he or she actually is. However, there must be no hard and fast rule because that could exclude perfectly good adoptive parents on the ground of their race, and I am sure that all hon. Members would find that utterly offensive. We need to take a commonsense approach, given the sort of society in which we now live.

I spoke to representatives of an agency this morning and discussed the case of a white couple adopting a black child. As they said, it is much more sensible for that to occur in an urban setting where there is clearly an acceptance of a much more multi-ethnic society than in a rural setting where a child might feel much more exposed. We need to understand those sensitivities, banish the politically correct brigade's nonsense and recognise that we have to deal with cultural and racial issues sensitively, but that misplaced political ideology can all too easily stand in the way of children's welfare.

Ms Shipley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would represent misplaced ideology to state that a couple had to be married to adopt if they fitted all the other criteria, the child was put first and it was the best place for the child? Would not a PC ideology of a particular sort stop adoption because of a lack of marriage?

Dr. Fox: It is mistaken to view the issue in isolation in the way that the hon. Lady describes. Emanating not least from Downing street at present is the view that wider social trends need to be taken into account—for example, what is the wider picture being given in a piece of legislation on the institution of marriage? As the Secretary of State rightly said, that issue will be widely discussed in Committee. I can already envisage a considerable amount of time in Committee being given to that issue, and I am sure that those hon. Members who will serve on the Committee are taking note.

It is an important principle of the Bill that a court must not make an order unless it considers that making the order would be better than not doing so. It is also clear from the Bill that the interests of the child should be not first, but paramount. In other words, they should outweigh all other considerations. Although many of us are in instinctive sympathy with that view, there is something of a conflict between paramountcy and reasonableness. I draw the Secretary of State's attention to the 1992 review, which recommended that the child's welfare should be paramount except when a court was deciding whether to dispense with parental consent. It added that

"where adoption would only be marginally better than another option, the court should allow the fact that a parent does not agree to adoption to tip the balance in favour of the other option."

In view of the reservations raised by many of the organisations that have already given evidence on that point, it would be useful if the Minister could give us more detail on the Government's thinking.

Mr. Dawson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that progress has been made in levelling the apparent gap by ensuring that the proposals in the placement orders meet the criteria set out in the Children Acts?

Dr. Fox: I am sure that that is correct. However, I am also sure that those applying the law will be looking for clear direction from Parliament on how it should be interpreted. After consultation with the Government's legal advisers, the Minister might feel that she cannot provide clarification tonight, but we will want it to be provided in Committee.

One striking development since the 1992 review has been the widespread acceptance of the need for pre- and post-adoption services. It is worth recalling that one in five adoptions fail and, as the Secretary of State pointed out, that is especially true when the child involved has special needs. Such cases involve great care in the selection process for adopters, but I am sure that I am not alone in continually wondering at the sheer commitment and downright goodness of those who adopt profoundly handicapped children. My experience as a doctor leaves me with no illusions about the difficulties that those parents face over the longer term, and the Committee will need to find answers to questions about the organisation and finance of the post-adoption services that they will need.

For example, who will be responsible for financing post-adoption services when a child moves from one part of the country to another, as is more likely with a national register in place? When local authorities are forced to provide services, will more money be made specifically available to them? Will that money be ring-fenced or will it be a "Robbing Peter to pay Paul" exercise, as some of them fear?

Then there is the question of entitlement to assessment. If the group entitled to assessment, including birth parents, can be extended by regulation in the way that the Bill stipulates, who will ensure that local facilities will not be overstretched with distortions of priority and pressure on resources? What will happen if someone is assessed as needing services but, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) pointed out, the local authority is under no duty to provide them? Will we not become involved in nothing more than a bureaucratic charade?

The Secretary of State referred to adoption allowances, but when will the Government provide us with more detail on exactly how they will work and on what the tax and benefit implications will be? How do Ministers envisage such a scheme working to ensure that, wherever possible, it is targeted to the requirement that siblings are kept together? Again, we shall want very much to explore that issue in Committee.

[Dr. Fox]

We agree in principle with the Government about many other points, but need more detail about them. For example, the introduction of an appeals procedure is widely welcomed on both sides of the House, because there have been far too many stories in the press about perfectly decent people being turned down as adoptive parents on the most spurious grounds. However, the plans are still a little too vague. How will appeals be triggered; who will give leave to appeal to an independent body; and what is to stop every adoptive parent who has been turned down from seeking an appeal with the obvious potential for administrative chaos that that would entail? Who will pay the cost of appeals? If the adoption agencies are made to pay, they will be under pressure to avoid costs by pleasing the adoptive parent, even if the result is a less appropriate placement. How will they deal with that? We need greater clarification of that during the Bill's passage.

The problem of parental responsibility, especially in relation to stepfathers and unmarried fathers, is difficult, and I sympathise with the Government in having to grapple with it. It is right that consent is dealt with clearly and early on in the process. Many have expressed the view that there is a tension in the law between the Government's approach through bodies such as the Child Support Agency, which assume and enforce the financial responsibility of fathers, and parental responsibility as it relates to adoption. Like hon. Members on both sides of the House, I am aware of concerns that some fathers might inappropriately take parental responsibility to stop adoption. However, Ministers are right to continue on the path outlined in the Bill and not to back away. Inconsistency of principle does not make good law, however uncomfortable it might be in the short term.

We have reservations on one matter, and we will want to question Ministers closely on it in Committee. It relates to the restriction on access to birth records for adopted adults. The Bill will fundamentally alter the arrangements in force since enactment of the Adoption Act 1976, under which adopted adults enjoy the right to be given information necessary for them to obtain a copy of the original birth certificate. We all understand the sensitivities of birth parents and the possible effects that such disclosure can have on others, especially later children. However, those who are adopted surely have an absolute right to know who they are. We cannot and should not legislate away someone's basic identity. We shall certainly want the Government completely to rethink their proposals.

Much work needs to be done to scrutinise details of this long, 130-plus clause Bill. There will be much agreement, including on plans to improve the court system for the adoption process. We will want to hear more about that and how the national register, which we support, will operate. We will also want measures to be put in place for older children in care. They are often the most difficult to place. They face long delays and are most deprived of the values and ethos of the world beyond the care home. We need to find ways in which they can have more contact with families during their time in care, so that they are better prepared for life outside.

I am sure the House agrees that, above all, we need to enforce rigorous safeguards for children at all stages in the process. As mentioned at the beginning of the debate, the death of four-year-old John Smith, with 53 injuries, due to a failure to make the appropriate checks is a shocking and shameful indictment of the system. We must not allow a similar incident to happen again.

We welcome the planned changes to the law in light of the Kilshaw case and the restrictions on intercountry adoption. The unchecked trade in babies on the internet and elsewhere must disgust hon. Members on both sides of the House, and we will certainly welcome controls. We will give the Bill a fair wind and try to improve it further. We are dealing with some of the most vulnerable people in our society. They are often scarred, traumatised and afraid for themselves and their future. We must not allow politics, prejudices, bureaucracy or short-term convenience to stand in the way of them having a chance to experience a loving family and to participate in the fullness of life that we often take too much for granted. In this area of law making, perhaps above all others, Members of the House of Commons have an opportunity to give to needy and undervalued children something that they may not otherwise get—a second chance. We must not fail them.

5.54 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I very much welcome the Bill and the Government's commitment to improve adoption services for children and to deal with delays in the adoption process. I was privileged to sit on the Select Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), which took evidence on the Adoption and Children Bill introduced in the last Parliament. I am pleased that this Bill will also go to a Special Standing Committee, because that is a valuable experience.

Everyone has an opinion on adoption—prospective adopters, adopters, natural parents, extended families, people who were adopted as children and the general public. Few people will not know someone who has a direct or indirect experience of adoption. Some experiences are heart-rending. They include people who were adopted 30 years ago and have no right of access to information about their natural parents; families that are disturbed and traumatised by the sudden appearance of an adult who was placed for adoption as a child many years before; and people who are refused as adopters for what they believe is no good reason. On the other hand, we have the sad situation in which people who are approved as adopters cause harm and suffering to children placed with them.

Opinions about what should be in adoption law are as many and as varied as the individual experiences people have had. It is right that legislation should give proper consideration to those experiences, but we should not have an adoption law that attempts to balance often different and conflicting interests. I therefore welcome clause 1(2) which says:

"The paramount consideration . . . must be the child's welfare, throughout his"—

or indeed her "life."

It is not the interests of the parents or prospective adopters, but the child's welfare that is placed above all other considerations.

However, I, too, should like the definition of "the child's welfare" clarified. Clause 1(6) states:

"The court or adoption agency must always consider the whole range of powers available to it in the child's case (whether under this Act or the Children Act 1989); and the court must not make any order under this Act unless it considers that making the order would be better for the child than not doing so."

I presume that the clause covers placement orders. Clause 20(2), which specifically refers to placement orders, says:

"The court may not make a placement order in respect of a child unless . . . the child is subject to a care order, or . . . the court is satisfied that the conditions in section 31(2) of the 1989 Act . . . are met."

Those conditions are whether the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. Without those conditions being met, the order should not be made.

Clause 50 relates to parental consent. Placement orders dispense with consent. The clause sets out two conditions for overturning parental consent, one of which is that

"the welfare of the child requires the consent to be dispensed with."

If in granting a placement order the Government intend to apply the threshold of significant harm similar to that in a care order as set out in the 1989 Act, we need better clarification of that in clauses 1 and 50. If it is not their intention, clause 20 probably needs some attention.

I also welcome clause 1(3), which states:

"The court or adoption agency must at all times bear in mind that, in general, any delay in coming to the decision is likely to prejudice the child's welfare."

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the delay in adopting children in care is still unacceptable. However, clause 5—this relates to an earlier point—specifically addresses the placement of children for adoption after a placement order is made. In other words, it recommends with whom children should be placed and gives due consideration to a number of matters. The clause does not make it clear that delay should also be a consideration when taking account of other factors, although I am sure that there is an assumption that that should be so. Delays in the court system can be addressed but, once an order has been granted, delays in adoption agencies making matches and moving the process forward also have to be addressed.

As I said, everybody has opinions about adoption, and mine are informed by the fact that prior to being elected to Parliament I was, like many of my colleagues, a social worker. I spent 10 years working in fostering and adoption. Most of the children whom we placed for adoption were under five, and most had had damaging experiences in their home environment. Most of the adopters were childless couples who would have wanted, in different circumstances, to adopt a baby if that had been possible.

The assessments that adoption officers have to make are complex and difficult. Not only do they have to consider the present needs of the child and assess what kind of family would meet them, which can be very complex, but in assessing families they must come to a conclusion about how they will respond in future to the challenges that their adopted child may present. That is a tough job, and it requires very good judgment.

It is good to start with a commitment from adoptive parents to love a child, but it is certainly not always enough, given the complex emotional problems that children can present in an adoptive placement. That is why post-adoption support is crucial, not only in the assessment of needs but in the provision of practical help. I very much welcome the Bill's recognition of that fact, which is a step forward.

Ms Shipley: Does my hon. Friend agree that prospective adoptive parents need to be provided with all the information regarding the child's background, including any assessment that has been carried out? It is only fair and proper that they know everything about the child.

Ms Coffey: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. When I was an adoption worker some years ago, we tried our best to do that, and I am sure that matters have improved a great deal in recent years. Of course, adoptive families need the widest possible information about the child and the background.

We can introduce the best legislation in the world, but it will not, by itself, improve adoption practice. The quality of assessments, the matching of children with families and the support that is given determine the outcome of adoption placements. We need to train and skill the adoption workers who make those crucial assessments. I worked in adoption during a time that now attracts heavy criticism for its politically correct decisions, and I have heard that criticism made by Opposition Members in previous debates. I refer, of course, to the "same race" debate.

At that time, we believed that an important factor determining the success of a placement was matching the child to a family who reflected the child's race and culture. I still believe that it is an important factor. Unfortunately, however, there is not always a family who will provide that match. The national adoption register, another innovation, will increase the possibility of a match because there will be a wider range of adoptive families from which to choose.

I accept that there were delays during those years, but if at that time adoption workers had been made aware of the importance of not causing undue delay and of the difficulties that delay can cause a child, we may well have considered other options earlier. I am not taking a shot at the previous Conservative Government, who presided over that state of affairs—well, I suppose I am really. I am simply making the point that we have to ensure that adoption workers have the best possible information to make their assessment and the best possible skills with which to perform that complex and difficult task.

I know that the Government are making available £47.5 million for social care training, which is another very welcome investment in social work. Will any of that money be used specifically for further training of adoption workers or, indeed, of adopters, who also need training to support often difficult and damaged children?

I very much welcome the new provision in clause 104 to timetable court proceedings, and I welcome the announcement that, from 1 October, there will be specialist adoption centres, particularly as Stockport county court is to be such a centre. I welcome also the document, "Adoption Proceedings—A New Approach", issued by the Lord Chancellor, which aims to reduce delay and inefficiency in adoption court proceedings. However, I must point out that timetabling was also a measure in the Children Act 1989, and I am not sure that by itself it achieved the desired reduction in unnecessary delays.

[Ms Coffey]

Are there any proposals to monitor court proceedings in special adoption courts to see how effective timetabling has been?

The Bill is very welcome, and I congratulate the Government on timetabling the Second Reading so early in the Session. It demonstrates their commitment to ensuring that children in care are given the best possible opportunities in life.

6.6 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): There is widespread consensus throughout the Chamber on large parts of the Bill, and I will not repeat what the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said about the areas on which there is broad agreement.

We have benefited from the expertise of the hon. Members for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley), for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), for Stockport (Ms Coffey) and for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), and we will do so again in Committee.

One of the more telling statements made about the Bill is that it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. That says a great deal about Parliament's willingness to legislate on adoption at leisure, over years and decades. While Parliament has been slow, changes in family structures and the needs of potential adoptees have outstripped the ability of the system, governed by legislation and regulation, to keep up.

Having said that, one cannot accuse this Government of being slow to introduce legislation following the Prime Minister's expression of interest in the matter. The Government have acted quickly and, moreover, they have been willing to accept that the rapid introduction of the Bill may mean that it does not contain all the answers. That is why I share the hon. Member for Woodspring's view that the attention of a Select Committee was welcome. The differences between this Bill and an earlier, lapsed attempt demonstrate not only that events have moved on but that the Government were able to take account of points arising from the evidence in the truncated Select Committee proceedings. I recognise the work done by Back Benchers on private Member's Bills, such as that in the name of the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), which became an Act in 1999.

It is appropriate on Second Reading to note that our main aim must be to prevent the need for adoption where possible. Support structures in education, health care and social services must be put in place to help people become good parents so that there is less requirement for children to be taken into care. Adoption has been described as the last resort. That is unfair, but there is a recognition that a care home should be the last resort. An increasing realisation of that has changed the population in care, and made it conversely more difficult to place looked-after children with adoptive families.

That is why the Government's record on increasing the proportion of children in care who are adopted is particularly commendable. We must be careful not to get carried away, because the increase has been small, from 3.8 per cent of children in care in 1997-98 to 5.2 per cent last year. None the less, that increase should be acknowledged, given the change in the population of children in care that occurs as greater efforts are made to avoid their going into care in the first place.

The Secretary of State mentioned the difficulty in respect of older children. About two thirds of those adopted from care are aged less than five and only 5 per cent. are aged 10 or above. Although the average period children spend in care before being adopted is less than three years—two years and nine months, according to figures from the Library—more than a third spend more than three years in care before being adopted. The longer a child is in care and the older they are when adopted, the more difficult placement becomes.

To attack the issue holistically and to increase the number of adopters it is important to increase the status of those who adopt and those who perform magnificent work as foster carers. I welcome the Secretary of State's emphasis on increasing their status and his acknowledgement that they provide a tremendous public good, as well as a personal good to both parties involved. It is broadly welcome that the paramountcy of the child's welfare throughout its life has been written into legislation. Against that background, the aim should be to ensure less hassle and delay for both the child and the adoptive parents.

Part of tackling both those issues is to widen the pool of prospective carers and adoptive parents. Ageism should have no place in measures taken under the legislation and the new procedures. If parents would otherwise be good adopters, and as long as other criteria are met, artificial criteria relating to age and health should not be set. Too often we hear of arbitrary cut-off dates that are, in effect, discrimination on the basis of age, as well as accounts of value judgments being made as to the ability of adoptive parents to carry out their role based on concerns about their health, but with presumption and prejudice taking precedence over proper evaluation of their abilities.

I tend to share the view that racial differences need not be an automatic barrier to adoption, but to use that argument to attack so-called political correctness undermines the fundamental point. If the hon. Member for Woodspring is right and race should not be a barrier, I repeat the question put by the hon. Member for Stourbridge to both Front-Bench teams: should marital status be a barrier, as it currently is, to joint adoption? That question was not answered by either the Secretary of State or the Conservative spokesman, and I cannot understand why not—it has been floating around in the ether for long enough.

I am prepared to put on the record the view of Liberal Democrats: we think that unmarried couples should have a right to adopt jointly. If Labour and Conservative Front Benchers address that issue, we will make better progress in Committee. The Secretary of State claimed that he wanted to have a debate on the issue, and he will get one, but his comment suggests to me that he has not yet decided whether to support our point of view.

Just as marital status and race should not be barriers to adoption as long as adoptive parents meet the relevant criteria and the welfare of the child is paramount, the sexuality of adoptive parents need not be relevant. It is important to recognise that times have changed since previous legislation was passed. I hope that we can persuade the Government to change their position on that point.

The Secretary of State mentioned the ten-minute Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths)—a Bill that I and other Back Benchers supported. During the debate, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) set out what he considered was the Government's view, stating that the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), had assured him in a previous debate

"that there would be no legal adoption of children by homosexual couples".—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 324.]

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that children are already placed with same-sex couples, but that what happens in law is that one partner adopts the child and the other seeks parental responsibility through an alternative court proceeding? That method, in its way, provides for adoption, but does it not mean that unmarried heterosexual couples are being discriminated against?

Dr. Harris: I agree that there is discrimination whichever way one looks at it. The easiest way in which to tackle the problem would be to recognise that, as long as the criteria for adoptive parents are met and the welfare of the child is paramount, there should be no bar to joint adoption by such couples. I have seen no evidence that couples' sexuality or marital status affects their ability to provide a happy home for children. Indeed, the evidence is that children born to lesbian couples using an intermediary and unknown donor are very well adjusted.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): I totally support the hon. Gentleman's arguments about re-examining the issue of marital status. Does he agree that an additional point that could be used to make that case is that we are short of good quality prospective adoptive parents? There are far more looked-after children who could be adopted than there are prospective adopters.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Lady puts well the argument on which this section of my speech started. There is anecdotal evidence from adoption agencies that 10 per cent. of couples who apply to adopt are not married. They may be put off by the fact that they are rejected ab initio from performing the role of adopters. In addition, 40 per cent. of children are now born outside marriage, making such family structures a recognised and common form. To continue to discriminate against such couples is wholly unnecessary and detrimental to the children whose interests we want to be put first. I hope that the Conservatives will reflect on the message sent by the electorate—a message that many of them have accepted privately, although fewer have done so publicly—and join us in pressing the Government on that issue.

It has already been said that targets can dominate policy, which would be wrong, rather than provide an insight into the successful or otherwise outcome of policy. Targets—whether for the number of placements and adoptions, or for waiting times—are useful as monitoring devices, but when they become an end in themselves, policy and procedures may be perverted to meet them. I understand the pressure that the media and Opposition parties can exert on the Government to establish and meet targets, but I hope that adoption targets will not be rigid. Adoption should be policy-led, not target-led.

I am delighted that the Government are to let local authorities retain responsibility for adoption, which is a core social services function. The key issue is resources. It would be a false economy not to invest sufficient resources in adoption services to maximise the number of good adoptions. Adoption services have historically been under-resourced and social services generally are being squeezed.

My next point is one that it is legitimate to make on Second Reading, and I intend to repeat it at every opportunity. It is that my local county council is again having to make cuts across a range of social services as additional duties imposed by the Government, as well as its responsibilities to an ageing population and a greater number of looked-after children, outstrip the growth money that the Government provided after their first two years in government. In their first two years, there was a real-terms cut in funding. I hope that the Minister will listen to the voice of the Local Government Association about resources and recognise that ring fencing is not the answer. It is easy for Conservative spokespeople to say "Let us ring-fence an inadequate amount of resources", but that does not solve the problem.

Critically, if we are to increase the amount and quality of adoption, we must have the necessary staff, which means raising the status of social workers and recognising the staff shortages that now exist not only in the south-east, but elsewhere. It will be a tragedy if the Government cannot deliver on those aims. Although investigations must be carried out when dreadful cases arise, I hope that hon. Members in all parties recognise that the use of such cases as an excuse to clobber under-resourced and overstretched social workers makes matters worse in the long run. We must ensure that we do not damage our case by seeking to allocate blame—a principle that applies in other health care professions.

On post-adoption financial support for adoptive parents, I worry when I hear the term "postcode lottery", as it implies that the misery will be shared out evenly when there is a problem with resources and that social services departments will not have the flexibility to focus resources where they feel them to be most needed. Adoptive parents in some areas will be less well resourced than those in other areas and will need additional funding. If we impose rigid central control, even with the welcome but misguided aim of ensuring no variation in provision, we may well be doing people a disservice.

Much has been said about intercountry adoption aspects. Will the Minister explain why the six-month limit in the new legislation has been introduced for overseas adopters? My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), who will seek to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, joins me in asking whether we can ensure that we do not deprive children from other countries of the opportunities for adoption by being over-rigid in our application of criteria. Of course, we recognise that welfare considerations must be met. Our worry, however, is about cases in which all criteria are met, but the original country's procedures are not recognised by this country, so adoption is prevented, however good it would be, however appropriate the steps that have been taken and however clearly the birth parents have given their consent. That may be inevitable, but I hope that the Government will reflect on the effect of seeking to look tough and on the risk of penalising reasonable and genuine adoptive arrangements.

[Dr. Harris]

I was interested in the question whether the religious views of the child are an issue. One must accept that it is only older children with significant capacity who will come to their own religious views. Personally, I would worry if the options for adoption were restricted for children who were born into a religious household of one denomination or another. It would be inappropriate for such children to wait longer for suitable adoptive parents than children who were born into atheist families or who do not know about their supposed inherited religion. Religious beliefs, like political ones, are different from race and gender, as they are acquired. If religious belief is to mean anything, it must be consciously entered into rather than inherited genetically. I hope that that issue will be carefully considered.

My final two points relate to ethically difficult areas. First is the question of parental consent and its significance when a small advantage is deemed to be gained from adoption in terms of the welfare of the child, but there is fierce opposition from parents with the capacity to withhold consent. There may be only a few cases in which that happens, but the matter will have to be explored very carefully in the Special Standing Committee. We must recognise that consent must be genuine to be valid. Consent has far too often been sought under inducement. It is better not to use an excuse where there is clearly no genuine consent.

Finally, I question the presumption of the hon. Member for Woodspring that we have an absolute right with regard to the Government's proposals to protect third-party rights in terms of access to information, with which he took issue. I am much more inclined to support the Government position. I do not believe that we have an absolute right to know who we are in genetic terms. I say to those on the Conservative Front Bench that we do not have an absolute right to subject our fathers to DNA testing to see whether they really are our fathers. Research evidence from anonymous testing suggests that the proportion of children who are not their father's child is well into double figures in urban areas. We do not have such a right and I do not believe that we should have it. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry if I am making some hon. Members uncomfortable; I did not intend to do so. I was referring to what is suggested by research. It is questionable for people glibly to say that one has an absolute right to knowledge of one's genetic inheritance.

All in all, the Bill is a very valuable measure. I echo the points that have been made on both sides of the House about the fact that so much of it is welcome and overdue. I look forward to the rest of the debate and to a healthy and—where appropriate—heated Committee stage.

6.25 pm

Liz Blackman (Erewash): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), I served on the Select Committee so I am delighted to be called to speak in this debate. I add my voice to those on both sides of the House who have congratulated the Government on the Bill, but I point out that we must also congratulate them on what came before it. It was praiseworthy that an Adoption and Children Bill came to the House shortly before the last general election. I congratulate the Government on establishing the Select Committee and on heeding the evidence that was taken and using it to improve that Bill. I also congratulate them on the speed with which they brought this Bill to the House. The Select Committee was concerned to ensure that we would not lose impetus, so their track record speaks volumes.

I do not propose to say much about the two core objectives that the Bill seeks to achieve: putting the child at the centre of the process and speeding up that process. Much has already been said about those aims. I merely point out that the two are inextricably linked and that it is also worth acknowledging that the Government were putting in place many planks of the process before the Bill's return to the Floor of the House, to help to speed up the adoption process and to put the child at its heart.

The national adoption standards, which will be enforced by the National Care Standards Commission from April 2002, were issued this August. An adoption and permanence taskforce has also been set up to support local councils in improving their performance—a point to which I shall return in a moment. The Lord Chancellor's Department announced that adoption work in county courts and above was to be centralised in specialist adoption centres throughout England and Wales from the beginning of this month. Without doubt, the original system has played a significant part in delaying that process. However, will the Minister tell us whether the change has gone smoothly in the first instance? I should also be interested to know how the work will be monitored in future. Another move forward was the establishment of a national adoption register under the old legislation. It will, of course, operate with increased powers under the Bill.

I welcome the introduction of an independent review mechanism for those who feel that they have been turned down unfairly as adopters—an issue about which I spoke on 26 March and to which I shall return. I also welcome the new special guardianship orders to provide security for children where adoption is not appropriate, and the post-adoption support system which will extend beyond the age of 18. The targets that we set are rightly ambitious. We seek to increase the number of adoptions by 40 per cent. by 2004–05 and to bring all councils' practice up to the level of the best within the same time frame.

Placing looked-after children successfully has become so difficult over the years because of the proportion of children in care with special needs—I use that expression in its broadest sense. Many children in care are badly damaged and it is more of a challenge for the system, including social workers and agencies, to work quickly and make the right matches.

It is therefore unsurprising that it is easier to place smaller children for adoption and that statistics for post-adoption breakdown are especially high—nearly 50 per cent.—for older children. Post-adoption support is paramount and a key plank of the Bill. A sense of further failure and worthlessness in the children must be avoided at all costs.

Let us consider the adoption and permanence taskforce and the varying performance of local authorities. Successful adoption rates vary from 1 to 10 per cent. according to the Minister, and up to 14 per cent. according to the House of Commons research paper. Good practice will continue to be vital to the success of the new framework, which will probably not improve the

outcomes as desired by itself. The practice as well as the framework must be right. I should like to hear the Minister's views on delivery, apart from the measure, in more detail.

We have known for some time that practice varies. What analysis has the Department carried out on the key reasons for that? What are the main factors? Has anything been done in the interim to tackle the findings of such analysis? The taskforce aims to give practical help to authorities with development plans and implementation, and to share good practice.

The first 11 councils have already had preliminary visits. I am interested in the way those councils were chosen and whether they were predominantly in poorer performing areas where adoption success rates are lower. Children who live in the jurisdiction of the poorest-performing local authorities remain less likely to be successfully placed in the first instance under the new regime. I should be interested to know the taskforce's initial findings. It has recently published an annual report, but I should like some more detail.

Good management is at the heart of success. I know that from my long experience in the education system and from experience of other organisations in my current job. Good management makes the crucial difference between organisations that perform averagely, poorly and well. An organisation can have good workers and professionals, but without a vision that good management communicates clearly and insists upon, implementation of a policy is much more difficult. Good management, good training and a change in culture in some authorities and agencies are required. That can be achieved not by the Bill alone but by support and monitoring.

Will the authorities that perform least well be monitored more closely as we try to improve the target to 40 per cent? Who will undertake that monitoring? Will the taskforce play a role? I note from its annual report that it cannot criticise management. However, could it make constructive observations—or even criticisms—through defined channels so that the points that it notes are properly fed back to the authorities responsible for monitoring and improving standards?

I spoke on Second Reading on 26 March because of a constituency case. Parents who had been approved for adoption were made to feel guilty twice for requesting detailed information about the children involved. They asked for the information when they were trying to adopt, and before they were told that they would be matched with the children. First, they could not get information on two small brothers. They were ultimately asked to go to a residential to get to know more about them. They went with their little girl and suffered a horrendous experience because they had not been told about the extent of the two small children's needs. It was upsetting for the boys, the little girl and the parents.

The parents had another disappointment when they tried to adopt a small girl from another authority in the London conurbation. They were desperate for up-to-date information but were stalled. They also felt that they were being criticised for asking for such information. They were told over the phone, without explanation, that they were not successful. They felt guilty about that.

Prospective adopters need good-quality information throughout the process, not only when the adoption order is made. When prospective parents want to make a lifetime's commitment, they are entitled to say, "This child is beyond our capacity, but we still feel that there are children in care whom we could adopt, love and care for." They should not feel bad about that, but they do. As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), there are more children in care than there are prospective adopters, and we should not alienate but encourage them.

I cannot make the point about lack of information strongly enough. I appreciate that it will be included in the guidance, but it will be interesting to know the number of complaints about lack of information when the complaints mechanism is set up. Information is fundamental to successful adoption.

On resources, the Government have pledged £66 million over three years to support the changes. Anxiety has been expressed about whether that is sufficient to maintain the objectives over that length of time. How was the figure originally reached? Will it be regularly assessed until 2004–05 to ensure that the resources are sufficient? Can the taskforce make observations about the adequacy of the funding as the system gets going?

In March 2001, 55,900 children were in care. In 1997–98, 3.3 per cent. of children in care were adopted. In 2000–01, that had increased to 5.2 per cent. Two thirds of the children were under five, and a little more than 5 per cent. were 10 or older. As I said earlier, many adoptions of children in the older group currently break down. In the year to March 2001, a child spent on average two years and nine months in care before adoption. About a third were in care for three years or more before being adopted.

Those statistics are shocking, but the Bill and measures already taken will do much to improve the situation. It is much to be welcomed. Ultimately, practice on the ground will be pivotal in ensuring that significantly more looked-after children are placed in secure and loving homes, grow up to feel valued and needed and are able to take their place in society, but I commend the Bill.

6.40 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): This is a good Bill that has rightly been welcomed by Members in all parts of the House. Some of the thinking goes back to the Children Act 1989.

The first such Bill was drawn up shortly before the Conservative Government lost office and, as Members have said, a similar measure was introduced in the last Parliament. I was privileged to serve on the Select Committee, under the distinguished chairmanship of the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), which contributed to changes introduced by this Bill.

I congratulate the hon. Members for Erewash (Liz Blackman) and for Stockport (Ms Coffey) on intelligent and characteristically interesting contributions, but I am pretty disgusted that the Liberal spokesman appeared to walk out of the Chamber without listening to the reply from the other side. Had he listened, he would have learned something.

The Secretary of State made the strong point that the situation among children in care is intolerable. Outcomes for such children are all too often awful: 40 per cent. of prisoners under 21 spent part of their childhood in care; a

[Mr. Julian Brazier]

quarter of all girls in care become pregnant while they are our responsibility as wards of the state; huge numbers are on the streets; and a third of homeless people and a high proportion of children in care become drug addicts and end up paying for their habit by prostitution.

Mr. Dawson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that adoption, while an extremely important placement option, is not the universal remedy for the ills of the care system? The Government have already introduced legislation and resources to address many problems in the system.

Mr. Brazier: I am glad to have given way to the hon. Gentleman, who is extremely knowledgeable on the subject. He is right that adoption is not a solution to all problems and that many other issues in the care system need to be addressed, but adoptions are a far more successful solution—more than 80 per cent. succeed—than all the other options within care.

As the hon. Member for Erewash said, the number of children adopted from care has improved, but it is important to recognise, as the Government have done publicly, that the figure of 5 per cent. each year is a low proportion, and represents only about 10 per cent. of children who have been in care for more than a year, although they are the true target pool. The figure is much lower than that in America, where the problems are worse for several reasons.

Ms Munn: On the number of children in care, is the hon. Gentleman aware that research shows that what matters is not whether they are adopted, but the permanency of their placement? Children who are placed permanently with foster carers can do as well as adopted children, provided that the placement is secure and well supported, hence my especial welcome for the new special guardianship orders.

Mr. Brazier: I will go three quarters of the way with the hon. Lady, if she can forgive my phrasing it like that. I, too, welcome special guardianship orders for certain categories of particularly difficult children. Having said that, bearing it in mind that foster parenting is very well resourced—

Mr. Dawson: What?

Mr. Brazier: Foster parenting is well resourced compared with adopting, which is very poorly resourced in most parts of the country. Even if the outcomes of long-term fostering and adoption are comparable, that still furthers the case for more adoption.

I shall give two brief examples of how much bad practice is still out there. Recently, "Jane" adopted two siblings in the south of England, and the contact arrangements require monthly meetings with their younger brother who is in long-term foster care. They like him and they all get on well, so he inevitably gets upset when they leave. The parents have applied to adopt him too. His social worker's response is that he needs assessing and the first step is to remove him from the stable foster home that he has been in for several years and put him in a new placement for reappraisal. Inevitably, he is showing signs of emotional disturbance.

The second example is from Cambridge. A woman who has been approved for 14 months to adopt a child aged under five is still waiting for a match, although we are short of adopters. She has recently been told that she is unlikely to get a child because she lives on a main road and a child could be seen and recognised by the birth family in the area. Presumably, she remarked sarcastically, she cannot go shopping in Peterborough centre for the same reason. No attempts have been made to consider her for adopting a child from outside the area.

I do not want to knock all social workers—I am only too conscious of what a difficult and occasionally dangerous job social work is—but as previous speakers have said and as those recent examples show, there is a long way to go to change the culture.

Much has been made of the fact that a huge spectrum is involved, from a small number of extremely good local authorities dotted around the country that achieve remarkable placement rates to the larger number with poor outcomes. That is why I continue to argue that, in the worst cases, the Government should use the provisions already available to them to take adoption from some poorly performing authorities and give it to a neighbouring authority or a voluntary agency.

The House will forgive me for going into a shopping list of several individual items, because we have been round the circuit once in the past year. I am glad to see the new Minister in her place. She has already several times taken the trouble to contact the all-party adoption group, of which I am privileged to be co-chairman.

I referred to my first point during an intervention on the Secretary of State—the provisions on race, religion and culture in clause 1(5). I do not want to make the issue hugely controversial, but there is a serious question here. No Member in any part of the House suggests that the provisions are not sensible or that they are not matters that should be taken into account in any adoption where they are relevant to the child. However, although clause 1(2) says that the interests of the child are paramount, a court may be faced with clause 1(3), which says that delay is unreasonable. What if clause 1(5) is considered alongside those criteria?

Why cannot we include the words said by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), in the Select Committee and by the Secretary of State on the Floor of the House rather than just having them on the record in *Hansard*? Considerations of race, culture, religion and so on must not be allowed to cause inordinate delay.

The hon. Member for Stockport nods. She is showing her usual robust common sense, although I hope that my saying that from these Benches will not damn her career. If it is clear that no suitable match will be found on those criteria, the time must have come to look for a good couple who do not match exactly, but who will give a child a loving home.

My second point relates to the need to protect damaged children and their new families from the birth parents. The hon. Member for Erewash said in a previous debate that if we are short of adopters, and want more to come forward, we must take account of the adoptive parents' interests. Over the past generation, there has been a trend in the courts towards adoption gradually becoming more open. A couple of senior social workers have complained about that to me, and in a sense one can understand why.

It is sometimes hard to cut all ties when birth parents have failed, perhaps for reasons that were not entirely their fault. However, in a more extreme case, constituents of mine have adopted two little boys and are making a success of that adoption. One of the children had been kept in a cellar for so long that, by the time he was adopted aged seven, he still lacked the power of speech. The other had been left out in the cold so often and for so long that at one point it was thought that both his feet would have to be amputated. That was narrowly averted, but to this day when he is upset his parents hold his feet and warm them to comfort him.

I am not suggesting that such cases are typical, but it is desperately important that we make it clear to the courts that most children who are adopted from care are adopted because their birth circumstances were unsatisfactory. An adoption may be compromised by insisting on the release of information on the new, often brave, adoptive parents who take on the children whom, as the hon. Lady said, many are unwilling to adopt. The least that we owe such adoptive parents is a guarantee of secrecy.

To move from the anecdotal to the statistical, to the best of my knowledge, the country that has gone furthest down this route is Australia, where almost all adoptions are open and it is easy for birth parents to get information on the adopters. I frequently refer to Australia because it has developed many exciting ideas in the social field, but the one area in which it has severely failed is adoption. Adoption rates in Australia are low: only 500 children in the entire country were adopted last year.

We must discourage the courts from making provisions more open. We should protect the new adoptive family by preventing the birth family from finding out their addresses and details.

Mrs. Humble: The hon. Gentleman and I raised that issue when we last debated this subject. Most so-called open adoption in this country does not involve direct contact between the adoptive and natural parents. It involves postbox communication: the natural parents send a card or gift at Christmas or birthdays, and the social work department transmits it to the adoptive parents. The adoptive parents and the children they have adopted often benefit from that procedure. When we talk about open adoption, we must be clear that it does not usually involve face-to-face contact.

Mr. Brazier: I accept the hon. Lady's point, but sometimes open adoption is involved. I had a particularly bad case in my county. An adoption was very close to being arranged, but to the frustration of the social workers who put so much effort into setting it up, it had to be abandoned when the court insisted on open aspects that the potential adoptive parents, for reasons that I thoroughly sympathised with, were unwilling to accept. Even the contact to which the hon. Lady referred may, in some of the extreme cases, be deeply offensive to the adoptive parents. The court should change the balance if it makes the difference between those adoptive parents taking the child on or not.

My third point relates to the independent review, which has rightly been welcomed by all hon. Members who have spoken. As my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said, we need a more precise definition of a "qualifying determination". It is critical that the definition should be extended. It should include individual matching, not merely whether or not a couple get on the list. We cannot allow an appeal in every case, so the question is about when an appeal on an individual matching should be allowed, and when not.

I suggest that an appeal should be allowed in two cases. The first is the case of foster parents who want to adopt the child but have been refused. If they have been fostering a child for a while, an appeal should always be allowed in principle. The second is the case of a couple who have been refused a match and a match is not made with another couple. In such a case, an appeal should be triggered after a reasonable period. If four or five couples want to take on the same child and are unsuccessful, they should not all be allowed to appeal. Allowing appeals in those two cases would strike a sensible balance.

The other point that came through in our Select Committee hearings was that the first part of a review should be a rapid paper appraisal. It may turn out that one of the potential adopters is suffering from venereal disease, or, to give an example raised in the all-party group, one of the adoptive parents may have told the social worker in secret without her husband's knowledge that he is an inappropriate adopter. Such cases can be quickly dismissed without triggering an expensive and time-consuming appeal.

I hope that my suggestions on how to flesh out the appeal system have been helpful. At the moment, it is left to regulation.

My fourth point is about the whole question of statistics and information. The Bill contains some welcome new provisions, which have been included since the general election partly as a result of the Select Committee hearings. However, I should like the issue to be more clearly pinned down. The sad fact is that from time to time children in care disappear, sometimes without anyone, except the social services department concerned, knowing about it. In the hideous West case, some of the children he murdered had been in care.

I welcome the new provisions that empower the Government to demand and collect statistics, and I suggest that the Secretary of State should do exactly that. I see no reason why there should not be a national database, given the IT available in this modern era and given that there are about 50,000 children in care. I am not suggesting that it should be public, like the national register.

Mr. Dawson *indicated assent.*

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful for the hon. Member's endorsement, as he is experienced in these matters. Every child in care should appear in that database, along with information about how long that child has been in care. That would soon show up the scandalous proportion of children in care for whom there is still no care plan.

My fifth point brings us back to lay visitors. The Children Act 1989 is very clear. There is a statutory requirement on local authorities to appoint lay visitors for all children in care who are not regularly visited by someone. Of all the provisions in the 1989 Act, that is probably the one that is ignored most often. The vast majority of children in care have no lay visitor, including the majority of those who are not visited by anyone else.

[Mr. Brazier]

I am grateful for the support that I have received on this issue from a number of Labour Members. The Minister has been open about taking ideas on board, and this could also be included under the clause on the gathering of statistics. I suggest to her that central Government could press local authorities to provide information on how many lay visitors they have appointed, and which children have or have not got lay visitors. Lay visitors are important, and one benefit is obvious. If a child in care wants to talk to someone outside that environment about something that they are unhappy about—not necessarily anything as dramatic as abuse—and to have an independent ear, that is obviously a good thing. In more serious cases, in which something is going badly wrong, however, it is extremely difficult and dangerous for a professional employee to blow the whistle.

I remember one whistleblower in particular—a social worker, and a very brave lady. I do not want to expose her, so I will not say which inquiry was involved. After telling us in a private hearing, very bravely, all that she had done to lift the lid off a horrible scandal, she then said quite bluntly, and almost by the by, that she was now working in a completely different capacity. She had destroyed her career with that local authority. The great thing about lay visitors is that, because they are not employees, they have nothing to lose from exposing something that is going seriously wrong. I would not be cynical enough to suggest that that might have something to do with the reluctance of many local authorities to appoint them.

My final point relates to problems in the family court advisory service. The Bill already contains two clauses—clauses 97 and 98, I believe—relating to that. If I am fortunate enough to be appointed to the Standing Committee, I shall argue that there is scope for extending those clauses to sort out the unfortunate muddle generated by the establishment of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. I have received a detailed brief from a children's guardian, describing the problems that are already arising from the new body's heavy-handed approach.

The matter is complicated, and I do not want to go into too much detail. I have already detained the House for a long time. Let me, however, draw attention to one extraordinary feature of my constituent's letter, which I could hardly believe. Defending its position in court—it was taken to court and, mercifully, lost the case—CAFCASS had the nerve to argue that, as a non-departmental body, it was not bound by any statements made by the Lord Chancellor's Department on its behalf.

The immediate crisis has been averted, because the courts ruled against CAFCASS. Indeed, Mr. Justice Scott Baker used some of the strongest language that I have known to be applied to a public-sector body. However, now that an "impending disaster"—the judge's words, not mine—has been averted, may I suggest that Ministers should ask how a public-sector body has grown so big for its boots that it could behave in such a manner, when dealing with a service as vital as the guardian service? It is vital not just to children who are adopted but to all children in care—indeed, to many of the most vulnerable members of society. A grip must be taken on it, and I hope that the Bill will provide an opportunity for changes in the original legislation governing it.

Let me end where I began. This is a good Bill, and I congratulate the Government on the huge amount of work put into it. I am pleased that a Conservative Government examined the position originally, but I am disappointed that we have twice seen Bills appear and then disappear. I very much hope to serve on the Committee, and see the Bill become law during the current Session.

7.3 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): It is grand to have an opportunity to speak on Second Reading of what I think is regarded as a vital Bill by Members on both sides of the House. If it becomes law, it will constitute the first adoption legislation for a quarter of a century. I consider many measures in it to be long overdue, as well as far seeing and entirely necessary. I am also extremely pleased that the extra legislative commitments required as a result of the international situation have not led to another postponement of a Bill that will improve the lot of some of the most needy and vulnerable children in the country and, indeed, overseas.

The Bill represents yet another step in what is becoming a major Government commitment to fundamental reform and investment in the care system. Several others have confessed their involvement, and I shall now confess mine, as I have done before. I worked in the care system for 15 years before arriving here in 1997, keen to promote change in what I considered to be a deeply inadequate and often destructive way of looking after children in care. I am extremely impressed by the progress that has been made.

The Bill should be viewed not in isolation, but in conjunction with measures such as the Care Standards Act 2000, the Protection of Children Act 1999, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the establishment of a children's commissioner in Wales, all of which build on the Children Act 1989. That is one of the few progressive achievements of the ghastly 18 years that we suffered before 1997. *[Interruption.]* I chide only a little.

As well as major legislation, we have seen, and are still seeing, considerable investment in such programmes as quality protects and in social work training. Attention has already been drawn to the vital necessity of ensuring that skilled, experienced and able people are encouraged to enter and remain in social work and perform one of the most delicate and difficult tasks in the public sector or, indeed, in any field.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): The hon. Gentleman tempts me. Will he not admit that one of the biggest pressures on social services departments and, in particular, on child care is caused by the fact that councils are spending some £1 billion above standard spending assessment—£1 billion more than his Government think that they should spend on social services, including child services? Is that not the real problem at the moment?

Mr. Dawson: It is certainly a significant problem, with which I shall deal at length later. However, if we need such services and if they are to work properly, they must be funded properly.

We have already heard some examples of the way in which social workers are viewed. I do not think that enough people will be recruited to perform this professional task—a task that requires real dedication, commitment, skill and tenacity—until the status of social work rises tremendously. I experienced life in social work under the last Tory Government and, like many of my colleagues, I felt that the profession was being denigrated and brought down. We are making progress, but there is a long way to go.

Tim Loughton: This was not intended to be a very political or controversial Bill, but will the hon. Gentleman admit not only that the gap between SSA and spending was never remotely as wide during those 18 bountiful years, but that the number of people applying to become social workers and take on child care responsibilities has fallen by some 50 per cent. over the past four or five years? Never was there such a manning problem as there is now, in any of those 18 years.

Mr. Dawson: That is partly a problem of the public sector across the board at a time when the economy is going well and there are many more opportunities. When there are more opportunities for better paid and less stressful jobs, the attractions of social work pall. The Government must get to grips with that, and do something about pay levels and the standing of people coming into an important profession that is carried out in difficult, strenuous and challenging circumstances.

I agree that this should not be a party political football, but all today's speakers have professed their commitment to meeting children's needs, observing their best interests, supporting adoptive parents and recognising that people operate in very stressful circumstances. It must be professional people who take on such a delicate task and become involved in the biggest decisions it is possible to make outside the acute medical sector—crucial decisions that will have a tremendous bearing on individuals throughout their lives.

I make a last, tiny, party political point. On a personal note, I am delighted to be able to take part in this Second Reading debate. I missed out on the Bill when it came before the House in the spring because I had the pressing matter of the sixth smallest Labour majority in the country to defend. Now resplendent with the fourth smallest Labour majority, relaxing into the comfort provided by those 481 excellent souls, I hope, like the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), to play a full part in the passage of the Bill, which I am pleased to note has been developed by previous discussion. The Bill should receive support from throughout the House. The quality of the debate so far shows that we can make more progress collectively.

The Bill is well named as the Adoption and Children Bill because it puts the needs of children over and above those of any of the adults concerned and at the heart of the process. In accordance with the key principle of the Children Acts, the welfare of the child will be paramount under the Bill.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): On that point, does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that the provisions for third-country adoption may be fine for many countries, but they place children in countries that do not have, and are unlikely ever to have, our infrastructure at a grave disadvantage when it comes to finding adoptive parents from this country?

Mr. Dawson: Intercountry adoption is another delicate and difficult matter, but it is a vital principle that people operate not only to the Hague convention, but to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. Two countries in the world have so far not supported the UN convention—Somalia and the United States of America. If we look at the Kilshaw case in that light, that is instructive.

We want children who need substitute families to be looked after within their country of origin, within that culture, with this country supporting systems in those countries.

Mr. Turner: First, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, there are good reasons why the United States has not subscribed to the UN convention on the rights of the child, although he may not think that they are good. Secondly, writing a rule that says that it is best that a child be looked after in their country of origin is clearly not putting the interests of the child above all other interests, any more than saying that a black child should be with black adoptive parents. He must surely apply the same standards overseas as he proposes to apply in this country.

Mr. Dawson: I am not sure about that. The moving of a child from one culture to another culture is an enormous step. While we have heard about the success of adoption—it is successful for many children—about 20 per cent. of adoptive placements break down. The thought of a child coming a long way away from their country to a completely different country, and all that falling down, presents a difficult dilemma for all of us.

We have heard some criticism of local authorities today, but it is important to emphasise that the Bill reasserts the central importance of local authorities as corporate parents of young people who are rendered vulnerable by a breakdown in their family support. The Bill places a duty on local authorities to maintain an adoption service in the same way that they are required to carry out their statutory responsibilities to all children in need under the Children Acts. That is of central importance.

As I have said, adoption is not a panacea. It is not an easy solution to the problems of all children who cannot grow up within their birth families, but it is a vital option for them and it is important that all unnecessary barriers to its use be removed. It is right and proper for the Bill to state that delay is likely to prejudice the welfare of children and to require courts to establish timetables for progress.

Far too many children spend their childhoods waiting for the opportunity of permanence that adoption could bring. I unequivocally welcome the Bill's proposals for an Adoption and Children Act register to build on excellent work by national adoption agencies—the "be my parent" initiative is one example—and to link children needing placements with prospective adopters across the country.

I am delighted to see the end of freeing orders and their replacement by placement orders. Children freed from their birth parents but left in a ghastly limbo without an adoptive placement have been denied a basic human right. It is excellent, proper and right that that should cease.

[Mr. Dawson]

I have been involved in many adoptions and I know that they can work well. I have also witnessed a number of adoption breakdowns. I will never forget some of the distress that those situations have caused. There is no possibility whatever of achieving the Government's admirable aim of increasing the number of children adopted from care by 40 per cent. by 2005, and of reducing the alarmingly high number of adoption breakdowns, without a major improvement in adoption support services. In particular, older children being adopted from care carrying a legacy of bad experiences, children who have been abused—often disclosing the extent of the abuse only when they feel safe enough to do so—children with disabilities and special needs and children from sibling groups, need the support of adoptive parents, who in some cases should be paid. In many cases, they should receive realistic monetary allowances. Adoptive parents must themselves have access to effective guidance, counselling and support throughout the long, changing and challenging years of childhood and, goodness me, adolescence—that is said with feeling. The bare essential is the commitment in the Bill that local authorities must make arrangements for the provision of adoption support services.

I was pleased with the response of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to a couple of questions about the level of adoption support services and the modernisation of some complaints procedures to ensure that people had a right of appeal when apparently they were not being offered the appropriate support and services. It is clear that adoption support services and the necessity of funding them properly will be one of the key debates during the passage of the Bill.

I give an unreserved welcome to the new measures proposed for the acquisition of parental responsibility by unmarried fathers and step-parents. In particular, the latter will remove something that has unnecessarily pitted the step-parent against the birth parent, who would under current arrangements lose parental responsibility, with the unfortunate child often being forced to take sides, and the time of social workers, who would be much better employed securing and supporting placements for children, being wasted.

I am also delighted with the introduction of a new concept of special guardianship. It gives parental responsibility to a carer without removing it from a birth parent, as adoption does. It will be available to unmarried couples whereas, at the moment any way, adoption is not. A very wide range of people can apply for special guardianship, and special guardians can be eligible for support services.

Special guardianship is a new proposal for permanency. The remark by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) about the importance of permanency rather than the particular nature of placement is crucial. I think that special guardianship could be one of the Bill's most important provisions, and it certainly seems to be a significant addition to the armoury of placement options. Although the proposals will benefit from further debate, I will be really interested to see how they work in practice. I think that, in some ways, the proposals will be developed further by good practice. The potential of special guardianship, especially at a time when more openness is being encouraged in permanent relationships and in permanent placements, is enormous. They are hugely significant and very good proposals.

It is a matter of human rights that those who have been turned down as prospective adopters should have access to an independent review and that those decisions are scrutinised. We have debated this issue before, and some of the examples given—especially by the hon. Member for Canterbury, who has tremendous knowledge, sincerity and commitment to improving adoption—were hair-raising. Although I am not laying claim to being a wonderful practitioner of adoption, my experience over some years was not that social workers operated in an enormously politically correct fashion; I think that they honestly tried, with poor resources, inadequate legislation and in very stressful circumstances, to do a decent job and their very best for children. They tried to meet children's needs as best they could.

Mr. Brazier: Although I endorse almost everything that the hon. Gentleman has just said, two facts remain. First, there is a huge difference in outcomes between even neighbouring authorities with similar resource shortages. Secondly, and as the hon. Gentleman has made some quite party political remarks, coming from Kent, I feel particularly strongly about the shortages of resources for social services. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said, those shortages have become very much worse.

Mr. Dawson: It is right and proper that differences in emphasis and in results should be scrutinised and questioned. There is no doubt about that.

The ghastly Kilshaw case will have reminded everyone that adoption is a service for children who need permanent places rather than for adults to meet their particular needs. We have had much discussion about cultural circumstances, language, religion and all the rest of it, but I think that the Government have got the balance about right. I really hope that the appeals of well-intentioned people who have had a raw deal from their adoption agency—of course such cases exist—will not be drowned out, and huge amounts of scarce resources wasted, by vexatious litigants who should not be allowed anywhere near children.

My real concern is that some people do not pass through a net that would otherwise stop them because there was a feeling that huge effort that could otherwise be expended in meeting children's needs had to be spent in attending tribunals and a lengthy appeals process. As I said, however, I think that the Government are striking a reasonable balance on the issue.

This is an excellent Bill but it is far from perfect. We have to have further support for adoption support services and funding. Extra funding is being provided to the service, but it is a service that has been denied the proper support that it has needed for many years.

It is odd to define the adoptive relationship, as the legislation does, as equivalent to one in which the child

"had been born as a child of the marriage",

especially when single people can adopt. The reason why adoption is the most fundamental course that can be taken in the life of any child is that it removes responsibility from birth parents while placing it with someone else.

I was pleased to get a response from the Secretary of State on the importance of hearing the voices of children and young people, particularly when they are at an age to express themselves, throughout the adoptive process. As with all legislation, the Bill needs to be firmly grounded in children's rights. Children of a sufficient age and understanding need to be able to give clear consent to adoption or to any other placement option.

I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) is right about the importance of allowing unmarried couples to adopt. I do not understand why in this society and these days a couple has to be married to adopt. I do not see why in principle couples living together should not be able to adopt, nor do I see why there should be a prohibition on single-sex couples being able to put themselves forward for assessment. No adult has a right to adopt, but I do not see why any group of adults should be ruled out of the equation initially.

The issue of access to birth records is crucial. People should have a right to have access to their own birth certificates. The process was controversial when it was first introduced in the Children Act 1975, but I believe that it has worked reasonably well, allowing people to gain information perhaps even against the wishes of the birth parents. The system seems to be working and I agree with the principle, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

No hon. Member has yet made the point that, most important of all, as currently formulated, the Bill misses an opportunity to deal with an aspect of child care that urgently requires reform: private fostering. We should not require the Laming inquiry into the appalling death of Victoria Climbie to tell us that we must have much more effective means of registering and inspecting arrangements for private fostering backed up by the full force of law. Thousands of children are rendered vulnerable every day that the grossly unsatisfactory status of private fostering is allowed to prevail. I believe that it is imperative that the Government use the opportunity afforded by the Bill to introduce the necessary provisions.

This is a very good Bill and all hon. Members should support its Second Reading. A Special Standing Committee is a grand opportunity to develop this important legislation as it proceeds.

7.28 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): It is with a sense of responsibility and honour that I make my maiden speech in this House. I represent the constituency of South Norfolk, and it is only right to begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, John MacGregor, now Lord MacGregor of Pulham Market. Lord MacGregor had a distinguished career. He served the people of South Norfolk for 27 years as their Member of Parliament. For 15 years of those years he was in government, and nine of those were spent as a Cabinet member. He served as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Agriculture Minister, Secretary of State for Education, Secretary of State for Transport and Leader of the House.

As many hon. Members will be aware, Lord MacGregor is also a talented magician, and not any old magician but a member of the inner Magic Circle with gold stars. That sounds a bit like the magicians' equivalent of being a member of the Privy Council—and I venture to suggest that as a member of the inner Magic Circle he was probably vouchsafed more secrets than are most Privy Councillors in the present Cabinet.

John used his talents as a magician to good effect in raising money for charity, notably when he beheaded the editor of the *Eastern Daily Press*, Mr. Peter Franzen, with a guillotine. He also once performed a similar service by beheading Mr. James Naughtie and Mr. John Humphrys of the BBC Radio 4 "Today" programme—although the House may be interested to know that on that occasion he used a chainsaw.

That prompted a number of colleagues to say that they were rather surprised that, having got those two in such a vulnerable position, John had not simply finished them off. To one or two hon. Members, that may sound somewhat extreme, but I cannot help reflecting that if John Humphrys knew that each time he asked a question he stood a chance of having his head severed from his body if he interrupted before the answer was complete, the quality of the "Today" programme would improve out of all recognition.

John MacGregor will be missed in this House, but I know that he will be an excellent addition to the other place, and will continue to contribute to political debate in this country.

What sort of constituency is South Norfolk? It is very rural, with an attractive and gently undulating landscape. In the north it borders the ancient city of Norwich, where many of my constituents work, and in the south are the beautiful market towns of Harleston and Diss, and the River Waveney, which borders the county of Suffolk. In the east is the town of Loddon, an architectural gem, and in the west is Wymondham, the largest settlement in the constituency, which has a magnificent abbey dating from the 12th century and the Market Cross where markets have taken place since the 13th century. To this day, the Market Cross is used for the Wymondham farmers' market, which has recently been rejuvenated following the foot and mouth crisis, and provides an excellent opportunity for local farmers to sell their meat and other produce at a much better price than they would get from the supermarkets.

In the far west of the constituency is Hingham, without question one of the most beautiful villages in Norfolk, where one Samuel Lincoln lived until 1637, when he emigrated to the new world, settled in Hingham, Massachusetts, and became the direct lineal ancestor of perhaps the greatest of all the American presidents, Abraham Lincoln.

Local services and the infrastructure in the constituency are improving, but there is some way to go. The dualling of the A11 creeps forward slowly. Norwich is now the only major city in the United Kingdom without a direct motorway link. The residents of Long Stratton cry out desperately for a bypass.

As I speak, the new Norfolk constabulary building is being completed in Wymondham, and will provide a welcome home for the constabulary, who have been dispersed among 10 or 11 different administrative buildings. They will now be in one, which will, I am pleased to say, save the taxpayer money. That will not, however, alter the problems of police recruitment and retention, which are caused by the fact that police officers spend so much of their time filling in forms and so relatively little out on the beat.

[Mr. Richard Bacon]

The new Norfolk and Norwich hospital, which has just been opened, is just outside my constituency, in that of the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke). Many of my constituents use that hospital, and many of them work there.

I endorse the comments of the chairman of the police authority, Mr. Jim Wilson, who wrote to the chief executive of the Highways Agency yesterday to express the serious concerns of the emergency services—not only the police but the ambulance service—about the lack of a suitable link road to the hospital. That issue has been running for many years; the problem was both predictable and predicted. I shall certainly add my weight to the cause of sorting it out soon, and finally getting the Highways Agency to take it seriously.

There are excellent schools in my constituency, one of which is Wymondham high school. I had the pleasure of visiting that school last week to present the prizes at the awards ceremony, and I hope that it will be third time lucky for its third bid for specialist performing arts status.

I could not possibly talk about my constituency without mentioning agriculture, which locally is very significant. Although it employs only 6.7 per cent. of the labour force, that is still three times the national average. Of course, agriculture has suffered hugely. We were lucky enough not to suffer from foot and mouth directly, but we have suffered many of the indirect effects. We did suffer directly from classical swine fever, and there has been a huge reduction in agricultural employment in the constituency.

In the east of England, 3,600 jobs were lost in the agricultural sector in the year to last May, and more than 1,100 of those jobs were in Norfolk. The average farmer now earns only £5,200 a year—and I must add, in case anyone thinks that cereal farmers are somehow exempt, that the situation is even worse for them; they are now facing one of the greatest crises for two generations. I have joined many of my right hon. and hon. Friends in pressing the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to apply for the agrimonetary compensation that is available from the European Union so long as she applies by 31 October.

The local economy is much more diverse than the focus on agriculture would suggest. There is a wide variety of other activities, from services to manufacturing and electronics. Anyone who has ever moved house has probably used a box made by Bux Corrugated, a well run factory in my constituency, which I had the pleasure of touring with the managing director the other day. The firm has family-friendly policies; indeed, it employs different generations of the same family. Anyone who has ever had a car with an airbag has probably unknowingly bought products from Hamlin Electronics, which provides the sensors that cause an airbag to explode if necessary.

Lotus, the car manufacturer, is one of the largest employers in the constituency. Its plant is quite near where I live, and I am looking forward to visiting it shortly and testing out its wares on the fast track—just to ensure that they are safe for my constituents, of course.

I have been advised that in a maiden speech it is unwise to try to make more than one substantive point about the Bill before the House. I shall try to stick to that, and I thought that it would be best for me to expand on the point made by the hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman), whom I am sorry to see is no longer in her place. She said that we must stop putting off prospective adopters. That is certainly true, particularly with ethnic minorities.

A paper in the journal *Adoption and Fostering* on initial agency responses to black prospective adopters makes it clear that people are often put off and lost at the initial inquiry stage because of negative initial contact with a variety of agencies. They may be lost not only to the agency to which they first applied but to adoption and fostering in general.

The study continues:

"Not only that, but offended inquirers will often tell their friends, and other potential adopters may never even reach the stage of an initial approach, if they feel they are going to be rebuffed".

The British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering noted:

"It is important that workers understand the 'ripple' effect of negative and positive contact first experienced by individuals. Experiences are quickly shared within communities and decisions are made based on this information as to whether particular agencies are worth approaching or not."

The study goes on:

"A January 2000 survey of 150 black people by *The Voice* revealed that 75 per cent. of respondents were put off by negative prior experiences, either their own or those of friends, in their dealings with social services . . . Comments included: 'I'm a barrister, I earn a good wage, yet I'd expect to be treated with disregard initially because that's how I've seen them treat other black people'; and 'Many of my friends had the impression that because I was black and single I would not be eligible so I didn't bother'. In response . . . BAAF's Marcia Spencer commented:

'Black families are willing to come forward but it's a question of how local authorities welcome them, how the process is explained and how individuals and families are supported through it.'"

There have been a number of references to the subject of same-race adoption, and whether it is better than other options. I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), and I tend to bow to her experience because she has seen many adoptions at close quarters. Same-race adoption may well be better, but that should not exclude other possibilities.

Indeed, the Department of Health's guidelines do not exclude the possibility of other options. On the contrary, they state:

"Any practice which classifies such couples"—

that is, people who are not of the same ethnic origin as the child—

"in a way that effectively rules out the adoption of a child whose origins differ from either or both prospective adopters is unacceptable."

Although the two may appear to run counter to each other, there is no reason in practice why one could not both do everything possible to encourage more families from ethnic minorities to become prospective adopters and, at the same time, heed the other important point in the guidelines, that not enough attention is paid to the factor of time. The guidelines state that

"there is a common perception among too many in the field that efforts to rehabilitate a child should be constrained by no timetable: that every effort should be made and all possibilities exhausted to try to secure the return of the child to his family—no matter how long it might take . . . Such a perception lacks proper balance. Time is not on the side of the child."

If the hon. Lady is right, it is sad, because she can be right only if people take into account factors of race and ethnic origin that should not matter. I often reflect on the words of Rabbi Hugo Gryn, which apply in the context of adoption and which could cause Conservative Members to think twice about the questions of same-sex adoption and unmarried adoption—although I do not offer a definite view on the issues. He said:

"Hold no one insignificant and nothing improbable for there is no one that has not his or her place and nothing that has not its moment."

Those are words that I shall carry with me in the House and try to remember as I do the job of Member of Parliament for South Norfolk. I thank the House for its indulgence in listening to me and I thank the people of South Norfolk for sending me here.

7.42 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on his maiden speech. It was amusing and interesting, and I wonder whether he will practise magic tricks like his predecessor. I was also interested to hear his reference to the Lotus car factory in his constituency, because I have the TVR factory in mine. Perhaps after his visit to Lotus we can compare the vehicles, although I admit that I did not actually climb into one on my visit to TVR and I certainly did not drive one away. I also congratulate him on choosing this important debate for his maiden speech. He highlighted some issues that I shall address shortly.

I support the Bill and its purpose in reforming adoption law, especially the aims of improving the performance of the adoption services and enabling more children to enjoy a stable family background. I had the pleasure of speaking in the debate in the spring on an earlier version of the Bill, so I am pleased that the revised Bill has been introduced so quickly after the general election.

In the intervening period, I have talked to my local adoption agencies to see how much has changed since I served on Lancashire county council's adoption panel. Some things have changed and some have remained the same, but the issues that were relevant to me as a member of an adoption panel all those years ago are still relevant to the aims of the Bill and the changes that it seeks to make.

I recollect that one major problem for the adoption panel on which I served was that there were too few babies and too many adopters who only wanted babies. That has not changed. One of the adoption agencies in my constituency told me that they had just one approved adopter who was willing to take children up to five. They had not a single approved adopter for children over five, but three quarters of the children on their list waiting for placement were over five. That is an enormous mismatch. To make matters worse, an appallingly high percentage of the children on the list suffer from serious health problems. Many have been born to mothers with drug and alcohol problems, or other problems, so even the babies on the list were not "attractive" to the prospective adopters who wanted babies.

The challenge to the Government in achieving the commendable targets that they have set for the legislation is to attract more adopters who are suitable to adopt the children who are now waiting on the list and who desperately need families. That will not be an easy task. Most people still think of adoption as involving babies and have a rosy image of the child they will have and the family life they will enjoy. However, as many other hon. Members have pointed out, the majority of children presenting for adoption are older and many have special needs, be those arising from disability, ill health or the trauma of their background.

I would be interested to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister about any initiatives to recruit more prospective adopters. Like many other people, I watched with interest the advertisements for the police in which stars of the small screen urged people to become police officers and described the importance of the job. It is also important to attract adopters for the children who are languishing in the care system, so let us have an exciting recruitment campaign for their sakes.

I also recollect well the financial pressures experienced by the adopters and by the agencies dealing with adoption. I therefore welcome the additional funding announced by the Government in the White Paper, but it is important to emphasise that adoption is an expensive process for councils. The payment of inter-agency fees and the costs of finding and supporting families can reach £16,000 a year per placement. The paradox is that the more successful a local authority is in recruiting families, and in dealing with other agencies to support those families, the more it costs. I hope that Ministers will consider carefully the extra money that will be made available. The £66 million sounds like a lot of money, but it may not meet all the needs that the Bill will generate.

It will also be important to consider the financial consequences for prospective adopters. If we want to recruit more prospective adopters, we need to take into account the fact that some people will need financial support, especially if they are to care for special needs children, children with disabilities or sibling groups. I hope that we will take those factors into account.

When I was on the adoption panel, I remember considering form F—and I have a copy here. It highlights all the areas that social workers have to consider when assessing prospective adopters. Other hon. Members have already mentioned the importance of appropriate assessments of prospective adopters. Most of the social work reports that I saw concentrated on why the individual or couple wanted to adopt, how they saw their role as adopters and how they thought that they could cope. The new form, however, emphasises competencies, some of which are highly commendable. The first requirement, under the heading "Caring for children", refers to

"An ability to provide a good standard of care to children which promotes healthy emotional, physical, sexual and intellectual development throughout childhood and into adulthood."

How do prospective adopters prove they have that wonderful competency? There is a long list of requirements, but the one that stood out referred to

"An ability to sustain positive relationships and maintain effective functioning through periods of stress."

I wish somebody would tell me how that can be assessed, especially as a social worker must not only give evidence but identify gaps and develop an action plan.

Social workers are often accused of making prospective adopters jump through hoops to achieve the desired end. I worry that some of the areas that social workers

[Mrs. Joan Humble]

are assessing and the extremely detailed range of competencies that are required may overwhelm many people. We must ensure a careful balance, with a thorough assessment procedure that identifies the skills necessary to be able to care for the sort of children who are now presented for adoption that does not put off people who could and should come forward as prospective adopters.

There have been changes over the years but mistakes are still made. Some months ago a constituent came to see me about a Child Support Agency problem. She was having great difficulty in getting any money out of the father of her children. She told me about the violent relationship that she had been in and also that her husband, who is now on his third marriage, had been approved as an adopter. She expressed concern that a man who had court orders against him for harassment, who was not allowed to see the children of his first or second marriages because of his violent behaviour, had been approved as an adopter, and that he and his new wife had adopted three children.

This had occurred in the early 1990s. I contacted the local authority—which was not in Lancashire, I hasten to add—about the issues that they had taken into account and whether they had looked into this man's background. The adoption agency had not contacted his second wife, the children, the doctor, the police or anyone who had had any dealings with him. I sent the agency copies of court records detailing the man's awful behaviour. There were even taped 999 calls from this poor woman, made as her ex-husband was beating her up. None of that was known by the adoption agency. So although in my long experience on an adoption panel I saw immensely detailed assessment forms asking all sorts of questions, in this case the right questions were not asked.

Perhaps the key is not to have very long forms but to ask the right questions to ensure that we have the information that we need to reassure ourselves about the ability of prospective adopters to do the job. People who are not suitable to look after children must not slip through the net. We should remember the case highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper). Poor John Smith died, aged only four, at the hands of his prospective adopters.

One area in which I am pleased to see some improvement since my days on an adoption panel is the time scale for dealing with adoption matters. I spoke in an earlier debate of my concern for five, six or seven-year-olds who came to the panel for adoption and were much more difficult to place. For many families, a breakdown had occurred when the children were babies, when they would have been snapped up by adoptive parents all over the country. However, the social workers, in following the requirements of the Children Act 1989, attempted to reintegrate the children with their families. Those attempts failed, the children went back into care, the social workers tried again and failed. Years went by as the children's plans were disrupted by reintegration attempts. The children were disturbed by the time they appeared on our books for adoption, which made it much more difficult to find prospective adopters. I am therefore pleased that the Government have new guidelines on improving the time scale for considering cases.

Social workers in Blackpool who deal with the adoption services operate as part of the Manchester consortium, which they find helpful in identifying prospective adopters. It is also one of the pilot areas implementing the new national standards. Although those social workers welcome the new timetable and the speeding up of procedures, they are concerned that placing a child within six months might be fine for a 10-month-old but more difficult when it comes to placing a 10-year-old. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State consider whether that time scale is realistic in all cases? Perhaps we cannot be hard and fast in all cases, although I urge that there are no built-in delays, as I have seen the result.

There are sometimes delays in adoption medicals. Many of the children who present for adoption in Blackpool come from families who have moved into the town and whose records are held elsewhere. Simply getting medical and other records from local and health authorities elsewhere in the country can be time consuming. However, those are not insuperable problems. They should not distract us from the Government's excellent initiatives in setting national standards, which are an important step towards introducing national practice standards for social workers. The Government have commendably legislated to introduce quality standards in all other sectors—day care, children's homes and old people's homes—but the commissioning of services needs to be considered in more detail to ensure nationally defined standards so that wherever children and prospective adopters live, acceptable standards will be implemented.

I wish to emphasise the point that I made in an earlier intervention. Although improving adoption services is vital, adoption is only one part of the wider picture and will not be suitable for all children. I welcome the proposals in the legislation for the special guardianship orders, but for some children long-term foster care or residential care is the appropriate placement. That is certainly true for many older children; many teenagers have experienced a traumatic family life, when either their own or a foster family could not cope with them. Such children respond to the communal setting of a residential care home where they are supported by qualified staff.

Finally, I pay tribute to those social care staff who support children across the range. They work extremely hard, offering support to children and families in need, to foster carers, to prospective adopters and to children who are in a residential setting. Usually, we hear about their hard work only when something goes wrong, but in 99.9 per cent. of cases nothing goes wrong and they do an amazingly good job with clients who are often difficult. Those staff deserve our support. Many of the Bill's provisions will offer the social care profession much needed support, so I commend the measure to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I point out to the House that time is running away and there have been several long contributions. A number of hon. Members want to catch my eye, so in order that, if possible, everyone can make a contribution, shorter speeches would be welcome.

8.1 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I shall certainly endeavour to meet your request, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was in any case my intention to be brief, not least because I am only too conscious of the excellent contributions that have already been made—often based on a degree of experience—so I do not want to repeat them.

The debate comes on the heel of Second Reading debates held towards the end of the last Parliament. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on the introduction of her private Member's Bill. There is a sense of irony among the adoption community that a Bill intended to limit the delays in the adoption process has itself been subject to what appear to be repeated delays. If we can make progress and see this Bill swiftly through to a happy conclusion, it will be much appreciated.

May I also say a word of appreciation to my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on his maiden speech? I enjoyed it, not least because I know his area reasonably well, although I had not realised about Abraham Lincoln's line of descent. My hon. Friend was modest enough not to note that Abraham Lincoln always described himself as a conservative.

I do not want it to appear that my support for the Bill has diminished. As colleagues have said, the measure is a good one and deserves support, but by its nature the subject will always bring out issues that we have to address, some of which have already been highlighted. I want to touch on some of them in the hope that they can be followed up during the Bill's passage.

The first point is that the Bill—rightly—is designed to put the interests and welfare of the child in paramount position, as does the Children Act 1989. However, that means that the legislation can override the necessity to seek parental consent. I want to look carefully at how we set about that in the measure. What message does the legislation send?

Clause 50 makes the circumstances clear. One of the criteria is that

"the welfare of the child requires the consent"—

of the parent—"to be dispensed with". That is simply to reiterate the primacy of the welfare of the child.

The explanatory notes refer, in the section on the welfare checklist in clause 1(4), to the importance of the child's relationship with the parents and their ability and willingness

"to provide the child with a secure home and meet his needs".

That is indeed important. For these purposes, the word "parent" is subsumed within the word "relatives".

However, the nature of the decision to proceed with an order in circumstances where parental consent is withheld is not quite the same thing as assessing a relationship with other relatives—whether they are able instrumentally to offer a secure environment or to meet a child's needs.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) compared the tests on placement orders to those on care orders. That is a relevant factor, but the decision on an adoption order is a different matter from the tests that have been applied to care orders. Although it is important that there should be a threshold and, in legal terms, "significant harm" might be a good starting point for such a threshold, it would be better to provide that a threshold beyond significant harm needs to be found—perhaps one that looks to the long-term harm that might result to a child who continued a relationship with birth parents. It would thus be a positive decision by the court and the authorities and agencies concerned when a parent was deprived of their consent in that way.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Even during the short time that I have been a Member of Parliament, cases have come to my attention in which the process has taken so long that adoption has become inevitable. The process involves children being put into care with parents allowed only restricted access—doubtless for good reasons—to the extent that, in one case, almost three years on, the mother has, by the court's ruling, lost contact with the child because only limited access was allowed. I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's suggestion that the courts should be required to establish a higher standard for depriving a parent of their child. I also welcome the proposal in the Bill that there should be much—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is beginning to make a speech.

Mr. Lansley: From the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) was developing his point, it would have been a good speech. I agree with him. The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) rightly pointed out the difficulties associated with delay. That reminds me that I came first to these issues, in the House, when considering the second report of the Select Committee on Health on children looked after by local authorities. Earlier we were discussing the best option for children. That Committee made it clear that if children are taken into the care of a local authority, the best option is for them to re-establish their relationship with their birth family. Nothing we say in the debate should detract from the driving objective of the Children Act 1989 and all of our remarks should be seen in that context.

I want to reintroduce that balance, while recognising that in the Select Committee the problems that we encountered were mainly to do with delay. It was obvious that in some cases it would never be possible to reunite or re-establish the birth family. However, there were often delays and, as the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood rightly said, the length of time that can count as reasonable delay varies according to the age and circumstances of the child. Unhappily, there were sometimes great delays in the cases of very young children that wholly vitiated what might otherwise have been successful early adoptions.

My second point relates to the wishes of the child. The explanatory notes for clause 126 make it clear that the rules of procedure implemented by the Lord Chancellor's Department would be intended to ensure that the child should be a party to any order proceedings. I hope that, even at this stage, it might be possible for the Government to consider whether the intention that they have expressed can be built into the legislation in some way.

My third point, which other hon. Members have mentioned, involves giving due consideration to religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. I disagree with what the hon. Member for

[Mr. Lansley]

Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, said about religious persuasion. How religious persuasion might form part of cultural and other background issues has to be borne in mind, and no hon. Member would dispute the necessity of giving such matters due consideration, but in circumstances that I have encountered in my constituency, such decisions can translate into a hangover involving the idea that we are looking for adoptive parents and the relationship with adopted children to mimic to the outside world the sense that those children are indeed the natural children of those parents. In many circumstances, that may not be the intention of the adoptive parents or the adopted child.

In this day and age, when families live in so many different circumstances of mixed-race backgrounds, ethnicity and so on, we should not be hung up on the desirability of appearing to mimic natural families when considering adoptive circumstances. It is important therefore to consider the nature of the circumstances that can be provided by those parents who put themselves forward to adopt. It is not that we should be colour blind in any sense, but if adoptive parents can satisfactorily show the agencies that they are aware of the differences in the cultural background of the potential adopted children and how they can sustain them, there is no reason why we should not support that. A degree of political correctness is involved in trying to stop that happening or in getting that balance wrong. We should certainly seek to signal—in debating the Bill, if not in its text—the desirability of shifting that balance.

The final issue that I want to raise is that of non-married couples. In thinking about the legislation and in raising the issue with the Secretary of State after the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley), I was aware that if we say we must try not to be politically correct because we must consider the welfare of the child—and, in many instances today, the welfare of children may well involve the potential adoptive parents showing that they can look after the children and can give them a loving background regardless of the fact that those children may not come from the same ethnic or cultural background—it should logically follow that that also involves doing so in relation to the status of the adoptive parents themselves.

I may be challenging those on both Front Benches about an issue that they perhaps want to duck for the time being, but the freedom of the Back Benches allows one not to have to duck such issues, and the logic of our approach—putting the welfare of children first—suggests that there are circumstances in which we should accept adoption by unmarried couples because they can provide the loving home and the stable surroundings in which children can be adopted successfully.

I am not so blinkered as not to understand that there are married couples whose marriages will not be sustained, who cannot necessarily provide the long-term stable circumstances as well as unmarried couples, who may well show in all reasonableness that they can provide those circumstances. Where that is the case, we should allow such adoption.

Indeed, we should also accept that there may be couples whose inability to remarry, for religious reasons or otherwise, may be a perfectly reasonable explanation of why they could not marry to make themselves a couple available to adopt. Although there may be a presumption that couples should seek to marry to provide the best circumstances in which to bring up children—I hope that it is common ground around the House that marriage provides the best circumstances in which to bring up children successfully—those are not the only circumstances for successful adoption, nor necessarily the best for any individual couple. Not all couples can meet that test. If they cannot, we should not necessarily debar them from being a couple who are available to adopt.

If we are living in the real world—the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) alluded to this—the truth is that many couples are adopting when they are not married. Even same-sex couples are adopting, and they are clearly not married. The issue of civil partnerships, which was discussed a few days ago, is neither here nor there; the issue is whether the agencies can consider the underlying intentions, circumstances, competencies and the loving environment that a couple can provide. If they can provide all that, we ought to make adoption available to them.

8.15 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on his maiden speech. Interestingly, he chose to speak in the debate on adoption and managed to refer much to rural affairs, whereas I made my maiden speech on rural affairs and managed to speak about adoption, so perhaps we have something in common.

Adoption raises strong feelings and emotions. After all, it is about our very identity—our families are important to us all. I talked about my father in my maiden speech, and several other hon. Members spoke about their fathers in theirs. We share physical similarities with our families. I have met adopted adults who say that they felt like strangers in their adoptive family because they did not look like the people whom they lived with. They felt that physically and, perhaps, in respect of their aptitudes. We should not rush into thinking that adoption can easily resolve the problems of many children.

I have probably betrayed in my previous interventions that I have had long experience working in social services, and I believe strongly that, where children cannot live with their own family, adoption provides stable families where children can feel a sense of permanence and grow up.

In any legislation on adoption, we need to recognise all three aspects of the adoption triangle. As has been made clear time and again in the debate, adoption is, above all, about children and their needs, but we must not neglect the needs of birth parents and their families, or the needs of adoptive parents and their families. Ensuring that all the interests are addressed is not easy, but we must seek to do so.

I welcome the opportunities that have been taken in the Bill to bring adoption legislation into line with other measures and practices and to deal with other problems in legislation and child care practice. For example, as other hon. Members have said, the welfare of the child should be paramount and the welfare considerations have to be set out. The Children Act 1989 was enacted 10 years ago this month, so it is time for legislation that takes account of those points.

I also welcome the fact that, under the Bill, local authorities should have a clear plan about the adoption services that they will provide, so long as that forms part

of the existing children's planning requirements and is not additional to them. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), I welcome the replacement of freeing orders with placement orders, because they have been a huge problem in recent years with delays and the consequences for birth parents. However, such legislation is complex, and I hope that the Committee will consider in detail how placement orders will work in practice.

The clauses on parental responsibility will improve matters for unmarried fathers, allowing them to gain parental responsibility more easily, but, crucially, they will provide an alternative way for step-parents to gain parental responsibility, while leaving the legal relationship to both parents intact.

Adoption support services have been well discussed. I welcome the assessment for those services and, in particular, the additional money that is being spent, but as has been said, the concern is that the amount spent might vary in different areas.

It is tremendously important to recognise that adoption involves a lifelong commitment. Children who are placed at the age of three, seemingly without any problems, will inevitably experience more difficulties in adolescence because of their earlier experiences than children who have always lived with their natural families. To have services that adoptive parents can approach without stigma, without feeling that they have failed or thinking that the child is at risk of being taken back into care is crucial. Not only must those services be properly funded, we must consider how they are organised. There may well be a strong role for the voluntary sector.

Meeting the needs of children today and into the future is important. We have heard that legislation on adoption is introduced only once in a generation, and we are here to consider such legislation. Most children who require adoption today are from the care system. They have complex needs and they are often older children. We need to ensure that there are sufficient adopters available for them.

We have heard much about the delay in placing children and I want to draw attention to a significant aspect of that problem. When the Children Act 1989 came into force in 1991, considerable effort was put into moving children through the system. Good outcomes were achieved and children were moved through the system quite quickly. Over the years, the process has become much more complex and I was greatly concerned by the fact that the courts would—often at the request of parents' solicitors or guardians ad litem—ask for detailed assessments from psychologists or psychiatrists while disregarding the information that social workers could already bring to the process.

It was galling when the report of a psychologist, which might be produced with three months' delay and at excessive cost, said exactly the same as the report of the social worker who had known and worked with the family for several years. That problem must be tackled. In the areas where I worked before the general election, some of the judiciary attempted to deal with it. We must ensure that that happens much more widely.

I welcome the proposal for a national adoption register, but it is still not clear how it will relate to the existing consortiums in which good adoption agencies have put in place arrangements to ensure that there can be an exchange of adopters between areas. That would help avoid the cases mentioned earlier in which people could not adopt a child from the same area because of contact issues or because an exchange of photographs had taken place. I am not clear how the arrangements that already exist relate to the national adoption register, and we must also consider inter-agency fees.

I especially welcome the special guardianship orders, which will meet the need of some children for stability and security. Research has shown that the sense of permanency that a child has in a relationship—and not the fact that a child is adopted—determines the outcome. A child who feels permanently part of a foster family can and will do as well as a child who is adopted. Orders that will give people who care for children day to day the responsibility for decisions are important.

Unmarried couples will be able to have an order made for special guardianship, and that creates an anomaly for unmarried adopters. We need to recognise that society today is different. Some people have a philosophical objection to getting married, and I know that some people who had lived together for several years got married solely to become adopters. In a process that relies much on honesty and trust, the state should not be asking people to go through a ceremony in which they do not believe simply so that they can become adopters. The issue is those people's commitment to each other and to the child, not whether they are married.

We have heard much about poor practice. It is sad that Members of Parliament often get to hear about cases only when things have gone wrong. I have seen much good practice over the past few years and, in my experience, common sense is as common among social workers as it is among other professionals, probably including MPs. Adoption work involves much common sense and, in the area where I chaired an adoption panel, it was not unusual to have adopters who smoked or who were overweight. The medical practitioner on the panel would always issue the regular cautions and we would not place a child with asthma or a chest infection with a smoker. Smoking, however, was not a bar to the process.

Similarly, age was not considered to be a bar to adoption. Our main concern was whether prospective adopters were likely to live until the child reached the age of 18 and thus see the child grow up. That gave us the leeway to consider people in their early 50s as adopters. As we know from the experience of hon. Members, it is not unusual for men to become fathers in their 50s.

On religion, we have heard about how we should avoid political correctness. However, in my experience, one is often so desperate to find an adopter for a child of a complex background—one parent might be British and the other from an ethnic minority—that one does not take a politically correct approach. One looks for the best possible match and for people who can meet the child's religious, linguistic and cultural needs even if they are not necessarily of the same religion. I cannot refer to individual cases, but such decisions are taken in practice. We should not get carried away with the view that social workers and adoption panels are all terribly politically correct and seek pure solutions; that is not the case.

Despite my view that social workers and adoption agencies generally use their common sense, it is important that the adoption process is fully transparent. The public need to understand what goes on and how a decision can

[Ms Meg Munn]

be reviewed if they are unhappy about it. People who put themselves forward to adopt feel incredibly vulnerable because they must disclose much personal information. If we want more people to come forward, we must ensure that they understand the processes involved and why they are asked about their experiences of growing up. They should be empowered through the process so that they understand that we are trying to ensure that they are matched appropriately with a child and that the needs of all are met.

I want to refer briefly to the Government's commitment to increase the number of children adopted. I sought to achieve that laudable aim in my work where appropriate. However, I am concerned about the statistics. Although they give a general idea of how well a local authority is performing, it is difficult to be exact. The figure is compiled by comparing the number of children who were adopted in a specific local authority in one year with the number who remained in care on 31 March of that year, excluding those who had been adopted.

The authority that I worked in before I was elected had on average 120 children in care. However, throughout a year the total number of children who came into and out of care was nearer 180. Some of them were never going to be candidates for adoption. They might have come into care for short periods only and were often successfully rehabilitated home. To take the figure of success as the number of children who were adopted as a proportion based on one day of the year can give a misleading picture, especially if the number of children is as small as 120. In that authority, a large number—six, I think—were adopted in April. Had they been adopted in March, the proportion would have changed significantly. Although that may be an indicator, it can be misleading to get hung up on the target or the actual number.

I also welcome the suggestion that the Bill should include private fostering.

Overall, I welcome the Bill. It contains many measures that will improve the lives of children and their families, including those who need adoption, those who are already adopted and those for whom security and permanence are important but adoption is inappropriate. People who speak out and who lobby on the subject are seeking what is in the best interests of some of our most needy children. I trust that as this positive Bill proceeds, debate and thorough consideration will ensure that it is improved even further.

8.31 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I begin by placing one or two facts on the record. More than 58,000 children are in care and the number is rising. Each year, only about 2,900 are adopted. Yet children who grow up in care are four times more likely to be unemployed, 60 times more likely to be homeless, and make up one in four of the adult prison population. It is obvious to everyone across the political spectrum that something needs to be done. About 92 per cent. of adoptions are successful, although that statistic decreases for children who are adopted when they are a little older.

We often hear of postcode prescribing and the need for the famous level playing field. That is a consideration in this matter as much as anything else. The quality of adoption services depends on where people live. Every commentator would agree that there is a dire and urgent need for conformity across the board, regardless of where a person resides. There is also a long-overdue need to bring services up to speed and to improve standards throughout.

I am not making an oblique criticism of local government, social workers or anyone involved in the sector, but some local authorities operate a Cinderella service. There are usually two main reasons for that. First, some people who hold sway in social services departments have almost a culture of objecting to adoption. Secondly, the resource implications make it difficult, if not impossible, for local authorities because of the huge financial pressures and the need to prioritise. Time and time again, the service is the loser.

When I served on the Standing Committee that considered the Family Law Bill in 1996, there were many and varied debates on the resource implications. Everyone who read the Bill readily appreciated that those implications were substantial. The Government did not heed our concerns and the upshot is that several aspects of the Family Law Act 1996 have yet to be implemented. That is a great shame; the legislation is fairly good, but the resources did not follow the words. Several hon. Members have made the telling and important point that this Bill has substantial resource implications. The Secretary of State said that £66 million would be provided. Is that new money? If so, how much will go, for example, to Wales? What will be the average amount that local authorities will receive?

The message is clear—we cannot duck the issue by not providing proper resources. Clause 3 says:

"Each local authority must continue to maintain within their area a service designed to meet the needs"

of people affected by the process. Unfortunately, for various reasons, many local authorities are not providing a sufficiently good service. If they were, there would be no need for the Bill. Many do not have adequate resources and, for the reasons that I outlined a moment ago, they do not prioritise as they should. In Wales, unitary authorities are probably too small to deliver specialist services, and they have not co-operated as it was hoped that they would.

I welcome the broad drift of the Bill. The paramountcy given to children's welfare in clause 1 is very important because it brings the Bill into line with the Children Act 1989. The Bill upholds important principles, and the reference to ethnicity and language has resonance in Wales. Welsh is the dominant language in much of the country, and I hope that the Bill will assist in placing Welsh-speaking children with Welsh-speaking adoptive parents. The same consideration should be given to the important factors of ethnicity and religion. If it is possible to achieve a match, that is all well and good, and if it is impossible, that is fine too, as long as an effort has been made.

I declare an interest as a so-called parliamentary ambassador to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. I believed that one day, when I left politics, I would like to be the Welsh ambassador to the Bahamas, but at least I have already reached ambassador status, albeit in a rather dank climate. The reform is overdue, and the NSPCC gives a generally warm welcome to the Bill. It says that the speeding-up of the process should not be at the risk of failing fully to assess and meet

the needs of children. It also notes that permanency for children can be achieved in several ways, and long-term foster care may be an appropriate alternative to adoption. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn), speaking from experience, made that point.

The Adoption Forum is concerned about the lack of an independent appeals or review procedure for prospective adoptive parents who are turned down. The provisions in clause 12 do not provide that independence. It also states that the current complaints procedure is insufficient, pointing out that it is difficult to complain directly to the body about which one is making a complaint.

British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering also welcome the Bill. It points out that the inter-agency fee, which other hon. Members have mentioned, is a significant problem in Wales. BAAF has set up a consortium of nine local authorities, which help each other on a no-fee basis. As hon. Members have pointed out, the inter-agency fee can be substantial—anywhere between £12,000 and £16,000.

I welcome the national adoption register. I have to say that since the implementation of the Children Act 1989, there have been immense improvements in the court system. Courts have speeded up legal procedures involving children and proceedings are properly timetabled. I speak as a barrister who practises in child law. The checklist approach in the Bill will be useful because time is of the essence when young children are involved. We have a good body of magistrates, district judges and county court judges who are expert in child law, and we must educate those people and give them in-depth training when the Bill is implemented.

The United Nations convention on the rights of the child emphasises the right of a child to be consulted. The Bill's intention is to increase adoption, and I hope that it will also increase consultation with children, particularly older children. It is crucial that older children have their say in what happens to them. That was emphasised in the response of the organisation Children in Wales to the draft Bill. We must also emphasise that targets are but targets. They must be set with great care and resource implications must be taken into account.

I had a list of issues that were of concern to the all-party adoption group, but the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) dealt eloquently with all of them in his speech. However, I should like the Minister who winds up to repeat the point about the £66 million.

I conclude by adding my voice to those of many hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber who have said that the Bill is welcome. It needs to be improved in Committee and I am sure that it will be. The debate has been of a fairly high standard, and I am sure that during the Bill's passage we shall be able to put politics aside and work as best we can together, keeping the welfare and needs of children nearest to our hearts. In that way, we shall be able to improve the Bill and make it the landmark legislation that it should be.

8.41 pm

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): The main focus of the Bill is the reform of the adoption process, but it would also amend the Children Act 1989 in respect of child contact. The focus of my speech will be the latter issue, to which speakers in previous debates on the Bill paid little attention.

Clauses 88 to 91 provide for restrictions on arranging and advertising children for adoption other than through adoption agencies, and prohibit certain payments. A self-confessed techie, I have watched with alarm the growth of e-adoption—a net nightmare with pictures of babies for sale over the net, and of course a black baby is cheaper than a white one. We must go further to stamp out such practices, using means similar to the internet taskforce report on child protection to investigate further, but for now those clauses are most welcome.

The Bill provides for amendments to the Children Act 1989. Clause 106 in part II amends the Act to increase the parental responsibility of unmarried fathers. I welcome the clause—of course it is right that fathers, wed or otherwise, take responsibility for and have contact with their children. That must, in most cases, be in the best interests of the child.

In all our consideration of the Bill and as we have agreed tonight, the protection of the child must be paramount. That is what the Bill is all about, but I believe that we are in danger of passing into legislation a measure that might inadvertently put children at greater risk. The 1989 Act was designed to make the interests of the child paramount, but many believe that it is failing, and failing dangerously. Most professionals agree that the Act is in need of amendment.

As we seek to increase child contact with unmarried parents, we must examine how child contact arrangements are currently working. In amending the 1989 Act, we must ensure that we establish full safeguards for the protection of the child. I fear that the Bill does not do that and I would like it to be amended accordingly.

To see why amendment is needed, let us examine the current position in respect of child contact orders made for couples who were married. The Amica—Aid for Mothers Involved in Contact Action—study in 1999 of 130 parents subjected to domestic violence found that 76 per cent. of their children were said to have been abused as a result of contact orders issued by the courts.

A recent survey carried out by the Women's Aid Federation found that courts are failing to protect children, who are being put in danger as a result of contact orders being granted to abusive parents. The survey also found that despite new guidance being issued to the courts, the situation has not improved. We hope that the Government now accept that there is an urgent need to amend the Children Act to ensure the protection of children involved in private family law proceedings.

Why is it essential that we take account of domestic violence? It does not occur in only a small minority of cases—the national snapshot of domestic violence showed that every minute, police in the UK receive a call for help because of domestic violence. We know that such violence features even more prominently in contested contact cases. According to Home Office statistics, every year an average of two women a week are killed by their partners or ex-partners in England and Wales. In recent years, several children have died as a result of contact arrangements.

I shall refer to a few of the cases that have been reported in the media or are known to refuge projects. Daniella Hurst, who was aged two, was killed by her father during a contact visit in Lincolnshire on 10 October 2000. Saba and Zeeshan Zaidi, who were aged seven and six, were killed by their father when he came to Bracknell

[Margaret Moran]

to collect them for a contact visit on 18 March 2000. Their mother was also stabbed to death. Christopher and Oliver Fairless, who were aged six and nine, were hanged by their father on 17 April 2000 in Scotter, north Lincolnshire. He had been granted unsupervised contact even though he was facing charges of rape and of assaulting his wife. Daniel and Jordan Philpott, aged seven and three, were killed by their father during a contact visit in August 1999 near Pontypridd. Unsupervised contact had been granted to Julian Philpott even though he was due to appear in Cardiff Crown court on charges of threatening to kill his ex-partner and causing her actual bodily harm.

Daniel Brinnan, aged two, was found dead with his father after a contact visit on 13 March 1999 in Lincolnshire. Imtiaz Begum was stabbed to death in Birmingham on 20 January 1996 when she was collecting her son after a contact visit. He was found strangled in her husband's car, and her three daughters, who had been living with her husband, were found dead in their beds with their throats cut. Nina and Jack Sandhu, aged four and three, were killed by their father during a contact visit in February 1994 in Derbyshire. Their mother, Sarah Heatley, had been persuaded by court officials to agree to contact informally, although she was very worried about her husband's mental health. We need action now if we are to prevent further such tragedies.

In taking up the issue, the all-party group on domestic violence, which I chair, has been guided by the voices of survivors. In the first ever parliamentary online consultation between survivors and MPs, "Womenspeak", we received powerful proof of the urgent need for change. I understand that that e-consultation has made this Parliament a worldwide leader in e-democracy and is being referred to in conferences around the globe. That is well and good, but the point of the consultation is the need to listen to the real concerns of survivors who made a desperate plea for help in protecting their children.

In our online consultation, more than 90 per cent. of contributions that referred to child contact said that either the child or mother suffered from domestic violence. I ask hon. Members to listen to their experiences. One contributor, Sharon, said:

"After he was released from prison for stabbing me, he saw my daughter at the probation office, under supervision. After a while they persuaded me to let him have her on his own. Things went okay for a long while, but then when she was eleven she became very depressed and unhappy and tried to get out of seeing him. It turned out that he had started hitting her on the contact visits."

Most women felt that the courts did not take into account the domestic violence or the experiences of the child and mother. The presumption in practice that child contact is always in the best interests of the child needs to be reviewed where there is domestic violence. I ask hon. Members to listen again:

"My daughter witnessed me being held down by my partner, when I was seven months pregnant. He knelt on me and held me by the throat. My daughter was eleven at the time. She came from behind holding a skateboard high above her head and was trying to hit him with it. But she was so afraid that she might hit me that she threw it at him and ran upstairs and locked herself in my bedroom where she called the police. This has mentally scarred her and she will never forget that night."

That message was from Vanessa.

The recent review by the Advisory Board on Family Law Children Act sub-committee on the death of Georgina McCarthy tells us that the system is not working. Child contact orders were made repeatedly by the courts, which ignored warnings from social workers and others that her husband posed a serious risk to her and her children. Sadly, they were right.

It has been argued that court practice has improved since the Court of Appeal judgment last year and that changes to the Children Act 1989 are consequently unnecessary. However, Women's Aid's most recent report makes it clear that child contact orders continue to be granted even when there is evidence of violence or abuse to the child.

The Bill could make it easier for abusive, unmarried fathers to obtain contact with their children. Women's Aid and the all-party group have repeatedly requested that the two issues should be tackled simultaneously to ensure proper protection for the child. The Children Act 1989 has been distorted by case law to the extent that it can no longer protect children.

Some judges agree. In Re H and Others, the House of Lords ruled that the more serious the allegation, the higher the standard of proof that the court should require. Two of the five Law Lords involved in the case dissented. Lord Browne-Wilkinson stated:

"My lords, I am anxious that the decision of the House in this case may establish the law as an unworkable form, to the detriment of many children at risk. Child abuse, particularly sex abuse, is notoriously difficult to prove in a court of law. The relevant facts are extremely sensitive and emotive. They are often known only to the child and to the alleged abuser. If legal proof of actual abuse is a prerequisite to a finding that a child is at risk of abuse, the court will be powerless to intervene to protect children in relation to whom they have the gravest suspicions of actual abuse but the necessary evidence legally to prove such abuse is lacking."

Lord Browne-Wilkinson clearly considers that the ruling has made the Children Act 1989 unworkable.

Women's Aid can cite cases of enforced contact when there was good reason to believe that a child had been abused. The organisation is also aware of several cases in which direct contact has been ordered despite strong suggestions of child sexual abuse:

"Eleanor's daughter was very disturbed after a contact visit and told her mother that she had been sexually abused by her father. Medical tests were done and Social Services decided there was enough evidence to prosecute the father, but just before the trial the Crown Prosecution Service dropped the charges, stating that the child, aged five, was too young to give evidence. The father applied for contact again and this was granted even though the judge was aware that the child had been sexually abused and did not want to see her father, aware that this man had served a six month sentence for assaulting his wife and aware that he had broken numerous injunctions. A penal notice was served on Eleanor to force her to comply."

Providing the sort of protection that we are discussing for our children would not be new. New Zealand has legislation on contact, residence and domestic violence. It establishes a rebuttal presumption that residence and unsupervised contact will not be granted to someone who has been violent in the family unless the court is satisfied that the child will be safe. It also enforces a mandatory risk assessment checklist, which forms the basis of all welfare reports.

The Bill could make such a provision, alongside the amendment to grant parental responsibility to unmarried fathers who register the birth of the child. Without it, there is a fear that the measure will make it harder for refuge projects to protect children of unmarried, abusive parents.

Why should English children have less protection from violent parents in child contact situations than their counterparts in Northern Ireland? There, courts are required to consider the risk of harm. The Family Homes and Domestic Violence Order 1988 is our equivalent of the Family Law (Northern Ireland) Act 2001, which provides that when a violent person who has abused the child's primary carer applies for contact with the child, the court has to consider the risk of harm to the child, including harm arising from seeing further abuse of the primary carer, in deciding what, if any, order to make. That provision was introduced in Northern Ireland as a result of consultation to fill a perceived loophole in protecting children. It is patently unfair and dangerous not to afford similar protection to our children in England.

Several children's charities, including the NSPCC, Barnados and National Children's Homes, support our call for an amendment to the Children Act 1989. We shall have few, if any, opportunities in the Session to amend it to ensure that no more children suffer the trauma, violence or abuse associated with domestic violence. How many more names of murdered children do we need before we provide the protection that other children have?

8.54 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): It is humbling to speak in such a debate when so many hon. Members have real expertise. I am thinking particularly of the hon. Members for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn), for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) and others who have a lot of professional experience. I have none whatever.

I was drawn into the subject, like many of us I suspect, mainly through personal experience of casework. One case was a blatant example of age discrimination by a local authority, which was eventually and painfully resolved by the intervention of the then Minister, the Financial Secretary. Another example involved frustrated inter-racial adoption, which eventually became a running column in *The Mail on Sunday*. The fact that the process seemed unable to handle such bitter, difficult cases led me into the subject.

The hon. Members for Erewash (Liz Blackman) and for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), in an excellent maiden speech, referred to the status and importance of adopters—if there are no adopters, there can be no adoption. It is naturally important that we build in all kinds of safeguards to protect children and essential that the Bill builds in the paramountcy of the child, but without the adopters, the measure will not work. Does it make sense to include a provision that recognises encouraging adoption and valuing adopters as fundamental strategic objectives?

I am struck by the fact that the headline for the only press publicity given to the debate is, "Couples who flout adoption laws face a year in prison". The message is that there is a community of potential adopters out there, all of whom are slightly dodgy and some of whom are looking for ways to break the law. That sends the wrong message to a community that we should do everything to value and encourage. We could achieve that through legislative drafting.

I welcome the appeals process, although as the hon. Members for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and others pointed out, the details are hazy. I felt sufficiently strongly about the inadequacy of the appeals system to initiate an Adjournment debate on 25 October 2000 and I like to think that some responses reflect that discussion.

It is important to consider why an appeals process is necessary. Most adoptions—about 94 per cent.—go through without any problem. About 6 per cent. are disputed or fail. In many ways, that figure represents a considerable understatement, because a lot of adopters do not want to take issue with their local authority for fear of prejudicing their future position. I suspect that the area of unhappiness is considerably larger.

Why does the existing process not work? Several points have been made, but there are others. One is that it is difficult for someone with a failed placement or who has been rejected from an adoption list to take issue with the local social services authority, because insurance companies put strong pressure on local authorities never to admit liability. It has become standard practice for local authorities never to admit a mistake, as they would prejudice their insurance cover, so it is impossible to achieve a sensible dialogue between frustrated adopters and a social services department that has rejected them.

Such people could proceed to the ombudsman, but the ombudsman will deal only with maladministration, not unfair judgments. They could go to judicial review, but that is hard to secure, expensive and time consuming. That is why an appeals process is necessary, and I must make a few points about it.

Charges, were they to be introduced, could discourage a lot of legitimate appeals. They could also prejudice and distort the outcome. We need to be careful about the way in which charges are imposed, particularly as they might be onerous due to the cost of setting up a tribunal system.

Furthermore, the appeals must be wide ranging and not just cover a dispute between a potential adopter and a local council. Many others—third parties, for example—might want to enter an appeals process. A recent abuse case highlighted the fact that a doctor was unable to bring to bear evidence based on personal observations of a prospective adoption case. Whistleblowers should have access to the appeals system, which needs to be widely couched.

I was a little worried by the tone of the Government's comments on intercountry adoption. The only hon. Member who addressed this issue coherently was the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre, who tried to explain why potential intercountry adopters encounter such a wall of resistance. This country is extremely unfriendly towards intercountry adoption. In France, 3,600 such adoptions are arranged each year, whereas there are only 300 in this country. People trying to go through the intercountry adoption process are treated with great suspicion by their local authority, and by Government Departments, if they get that far.

There are often good reasons why people want to engage in intercountry adoption. Many people travel widely, work overseas or are familiar with an overseas environment, and it is perfectly natural to want to adopt a child from that country. There are, increasingly, cases of mixed marriages. Couples of different nationality, where one spouse comes from an overseas country, may find it culturally easier to adopt from that environment. It is entirely proper that they should be allowed to adopt, provided that the process is properly supervised, that those countries have a proper

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

system of vetting, and that we observe international conventions, such as the Hague convention or the United Nations conventions. Intercountry adoption should be encouraged. Such couples are providing a child with a home, and the fact that it is not a British child is not the last word on the subject.

The Government must use a more positive tone on intercountry adoptions than they have in the past. It has acquired a negative connotation, which is completely inappropriate. By including in the legislation extraterritorial provisions that require other countries to satisfy British as well as international standards, the Government are building in an unnecessary barrier.

Finally, I want to take up a point that was usefully made by the hon. Member for Canterbury, which related to joined-up government. The process of taking an adoption to its conclusion involves the crucial court stage in which the ad litems are key people. As he observed, CAFCASS and the Lord Chancellor's Department have got themselves into an appalling tangle over the terms of contracts of those 2,000 people, such that half of them have resigned from their contracts. He kindly placed the responsibility on that parastatal organisation, but I think that the problem lies with the Government, especially the Treasury, which is driving this policy. It is an Inland Revenue-driven policy to try to force this small group of people off self-employment and on to full-time contract terms for tax reasons. It is totally inappropriate to the work that they do, and the end product has been that a small but crucial profession has, in effect, been destroyed. The judicial review may overturn that, but extraordinary administrative incompetence could undermine the continuity of the Government's policies on children, so I hope that they will reconsider the matter.

Despite those qualifications, I agree that this is a good Bill. It is long overdue, very welcome and will enjoy support from all parties.

9.3 pm

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I welcome the Bill, because we are all confident that it will become law, unlike White Papers and draft Bills from the previous Labour Government and the Conservative Government before them. Bills always came at the end of a Parliament, and the fact that this Bill has been introduced at the beginning of the Parliament gives us confidence. As no general election is pending, we will be able better to consider some of the more difficult issues, especially the question of whether unmarried and same sex couples should qualify for adoption. The point that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) made was well articulated. If an election had been pending, we would have all vied for the chance to show which party was the most family friendly. As we are at the beginning of the Parliament, we shall be able to give the issue better consideration.

Parliament has waited a long time to change the law on adoption—since 1976. More importantly, the children have waited for far too long. We have heard comparisons between adoption and remaining in the care system. We are told that 75 per cent. of children in care leave without any educational qualifications. Children in the care system are apparently represented disproportionately in prisons, and are disproportionately found to be living rough. We should, however, compare the adoption legislation with what was the law earlier. Children who had been abused in all manner of ways were expected to stand on their own two feet after leaving care at 16. The position of those in adoptive placements is bound to show in a better light.

I am proud that we have changed the law. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 raised the leaving age to 21, and to up to 24 for young people in education or training. I believe that in years to come we shall be able to compare today's figures with figures demonstrating a far more favourable system for children in care.

Practitioners in the field welcome the Bill. Before proceedings began in the Special Select Committee of which I was privileged to be a member, I sat down to discuss it with social services staff from Medway council, one of the local authorities in my area. They reacted warmly to the Bill. Not just children, not just Parliament, but practitioners have been waiting for legislative changes.

We criticise practitioners, but to some extent it was Parliament that allowed political correctness to manifest itself during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when it did nothing to build a better framework in which more children could enjoy the love and happiness provided by adoptive families to which we have all referred today. I do not think it right to point the finger at any one group involved in the process of adoption.

Let me record my thanks to the Medway council staff, who were very informative about the Bill. Medway was judged to be among the top 10 authorities in terms of social services, and fostering and adoption are two of the key indicators. We should give praise where it is due.

I welcome proposals to speed up the court process, and to establish a timetable. When I was a social worker, delay was built in—not necessarily by the panel or the process in which my colleagues and I were involved, but by our having to wait time and again for yet another expert's report. As has been said, the reports for which we waited generally reached a conclusion similar to that reached by the social workers. There would then be a residential study, followed by a further study.

I remember a case involving the removal of a child at birth. In some ways that is the most painful experience for a social worker, especially a social worker who is also a parent. We cannot help empathising with the mother, while perhaps also feeling that it is for the best, given what has happened to other children. The case took 18 months to resolve, and no one can tell me that that has not had a profound effect on the child. Fortunately the child went to fantastic adoptive parents, but the process took 18 months. We all know from remembering our children at the same age that they have been shaped enormously by their families and their experiences; being taken away from foster carers is bound to have a profound effect.

I welcome the timetabling, but, as one of my hon. Friends said earlier, we should monitor it. It is all very well to set a timetable, but what is most important is what actually happens.

On Second Reading of the Bill debated in the last Session—I have reread the report of it—many passionate speeches were made, similar to those that we have heard today. Frequent reference was made to the 58,000 children and young people whom councils had to look after. We

should not assume, however, that a child will not have a fulfilling life just because he or she remains in care. Sometimes we almost say that children in care are condemned, and that is not true: many children in care flourish. Of course, it is preferable for them to have a loving family relationship in permanency, ideally in an adoptive relationship, but we have other measures, especially the special guardianship order, which I welcome. Adoption is not a panacea. There are alternatives in which children flourish.

Moving children to an adoptive family can often appear the easiest solution, but research shows that, where children can remain within or be returned to their natural family, and an assessment can be made that that is good enough—it may not be good enough for us as individuals—that is the best for them further on in their lives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) referred to privately fostered children. The Victoria Climbie inquiry is taking place at the moment. The tragic circumstances in which that child died and the failure of all agencies to protect her have been well recorded, but there was a failure not just of the agencies but, again, of the legislative framework. We do not know how many children are privately fostered. Report after report, including those by Lord Laming and by Sir William Utting, have said that we must have far more rigorous inspection and registration of that particular group. We require child minders and day centres to register with the National Care Standards Commission, yet we do not have the same rigorous inspection regime for children who are looked after full-time, often when their parents are abroad.

I am sure that Lord Laming will make the following recommendation. He mentioned it in the other place during the passage of the Care Standards Bill, as did other noble Lords. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre did so during the Committee stage of that Bill. We called on the Government to look more closely at the way in which we monitor privately fostered children. There is a golden opportunity to look very carefully at the legislation and to ensure that those vulnerable children living on their own away from home are properly protected.

I applaud the Bill. I was involved in the process for many years prior to coming to the House and the delays were appalling. The effects on children were equally appalling. All of us should recognise that legislation should have been in place, but this Bill has been welcomed by practitioners, by all those operating in the field, and not least by the children who need permanency.

9.13 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I shall extract certain comments from my speech to enable another hon. Member to follow me.

The Bill says relatively little about birth parents, especially where adoption is opposed. I understand that about 60 per cent. of adoption proceedings are opposed by parents. We heard some gruelling accounts from my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) of dreadful suffering at the hands of birth parents, and from the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) of repeated unsuccessful attempts to reunite a child with its parents, but they are not typical, and we should be careful not to generalise.

Local authorities are large professional organisations and birth parents are individuals. They are laymen. Under stress conditions, they depend totally on representatives at adoption hearings and their chances of success are poor.

We also hear little about sibling groups and the advisability of keeping them together. I have been very surprised at a case in my constituency. I defer to hon. Members, who obviously have much more expertise in this sector than I have, but there is no presumption in favour of the birth mother up to the point of adoption, even when the problems that led to children being taken into care have been overcome, even if she is now in a stable and established relationship, even if the new partner wants the children back as well and is equally committed, even if the home circumstances have improved and are now suitable for family life, and even where the prospective adoptive parents have rejected one of the sibling group. The children's wishes are to be returned to the mother.

I was surprised to learn that local authorities put more weight on the period, in this case 10 months, which the remaining siblings have spent in the pre-adoption placement. That begs the point that longer periods will influence the outcome of adoption proceedings and that the length of the pre-adoption period is outside the control of the birth parents. If there is a good chance of the reunited family being successful, surely that would be the best outcome for the children: to be with their own siblings and their birth parents.

Clause 44 states that an adoption order will "extinguish" the birth parents' parental responsibility. It is an irrevocable transfer from a child's birth family to the new adoptive family. Adoption should therefore be for only those children who cannot live with their birth families. I should like the Bill to include greater protection for sibling groups, ideally keeping them together, and for the birth parents and their rights when circumstances have changed, before the adoption has been formalised. I suggest that greater protection on both those points would be in the best interests of the child.

9.16 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. Like many other hon. Members I very much welcome the fact that the Government are legislating on adoption. I also acknowledge that the opportunity to legislate on adoption tends to arise only once in a generation. Consequently, it is so important in the most personal sense to thousands of children and adults that we get it right and that the principles on which we base this legislation are sound and founded in common sense and compassion. I think that the Bill certainly meets those criteria.

In the generation since the House last legislated in this area, there have been many human stories not only of hope but of pain and sadness that have arisen from the operation of the United Kingdom's adoption services. Certainly it is right that the welfare of the child throughout its life is at the heart of the Bill. However, as other hon. Members have said, we have to ensure that we maintain the correct balance in what has sometimes been called the eternal triangle, or the holy trinity, of adoption: the child, the adoptive parents and the natural, birth parents. I therefore very much welcome the Secretary of State's

[Kevin Brennan]

announcement today that a Special Standing Committee will consider the Bill. I also welcome his open mind on adoption by unmarried couples.

In the short time that I have to speak I shall concentrate on only one element of the trinity, the natural or birth parents, whom some hon. Members have already mentioned. I do so because, like probably every other hon. Member I have encountered, as a Member of Parliament, many tragic, heart-rending, human stories of adoption, of couples who are desperate for a child being deemed too old or unsuitable for reasons that are beyond their ken or anyone else's understanding and of children who are lost in care with no hope or love. It is right that the Bill seeks to help them.

One particular case of a constituent of mine whom I first encountered while working for my predecessor has led me to take an interest in the subject and to participate in this debate. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to remember as the Bill is developed and honed that birth parents can be victims too and are sometimes little more than children themselves when they first have to deal with the system.

My constituent's story spans a large part of that generation since the House last legislated comprehensively in this area. She was very young when she had her second child, a girl, in the early 1980s. She was devastated when her daughter although not her older child, her son, was taken into care. At first she thought that it would be a temporary situation caused by her circumstances, but as time went on she was told that as the bond had been broken her daughter would not be returned. Over the years she had three more children, whom she brought up herself, but she always felt terrible anger, guilt and confusion about why her daughter had been taken into care and never returned.

The daughter was in foster care for several years, and eventually placed for adoption. My constituent opposed the adoption, because she still wanted her daughter back, but she felt powerless to oppose the system. She first came to me in the mid-1990s when I was working for my predecessor. By then her daughter had been adopted and was in her teens, but my constituent was still filled with a burning desire to understand what had happened to her.

On behalf of my predecessor, I helped to get hold of what records we could from social services. They contained an unexpected bombshell: before being placed with potential adopters, the daughter had received criminal compensation for having been abused in foster care. This information had never been released to my constituent either when it was discovered or when she contested the adoption in court.

Understandably, my constituent was devastated. Surely, she asked me, social services must have had a duty of care towards her. She felt guilt, anger and betrayal. However, when she took her case to a lawyer, it turned out that things were not that clear. There was no case law to establish that the local authority owed her any duty of care as the parent of a child who had been taken into care and placed for adoption.

At the very least, the Bill should ensure that adoption services owe a duty of care to birth parents as well as to adoptive parents and to children. I would be grateful if the Minister would comment on that when she sums up. If not, could the idea be considered in the Special Standing Committee?

I welcome the fact that the birth parents are considered in the Bill, and also the introduction of the proposals for special guardianship. In particular, I welcome the fact that under clause 3, adoption services will have to meet the needs of natural parents, and that under clause 4(1), there is a change from the previous version of the Bill in that birth parents are now included in the requirement to carry out assessments of need for adoption support services. However, I am concerned that there is no absolute duty to provide that service, even when a need has been recognised.

In addition, we need to be sure that the Bill does not lead to courts feeling almost compelled to dispense with parental consent even in the most marginal of cases. The House was reminded earlier in the debate that the departmental review of 1992 specifically excluded the paramountcy principle from a decision to make an adoption order without consent. I hope that we shall be able to examine that issue carefully in the Special Standing Committee.

The removal of parental rights is one of the most dramatic possible actions affecting individual rights. It is right that such orders should be made when they are clearly in the interests of the child—but we must ensure that in developing the Bill we do not create an atmosphere in which social services departments and courts feel under almost irresistible pressure to press for adoption even when, with support, a child could remain with its natural family.

I am not talking about allowing a child to be bounced back and forth within the system, as in the example so clearly and eloquently illustrated by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble). That has happened too often in the past; it should be stopped, and the Bill will go a long way towards doing that. However, when we consider individual cases, we should approach general adoption targets with caution. The welfare of the child demands that the system should be swift, but let us be sure that it is also just.

The Bill would benefit from being strengthened to include opportunities to initiate renewed contact with adopted adults. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to give some assurance that the Bill will not remove the rights of birth relatives to apply for an order under the Adoption Act 1976, which the Bill replaces, to require the Registrar-General to disclose information. She will know that that concern has been expressed by the National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and Parents.

I also hope that my hon. Friend will consider the possibility of strengthening the Bill to create a more active service for those seeking contact in adulthood. Let us not forget that such people are often siblings who have never met their brothers or sisters. I hope that she will tell the House that the Bill will offer something for them.

The point made by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) that no one has the right to subject their legal father to a DNA test was especially fatuous. The point is not whether adopted adults should be able to prove that their DNA matches the male name on the original birth certificate, but that they should be able to discover, broadly, their personal story. Perhaps

Liberal Democrats are especially sensitive on that issue, which might explain the illegitimate political tactics that they adopt locally. That is a long way of saying something very short.

Adoption is a subject that touches the lives of our constituents in the most profound and personal ways. It is a subject that raises issues of the deepest human resonance—childhood, family, love, our own sense of belonging and mortality. I have listened to the debate and read the reports of previous debates in *Hansard* with much admiration for the commitment and expertise that hon. Members on both sides of the House bring to the subject. I hope that on this occasion—perhaps even more than on others—the debate will be studied closely by Ministers and used to improve and enrich this highly commendable Bill.

9.26 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): In the few moments remaining, I wish to welcome many aspects of the Bill and the changes that have been made to it since the Second Reading of the earlier Bill in March, in which I took part.

It is important that we remember that we only ever hear of the times when social services fail. We never hear when they are successful in placing children into care, providing good homes and ensuring that they are brought up in a loving family. It is of course right that we hear about the times when social services fail, because the consequences are so horrendous, and it is right that such cases should be investigated. However, we should also remember the many occasions when social services get it right and place children where they are brought up successfully.

I pay tribute to foster parents and the work that they do. In today's society, we must unfortunately think carefully about the damage done when a malicious accusation is made against a foster parent. Such accusations can take social services a long time to investigate—a point that has struck me particularly.

I ask the Minister to pay particular attention to the role of grandparents. They can have an important role in caring for their grandchildren, especially those who have been neglected or forced into the care of the local authority perhaps because of drug abuse by their parents. I find that I can go a long time without experiencing a case involving drug abuse and then suddenly I deal with two or three similar cases. I recently dealt with two distressing cases, which I outlined in March, and I do not intend to repeat the details today.

Time is short, but I wish to make one point to the Minister. Clause 2(6) mentions

"such other services as are specified in regulations (which may include financial support)."

I understand that the use of words such as "may", "possible" and "responsible" can be not wholly definitive. My point for the Minister is that local authorities should not be able to decide the level of support, because they will want to take many other issues into account. When grandparents take on the responsibility of bringing up children, they should receive an allowance, especially if they go the whole hog and become adoptive parents. The Bill is not clear enough on that point and I hope that the issue will be considered in Committee.

I hope that when the Bill returns for Report and Third Reading it has been further improved. If that is the case, the Government will have done a great service to those many thousands of children who are at the moment in the care of local authorities but whom we would all like to see in the care of families.

9.29 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): We have had an excellent and well informed debate, in which all right hon. and hon. Members have spoken with a great deal of personal experience. I feel greatly under-qualified to respond.

We appear to have no lack of recruits to the Special Standing Committee and the Standing Committee that will follow this part of the Bill's proceedings. The hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), a member of the Select Committee who has a great deal of experience in fostering and adoption, mentioned the need for clarification on placement orders and overturning parental consents. She said that any delay in the procedure prejudices the child's welfare.

The hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman), another member of the Select Committee, welcomed the independent review mechanism in the Bill and said that the 40 per cent. target was perhaps ambitious. She questioned, quite rightly, the adequacy of the resources being rolled out in the longer term to finance it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), a highly qualified speaker on the subject and another member of the Select Committee, queried the thrust behind clause 1 and other early clauses. We will have a lot of fun and games debating those in Committee. He made helpful suggestions about when the appeals procedure should be triggered.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), a former social worker, showed considerable understanding of the issue and then ruined it all by blaming the whole thing on 18 years of Tory rule. He almost redeemed himself by his pertinent references, echoed by other speakers, to the problems of private fostering.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), a member of an adoption panel in her previous career, said that we need to attract more suitable social workers. That point was echoed by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable).

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) queried clause 50 and rightly said that the tests applied to the adoption order are different from those applied to a care order. He reinforced the need to flag up the threshold. He then went on to speak about other issues, which I will duck.

We then heard from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn), another speaker with social work experience. As I said, I feel woefully inadequate in responding to the debate. She mentioned the need to bring the legislation up to date to make it compatible with the Children Act 1989.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) described the detailed extent of the problem. The hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) gave a grisly catalogue of violence during contact visits. The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw), another person with great experience in social work and

[Tim Loughton]

dealing with children, said how much time is wasted in the process, and that that needs to be addressed. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) rightly flagged up the problems with sibling groups and consideration for birth parents. That point was echoed by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan). Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) said, with characteristic succinctness, how right it was to mention the successes of social services. People never want to read newspaper stories about the plane that landed safely. That attitude also applies to social workers, because many cases go well. He also made a pertinent point about the role of grandparents, with which I am sure we will deal in Committee.

In the midst of the debate, we had an excellent maiden speech by my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon). He may lack the professional prestidigitational—

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): What has taken him so long?

Tim Loughton: That has put me off. My hon. Friend may lack the professional prestidigitational qualifications of his predecessor but he shows immense early promise in keeping all his balls in the air at the same time, as one would expect from someone who lists his recreation as "words". Alas, we will not be seeing a recreation of the BBC chainsaw massacre that his predecessor attempted, but he started well with talk about the motorway link for Norwich. From a shopping list of concerns, early pleas for the transport infrastructure in one's constituency always go down well. With a name like Bacon, it is hardly surprising that he takes a close interest in agriculture.

It is always profitable territory to list and give a plug to some of the businesses in one's constituency and their products. So when my hon. Friend started talking about Bux Corrugated and Hamlin Electronics airbag sensors, I was a little confused until he mentioned Lotus and the prospect of a doggy bag. May I offer him a friendly word of advice and remind him at this early stage of the existence of the Register of Members' Interests? He will no doubt prove a worthy successor to John MacGregor, whom we all miss in this House.

The Bill is welcome on both sides of the House. It has been introduced belatedly—four and a half years after the Government came to power—and only after a friendly push last March from my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). However, the Bill is good news. We know that because the Secretary of State is here in person: in contrast to the invisible man act of last week after the disastrous news about accident and emergency services when he was nowhere to be seen, refused to make a statement to the House and refused to debate with us head to head on the media. We are glad that today he is making up for his invisibility last week.

We welcome the Bill. We also welcome the use of a Special Standing Committee, a procedure that previously proved so useful in the form of a Special Select Committee. However, we do not welcome the Government's apparent need to timetable this complicated measure and we question why they are taking that course. We shall certainly vote against the programme motion.

The sense of urgency for the Bill has been heightened by the current spate of cases involving the death of young children in terrible circumstances. The most high profile cases were, as we have heard, those of Victoria Climbie and of John Smith. He died in my constituency and until last Monday his parents were my constituents. He died in 1999 on Christmas eve from severe brain haemorrhaging, caused by blows like those normally seen on a battered boxer. He suffered 54 visible injuries at the hands of Simon and Michelle McWilliam, including adult bite marks and having his hair torn out.

The McWilliams were prospective adopters after that child had been for 17 months in the happy foster care of parents elsewhere. The McWilliams pulled the wool over the eyes of Brighton and Hove social services department during 20 home visits by social workers. Furthermore, the danger signs were not acted on by health service staff.

Last Monday, the McWilliams were sentenced to eight years each after an emotional jury foreman had delivered the guilty verdict. However, they were charged only with child cruelty. The weakness in the law is that they were not charged with murder or manslaughter because it was not possible to pin the blame on either one of them, despite the fact that Sussex police and the Crown Prosecution Service were satisfied that the child was murdered. The problems of joint enterprise in such cases must be tackled urgently by the Government.

Obviously, the social services department made mistakes and action is now being taken, but the subsequent report—released last Tuesday—highlighted claims from Mr. McWilliam's first two wives about his violent and cruel tendencies towards them and the children. It noted that he had changed his name twice and that Mrs. McWilliam had five police convictions. None of that was known to social services, but it was easily uncovered in the space of one hour by the author of the report.

A major consideration in the Bill, and relevant to those current cases, is the full and thorough investigation of the background and suitability of prospective adoptive parents. We need to examine those failures by social services. As I noted, Brighton and Hove has taken action and has been praised in reports elsewhere, but there are no excuses. Ministers are aware of the enormous pressures on social services departments throughout the country. I have mentioned previously the £1 billion standard spending assessment overspend and the fact that social services recruitment has fallen by 50 per cent. and that in London and in parts of the south-east vacancies are running at 30 per cent. in certain child care sections of social service departments. In this case, it is not good enough merely to take the "not me, Guv" approach of naming and shaming as the Secretary of State did, shamefully, at the social services conference in Harrogate 10 days ago.

When we scrutinise the Bill, it is essential to ensure that the system can cope with the additional responsibilities, duties and structures that will be placed on social services departments. We are all in favour of expanding the number of children who pass through the adoption system, but not at the expense of compromising the quality of the service available and the safeguards to be carried out.

There are already questions about the adequacy of the ring-fenced funds supposedly attached to the many new requirements under the quality protects programme, for example, and about the adequacy of the funding for the operation of the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 when it is eventually implemented. The Local Government Association has expressed legitimate concerns as to the availability of new funding for the increased work load that will be placed on social services, which are currently spending £1 billion above SSA as I pointed out.

We must ensure that there is proper resourcing for the pre-adoption and post-adoption support services, which represent such an important part of the Bill. We must ensure that we take account of the differential pressure on those local authority social services departments that are deemed to be under-performing and where their pool of prospective adoptee children have more complex physical, behavioural or ethnic characteristics.

We fully concur with the need to address the logjam in adoptions, to increase the numbers adopted each year and to speed the process for babies in particular. The current average of two years and nine months waiting time for looked-after children is far too long. We are constantly reminded that, in 1970, 20,000 children, no less, were given up for adoption in this country, whereas in 1999, the figure was some 4,100—barely 20 per cent. of that 30 years ago. But the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State tell us that, by using public service agreements, they want the number of adoptions from looked-after children to increase by 40 per cent. or, ideally, 50 per cent.

That is all very well, but it needs to be handled sensitively and we must not validate a system which falls into the usual trap under this Government of setting targets for everything and priorities for nothing—all the more crucial with adoption, where the slavish adherence to targets could result in social service authorities that approach the year end having fallen behind on their target average fast-tracking certain less appropriate adoptions without the necessary quality controls, purely to spruce up the figures.

As we have heard, the circumstances have changed dramatically since 1970. The 1960s represented the high-water mark of the dash for adoption, and babies were usually snatched away from teenage single mothers, amid a culture of institutionalised opprobrium. We must never return to that climate of Victorian taboos. Similarly, we need to dismantle the insidious forces of political correctness that have put obstacles in the way of perfectly good adoptive parents being given the opportunity to offer a stable home to vulnerable children on the irrational grounds of age, weight, being smokers or because of the ethnic compatibility test.

The nature of the adopted children has also changed dramatically in those years. They tend to be older children with a history of more complex disabilities or behavioural problems, and there are particular pressures in finding placements for sibling groups, as we have heard from various hon. Members. The pool of prospective adopters has shrunk because they have been put off by the PC brigade and because other ways of producing a family exist through IVF and other means. However, it is essential and right that at the heart of the Bill is the overriding consideration that the welfare of the child is paramount. That will achieve consistency with the Children Act 1989 and mean that the welfare checklist is applied.

In scrutinising this technical Bill, with its 135 clauses and 6 schedules, we shall seek clarification of much of the detail. We would like to have further detail on the test of paramountcy over reasonableness, as my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) has mentioned, and on the need to avoid deterring struggling parents from seeking outside help if there is a heightened risk of unsought adoption. We should consider the timing of permanent placement decisions following on from children being looked after, because the quality of the test is much more important than the length of the delay.

We will want to consider the workings of the welcome addition of the appeals panels, who sits on them and at which stages of the adoption process they kick in. We will also want to know what form the extra support services for adopters and adoptees will take and the availability of proper training for the people involved.

What will happen to a social services department that is deemed to be failing in its adoption targets? What about the mechanics of the proposed special guardianship status as an alternative to adoptions, and how does it relate to target setting? We will also want to consider the need to allow the voluntary sector to continue to play a full and important role and not to encroach further on the generosity of voluntary adoption agencies, which currently subsidise adoption services to the tune of £3.5 million a year and provide 20 per cent. of the placements.

No doubt, we will return to the ubiquitous problem of the respective balance of rights between the adopted child, the adoptive parents, the birth family and the rights of disclosure of information to each. No doubt, in all our deliberations, the paramountcy of the common-sense approach will be frequently scuppered by the requirements of the European convention on human rights.

We welcome the strengthened penalties on unauthorised intercountry adoptions. It is absolutely right to clamp down on cases involving internet twins, for example, but we shall be interested to discover how the Secretary of State plans to regulate hyperspace in that respect. So the Special Standing Committee has a lot of work to do—this is a big technical issue.

The Secretary of State said earlier that it is not up to politicians to determine the suitability of adoptions, but it is up to the House to provide a clear framework and workable guidelines that enable those at the sharp end and in the courts to make the right decisions. Those decisions should be less open to challenge, more likely to speed the adoption process and make the welfare of the child paramount, without the complication added by some of the macho PC nonsense displayed by the Liberal spokesman earlier this evening.

As we come to the end of our deliberations, we need to make the difficult job of adoption easier for the dedicated band of adopters in this country who give vulnerable children improved life chances, as the Secretary of State put it. I look forward to the constructive progress of the Bill. We shall support its Second Reading.

9.45 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): We have had a significant and wide-ranging debate and I am grateful to Members for their genuine interest and for their informed contributions to it. In the relatively limited time left, I hope to respond to some of

[Jacqui Smith]

the issues raised, but I start by congratulating the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on his maiden speech. I am afraid that I missed his keeping his balls in the air, but I am sure that it was something worth seeing.

For many children, adoption can help to provide a stable and secure family life. The child and his needs must come first. A child's welfare is our first and last consideration. However, to help meet those needs and to provide children with new families, we must encourage suitable people to come forward as prospective adopters and to provide them with help where necessary.

There have been great changes in society and in our expectations. There are more people wanting to adopt than there are young children available for adoption. Very few babies are given up for adoption, but demand from couples to adopt babies has grown. Many couples therefore turn to other countries, and last year there were 351 applications for overseas adoption. Legislation has failed to keep pace with these changes, but the Bill represents the most radical overhaul of adoption law for 25 years. It is long overdue.

The Bill has five key aims: to make the child's needs paramount in all the decisions made by the adoption agency and the court; to provide for support for adoptive families; to help to make the process of adopting fairer; to help cut delays in adoptions; and to strengthen the rigorous safeguards to protect the child including those for intercountry adoptions.

The hon. Members for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) questioned the provision for six months in our proposals for intercountry adoptions. I should explain that the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 placed restrictions on those habitually resident in the UK bringing a child into the UK for the purposes of adoption, but it does not catch Britons who adopt the child abroad and then bring them back into this country. The Bill extends the restriction to Britons who adopt abroad and bring the child back. If they do not follow approved procedures, they will be committing an offence.

The restriction applies to habitual residents in the UK who adopt abroad within a period of six months. We chose six months because we thought that it would be long enough to deter those who want just to nip abroad and adopt quickly—we felt that three months was too short—but we did not want to catch people who worked abroad for a considerable period, adopted properly and ended up committing an offence when they returned to the UK.

There has been much debate about clause 1, which makes the child's welfare in childhood and later the paramount consideration for a court or adoption agency in making any decision relating to the adoption of that child. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), who drew on her considerable experience in this subject, the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) raised the issue of delay. The welfare checklist in clause 1(5) states clearly:

"In placing the child for adoption, the adoption agency must give due consideration to the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background."

However, clause 1(3), vitally, will oblige courts and adoption agencies to bear it in mind at all times

" that, in general, any delay in coming to a decision is likely to prejudice the child's welfare."

That point applies across the Bill, so clause 1(3) refers to clause 1(5). Taken together, the provisions give effect to the policy set out in the national adoption standards that the best adoptive placement is one that reflects the child's birth heritage provided that the placement can be found without unnecessary or harmful delay. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear, children should not be left waiting indefinitely for a supposedly perfect family.

The hon. Members for Woodspring, for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) and for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) mentioned the importance of birth parents. The paramountcy principle applies to all decisions involving the adoption of a child, including whether to dispense with the birth parents' consent to adoption. However, we believe that the welfare check list and the need for the courts to consider those decisions provide the necessary safeguards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport also raised the important issue of thresholds. The Bill provides that a child cannot be compulsorily placed for adoption without the Children Act 1989 threshold test of significant harm being met. That test safeguards the rights of birth families and means that there is a consistent threshold for compulsory state intervention in family life across adoption legislation and the 1989 Act. That delivers on our promise to bring those measures into line, and it is right that the focus of all decisions to do with adoption, including whether to dispense with the birth parents' consent, should be based on the child's welfare.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) and the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) emphasised the importance of the child's voice in adoption decisions. Clause 1(4)(a) explicitly demands that the court takes into consideration the ascertainable wishes of the child when making decisions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) rightly emphasised the need to recruit sufficient adoptive parents. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn), building on her experience, spoke passionately about the need to support families. The Bill places for the first time a clear duty on local social services authorities to make arrangements to provide adoption support services, including financial support. That is important. It will encourage people to come forward in the knowledge that help will be available.

Looked-after children who are adopted and their new families will have a key worker who will act as a gateway to adoption support services if they want to access them. Support will also be available for the new special guardianship proposals. That may include grandparents, who were mentioned by the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). Grandparents specifically welcomed those proposals.

The hon. Member for Woodspring questioned the speed with which more details about adoption allowances and support would be made available. We will publish a draft framework for consultation next spring. Early work has begun, in discussion with stakeholders, on the details of adoption and financial support.

I agree that recruitment is important, which is why the Government are supporting specific local recruitment activity, developing a resource pack to support the work of local authorities in recruitment and helping to raise awareness of the children who are waiting for adoption and the adopters needed. In addition, we continue to support national adoption week.

Several hon. Members referred to resources. Overall, social services in England spent nearly £51 million on adoption and adoption allowances in 1999–2000. The Government have pledged another £66.5 million for adoption services over three years. That means a 25 per cent. increase in this financial year in the resources available for adoption and adoption support.

In response to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, I understand that the National Assembly for Wales has made extra money available, although the £66.5 million relates to England alone.

We have of course made available more money for training, and I am sure that good authorities will be using that to support their adoption work. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) has a bit of a cheek raising the issue of social services funding, given that he stood for election on a platform that did not promise even to match our pledges.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) rightly emphasised the need to improve best practice and the management of adoption services. The adoption and permanence taskforce has already worked with 12 local authorities. Today we announced the involvement of another 12 authorities. The taskforce has helped local authorities to improve performance and to develop a range of good practice materials. The chairman of the taskforce is the chief inspector, so there is an important link between the work of the taskforce and our emphasis on raising standards. We also have performance indicators, inspections by the social services inspectorate and in-year monitoring. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear in a highly acclaimed speech to the social services conference two weeks ago, we will also be taking action to improve performance where necessary.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley rightly emphasised the fact that adoptive parents need to feel confident in applying. Through the independent review process, which we will be consulting on further, we will ensure that adoptive parents can have confidence in the system. Several hon. Members mentioned access to information. The fact that the hon. Members for Woodspring and for Oxford, West and Abingdon and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West took different views on that issue shows that we will return to it in the Special Standing Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) made an important point about safeguards. The Bill reinforces safeguards to protect children from harm or exploitation. I know that she has already had useful meetings about child contact with the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), and we will certainly consider how best to minimise the risks that she outlined.

We are determined to deliver, between March 2001 and March 2005, a 40 per cent. increase in the number of children adopted from council care. Our adoption taskforce, the adoption register and the national adoption standards launched this summer will help to achieve that, and some of the Bill's key provisions will help to sustain that commitment. Earlier this month, the latest published figures showed that this challenging goal is achievable, and one that we are right to strive for and possibly to exceed.

Last year, 12 per cent. more children were adopted from council care in England, which means that nearly every day an extra child was given the chance of a stable, loving family. The Bill represents a much needed, fundamental reform of adoption law. It is vital that we get it right. That is why we have taken a consultative approach, building on the 1996 draft Bill. That is why the Bill was referred to a Select Committee after its previous Second Reading, and why we are now proposing, by remitting the Bill to a Special Standing Committee, to give the House an additional opportunity for intensive scrutiny and to allow the key players in adoption to comment on the Bill.

We are determined to modernise and reform adoption, and to make it a faster, fairer experience for children and families. We have made good progress, and the Bill marks a further significant step towards our goal. The Bill is of lasting significance. The House has not debated and passed a major Bill on adoption for almost a generation. However, we must ensure that new laws work, and that they provide the safeguards and flexibility necessary to meet expectations and needs that have changed a great deal since the 1970s. Thousands of children and adoptive parents will have their lives changed for ever by the measures detailed in this necessarily complex Bill. For their sakes, we must get it right.

Successful adoption provides the chance of a new start and a new, loving family life for a child. The Bill will help us to provide that chance for thousands more children, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

ADOPTION AND CHILDREN BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Adoption and Children Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Special Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

2. All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Special Standing Committee

3.—(1) Proceedings in the Special Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 17th January 2002.

(2) Standing Order No. 91(1) (special standing committees) shall apply with the omission of the word "morning".

Consideration and Third Reading

4.—(1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(2) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—[*Mr. Sutcliffe.*]

The House divided: Ayes 317, Noes 70.

Division No. 45] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Hesston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leppер, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Dan Norris.

NOES

Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Conway, Derek
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

ADOPTION AND CHILDREN BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(A),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Adoption and Children Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown by virtue of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Contracting Out

That the draft Contracting Out of Functions (Tribunal Staff) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 28th June, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Local Government Finance

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 87) (HC 220), on 2001–2002 Special Grant for Local Authority E-Government Pathfinders, which was laid before this House on 19th July, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

London Government

That the draft Greater London Authority (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 2) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 4th October, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

DEFENCE

Ordered,

That Dr. Julian Lewis be discharged from the Defence Committee and Mr. James Cran be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Stephen O'Brien be discharged from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and Mrs. Gillian Shephard be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ordered,

That Mr. John Whittingdale be discharged from the Trade and Industry Committee and Mr. Andrew Lansley be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Illegal Hare Coursing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

10.15 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): In bringing before the House the problem of hare coursing, I want first to draw a sharp distinction between legal coursing under National Coursing Club rules and illicit hare coursing with trespass, which is a serious difficulty to which the House and the Government must provide more effective solutions.

Some Members—I see the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) in his place—might think that the way to deal with the problem of hare coursing with trespass is to wait until all hare coursing is banned. I disagree. There is a place for legitimate hare coursing among our country sports, but its continuance should not be used as an excuse for not tackling the serious difficulty of illegitimate hare coursing.

I describe the problem as serious in the light of what I have been told is going on in my constituency and what I have learned is happening in other parts of the country. I have been given vivid accounts by local farmers, and by the police, of what commonly occurs in cases of hare coursing with trespass. Although my local farmers are grateful for the increasing effort being put in by the local police to deal with the problem, the farmers and the police have told me of their frustration at its continuing intractability.

Hare coursing is no longer an exclusively rural pursuit, if it ever was. Hare coursing with trespass has become a favourite weekend occupation of substantial numbers of rough urban dwellers, who will drive hundreds of miles for a day's "sport". They assemble in large numbers, using the motorways and co-ordinating their activities on mobile telephones, and supplement the pleasures of the chase by betting on the performance of the animals. I have heard that there are wins of the order of £20,000 in cash on the day.

The behaviour of such people towards farmers, the police and anybody who might get in their way is distinctly intimidatory. They favour the months when the crops are growing, so that cover for the hares is minimised. Crops are most vulnerable when they are growing, so that choice of season could be calculated to do the maximum economic damage. That contrasts with legitimate hare coursing, in which there is a closed season between March and September, so that the hares are undisturbed during the breeding season.

Let me dwell for a moment on the risk to the hare population. Research at the university of Bristol shows:

"after the water-vole, the brown hare is the species of mammal in Britain which has undergone the greatest decline"

in the 20th century. Numbers have fallen to such an extent that the UK biodiversity steering group has put hares on its list of species in decline. Obviously many factors are involved in the decline of the hare population and such coursing is only one, but it adds to the wider concerns about economic damage and damage done to the wider sense of security in the countryside.

Mr, Tony Banks (West Ham): The hon. Gentleman rightly notes the decline in the brown hare population. Would not it be better to ban all hare coursing? I cannot understand why he makes a distinction between illegal and legal hare coursing—the hare does not know what is illegal or legal. All it knows is that it gets ripped to pieces by greyhounds. What is the point of hare coursing?

Mr. Jackson: I simply disagree with the hon. Gentleman on that point. I shall continue to make my point about what I regard as illegitimate as opposed to legitimate hare coursing and discuss the legal remedies for the problem as I have defined it. He is perfectly free to define it in whatever way he wishes.

I know from my extensive correspondence with the Home Office, which I suppose will have briefed the Minister, that it believes that the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 provides the answer. It is true that the 1994 Act substantially increased the penalties for trespass in pursuit of game, but I believe that it has not solved the problem. It provides for heavy fines in certain circumstances, but despite that legislation hare coursing with trespass continues, and I have the impression that it has been increasing. It is a serious problem in rural areas, and the stiffer penalties under the Act are not acting as a deterrent.

For one thing, the effectiveness of the 1994 Act against aggravated trespass—trespass that intimidates or interferes with the local activity of farmers and landowners—has been undermined by the High Court in its ruling in Tilly *v.* the DPP. The case involved a genetically modified crops protester, and the High Court ruled that the farmer had to be physically present for the lawful activity of farming to be obstructed. In light of that ruling, the Government should at least review the Act to see whether those provisions are still operational, as a loophole has been created.

The fundamental problem is the fact that, in the case of trespassing hare coursers, the main offence that has to be proved is that of trespass in pursuit of game under the Game Act 1831, and that is a very difficult offence to prove.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jackson: I am afraid that I will not, because there is only a short time for the debate and I want to conclude my remarks and give the Minister reasonable time to reply.

In order successfully to establish the offence of trespass in pursuit of game, the prosecution has to prove, first, that a trespass has taken place, secondly, that a particular individual or individuals being charged actually committed that trespass, and thirdly, that the trespass was done with the intention or purpose of searching for or pursuing game.

It is common for those involved in such activity to hide their identity by wearing balaclavas. By the time that the police have arrived, the offenders have moved on, or they may be apprehended on a public footpath, in which case it is easy for them to claim that they were merely walking their dogs, perfectly legally, and were not in pursuit of game.

What can we do about this lamentable situation? As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, if Parliament acts as the hon. Member for West Ham wishes and legislates to ban hunting with dogs, all hare coursing, including hare coursing with trespass, will become illegal.

Like many other hon. Members who represent rural areas, I oppose a total ban on hunting with dogs, so I would not recommend that solution. I would be willing to support the middle way option of licensing all hunting with dogs, which would make hare coursing with trespass illegal because it would not have a licence. I put it to the Minister that, in spite of the desires and public activities of the hon. Member for West Ham, general legislation on hunting with dogs is still an uncertain prospect, and that the problem of hare coursing with trespass is a current, live problem that needs to be addressed with urgency in view of the inadequacy of the current law.

That is why I want to put to the Minister two practical suggestions for early action. First, we should legislate to reverse the burden of proof, as was done under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. At that time, there had been a number of cases in which men had been caught digging up the land, and it was suspected that they were involved in the offence of badger baiting. They could get away with it by claiming that their purpose was legitimate pest control. The 1992 Act reversed the burden of proof, so that anyone trespassing on land and having with him the tools or implements for digging out a badger had to prove that he was not committing that offence. I understand that that change in the law has helped to reduce the illegal digging out of badgers, and I think that it would help to reduce trespass for the purpose of hare coursing.

My second suggestion was put to me by members of the local police in my constituency. It is that the law should recognise an element of persistence or continuity of conduct. If a person is given a verbal warning similar to a warning under part V of the Public Order Act 1986 and continues hare coursing on the same day within a 10-mile radius of the place where the warning was issued, he will have committed an offence for which there should be a power of arrest. That would prevent the present run-around that absorbs so many police resources on Sunday mornings between September and May, while safeguarding the rights of dog owners whose dogs genuinely slip the leash and run after rabbits and hares.

During my 20 years as a Member of Parliament, I have raised many different matters on the Adjournment, but I must tell the Minister that I have rarely encountered such interest in a subject. I have been contacted by farmers all over the country, and have been offered briefings by many concerned individuals and groups.

This is a serious matter. If the Government have rural interests at heart—as I believe that they do—they will want to respond positively, and with urgency, to my concerns.

10.25 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): We certainly take seriously the need to address rural concerns. I thank the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) for raising this problem and for being so clear about his purpose in seeking the debate, both in advance—and I am grateful to him for his courtesy in spelling out his intentions—and in his well-judged speech.

The hon. Gentleman has rightly drawn our attention to the unpleasantness of illegal coursing. It raises the issues of trespass on farmland, damage to crops and property and the killing of scores of hares. Illegal coursing, however, also provides an opportunity for unpleasant and often violent characters to travel around the country and intimidate rural communities. The police rightly fear that it will provide the criminal element with an ideal opportunity to "case" isolated rural properties. It is also believed that it can be an organised and lucrative business. The hon. Gentleman, who gave specific figures, clearly knows more about it than I do, but betting on dogs often results in thousands of pounds changing hands. Moreover, illegal coursing is in itself an unsavoury activity, which many country people abhor.

I want to say something about the victims of that illegal activity. I stress that I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the conservation and status of the brown hare. It is a widespread and conspicuous farmland species in Britain, which was formerly considered abundant but appears to have undergone a substantial decline in numbers since the early 1960s. The most recent major survey is "The National Hare Survey 1997–99", undertaken by Bristol university. It estimated that the current population was about 750,000.

The survey concluded that there was no evidence to suggest that there had been a significant change in the population of brown hares nationally since the first survey of 1991 to 1993, although there had been a decline in some arable areas. That suggests that after a decline lasting several decades, populations have shown a degree of stability in recent years, albeit at a lower level than formerly.

Owing to concerns about the decline in numbers, the Government have drawn up a biodiversity species action plan to maintain and enhance its conservation status. The plan assesses the main threats to the species, and sets out a framework to maintain and expand existing populations. The three main factors identified in the plan as causing the decline are changing agricultural practices such as conversion of grassland to arable land, loss of habitat diversity and cropping regimes. Those are the threats that the plan seeks to address.

My Department and the Home Office are very alive to the need to tackle illegal coursing. I welcome the opportunity to tell Members about the legislation, and also about some recent initiatives that are available to help the police and the courts.

I understand that Thames Valley police have said they are experiencing difficulties because of legislation dating back to 1828. In fact, although old, the laws relating to illegal coursing of hares remain relevant and effective: they are still being used today. The real issue is that in some rural areas there may be difficulties in ensuring a rapid police response to illegal hare-coursing incidents.

The Night Poaching Act 1828, as amended by the Night Poaching Act 1844, makes it an offence for any person unlawfully to take or destroy any hares or other game at night. It is also an offence to enter or to be on any land with any instrument for the purpose of taking or destroying game. The Act also creates an aggravated form of the latter offence when the offender is armed with any offensive weapon, or is in a group of three or more poachers. Illegal coursing during the daytime, the real mischief, is dealt with by the Game Act 1831, which criminalises any trespass in search or pursuit of game. Aggravated offences occur if five or more people together commit the offence.

In addition to owners, occupiers and gamekeepers, the police are also able to deal with illegal coursing, having been granted wide powers of entry, stop, search and arrest

[Alun Michael]

under the Acts. For a poacher to be convicted, it is not necessary to prove that game has actually been taken. Nor is it necessary to prove by direct evidence either the specific land where poaching has taken place or, in the case where game is found, the unlawful means used to take it. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to stress that the prosecution must satisfy the court by either direct or circumstantial evidence, not merely by speculation that the defendant has been poaching.

The original legislation has been well tried and tested, but that is not all the police have to work with. For example, section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 provides the power to order removal of face coverings, including balaclavas. The trigger for that authorisation under section 61 is a reasonable belief that incidents of serious violence may take place in the locality and that it is expedient to give an authorisation to prevent their occurrence.

Legislation has been passed in more recent years to help the police and the courts to deal more effectively with modern-day illegal coursing. As well as the serious offences of violent disorder and affray, section 4 of the Public Order Act 1986 created an offence of using

"threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour"

which causes a person to believe that immediate violence would be used against him, or which may provoke violence. Under the section, it is an offence intentionally to behave in a way which is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress. Section 5 similarly prohibits such behaviour, or disorderly behaviour which is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress, even when no intent is involved.

Other powers are as follows. A power of arrest granted by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 empowers police officers to arrest where any offence has been committed and the offender's name and address is either not given, believed to be false or insufficient to allow for the service of a summons.

Under the Game Laws (Amendment) Act 1960, courts have the power to cancel game licences and forfeit any game found on an offender. If the offence committed is one of the aggravated forms under the Game Acts, a court may under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act also order the forfeiture of any vehicle used for the purpose of committing the offence.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that a recent case, known as the Tilly case, has undermined the legislation and that the decision in that case created a loophole in requiring the presence of the landowner in order for there to be an illegal act of aggravated trespass under section 68 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. He went on to ask for a review, but it is not yet clear whether there is a loophole to be remedied. I understand that the Crown Prosecution Service has sought leave to appeal the matter to the House of Lords. It would be inappropriate to say any more about that until the matter has been resolved, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take my point that one cannot firmly say that there is a loophole.

I hope that what I have said has shown the powers that are available to combat the evil of illegal coursing, but that is not the only way to address the issue. Partnership is the really effective weapon in cutting crime in rural areas. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced a new statutory framework within which crime reduction activity will be carried out—the crime and disorder reduction partnerships. That means that partnerships, comprising the police, the local authority, the probation service, the health service and many others, can work together to reduce crime in their area.

I understand that the crime and disorder audits should now have been completed in each area of the country and that draft strategies will be completed shortly and submitted to the regional crime directors. To the extent that illegal hare coursing is a problem in any area, it should be reflected in the local strategy.

The hon. Gentleman remarked on the number of people particularly in the Thames valley area which is relevant to his constituency, who have commented on the issue. They should be providing that information to police and ensuring that the issue of hare coursing is dealt with properly in the crime and disorder reduction strategy that is currently being completed. I suggest that he speaks specifically to the chief executive officer of the district council and the local superintendent in his area who have joint legal responsibility for the development of that strategy.

There are also examples in which police powers have been used successfully using the laws to which I have referred. Cambridgeshire police, for example, have tackled hare coursing in Huntingdon and the fenland where it was identified as being a major and serious problem. Operation Sparrow ran from September 2000 to March 2001, building on experience in previous years. It involved police, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Countryside Watch and Customs and Excise. Farmers from Countryside Watch helped the campaign by acting as the eyes and ears of the rural community, gathering information on any suspicious vehicles in the area, which they passed on to officers.

The operation was successful because 560 farmers and rural residents became members of the Cambridgeshire Countryside Watch. I am told that that organisation was established specifically to combat illegal hare coursing in the area, but I am sure that such a strong partnership has many other benefits. Clearly it is having the desired effect. The latest figures show that the number of reports of illegal hare coursing were cut from 357 to 164, which is an all-time low. I understand also that Thames Valley police are now talking to Cambridgeshire police, which is a good example of sharing good practice between police forces and a direct outcome of the hon. Gentleman's raising the issue as the subject of this debate.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Alun Michael: The prime purpose of the reply to an Adjournment debate is to reply to the hon. Member who initiated the debate. Once I have dealt with the points made by the hon. Member for Wantage, I shall be happy to give way.

The Home Office has provided extra funding—in the sparsity grant, which is specifically related to rural areas—to Thames Valley police specifically to improve policing. More than £1.5 million has been provided since April 2000 specifically to deal with the needs of rural areas. Police have therefore been able to set themselves a number of challenging objectives, including to deter illegal hare coursing and to prosecute such cases when the evidence can be found.

I listened with great interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Wantage on the problems of using Victorian legislation to tackle present-day crime. However, I hope that my remarks have demonstrated how that original legislation has been complemented by modern legislation and modern police methods to ensure that the powers exist for police and the countryside community to tackle effectively what the hon. Gentleman rightly described as a pernicious activity.

Mr. Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that allowing hare coursing as the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) has described it to remain a legal activity makes it much more difficult to detect illegal hare coursing? Furthermore, is not the reduction in the number of brown hares in particular a consequence of hares being brought into areas such as mine for the fun, as some might call it, of legal coursing?

Alun Michael: This debate is not about the rights and wrongs of activities that are currently legal; it is about the pernicious activity of illegal hare coursing. I certainly understand the point that my hon. Friend is making; there may well be some activities connected with legal hare coursing that many in the House would deplore, and which come close to the illegal activities that are the subject of the debate. None the less, they are beyond the subject of the debate. What we can agree across the Chamber is that illegal hare coursing is a pernicious activity, but that there are ways of dealing with it, that those methods should be used whenever it causes a nuisance either in depleting the hare population—if that is the case—or through the other damage that it does to rural communities, which the hon. Member for Wantage outlined effectively in introducing the debate.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): What aspects of legal hare coursing come close to those of illegal hare coursing?

Alun Michael: Many of the activities—my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) referred to the artificial creation of activity—may be open to question and debate, but my point was that now is not the time to debate them. There may be a place and a time for such discussion, but this debate is not suitable because it is specifically about illegal activity.

Mr. Banks: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Alun Michael: There are many ways in which illegal hare coursing, about which the hon. Member for Wantage complained, can be dealt with by the law, and by the police methods already available.

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Alun Michael: I want to deal with the final point that the hon. Member for Wantage raised—his specific suggestions about strengthening the law. Obviously, in considering any changes to the law, thought must be given to whether they will be effective in tackling the particular problem they seek to address, or whether they would simply move that problem elsewhere. I do not intend to comment further on those proposals today, but I will consider them further and seek the views of ministerial colleagues in the Home Office. Both the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Home Office keep an open mind on such issues—

Mr. Banks: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Alun Michael: —but at the moment my impression is that targeted use of existing legislation, and police action in partnership with the rural community, are most likely to achieve the end sought.

Mr. Banks: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Alun Michael: I give way to my hon. Friend, but I wish that he would allow me to complete a sentence before I do so.

Mr. Banks: I am sorry; I was getting a bit edgy because I felt that my right hon. Friend was reaching his peroration, and that I would find myself with no Minister to reply to a very simple question. The hares—allow me, if I may, Mr. Speaker, to represent them in this House—know of no distinction between illegal and legal hare coursing. Would it not solve the problems of the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), and those of my hon. Friends and myself, if all hare coursing were declared illegal? Surely that would deal with the problem on both sides.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend, with his usual ingenuity, takes us into areas that are not the subject of the debate. He may or may not be correct in his argument, but I am seeking to address the illegal activity. The hare may not know which is legal and which is illegal activity, but many of the people involved in illegal activity know full well that it is illegal, and that they are acting without regard to the interests of the local community—or to those of the hare, which obviously causes my hon. Friend great concern.

I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Wantage for the welfare both of the hare population and of the rural community, whose members are frequently damaged by illegal hare coursing. I hope that what I have said will have satisfied him about our concern to address the problem of illegal hare coursing, that the legislation is in place, and that a healthy partnership between the local police and the local community can combat the threat.

I recommend again that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, and those who have expressed concern to him, enter actively into the partnership with the police and the local authority that was put in place by the 1998 Act. There could not be a better time than now, when the audit has been undertaken and strategies are being put into place for the future. I am sure that Thames Valley police would welcome his participation, and that of those who have contacted him with their concerns about the issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 30 October 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BARCLAYS BANK REORGANISATION BILL *[LORDS]*

NATIONAL AUSTRALIA GROUP EUROPE BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Kashmir

1. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What recent discussions he has had with the Governments of India and Pakistan about the security situation in Kashmir. [8785]

6. **Mr. David Crausby** (Bolton, North-East): What recent discussions he has had with the representatives of the Indian Government about combating terrorism. [8790]

12. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): If he will make a statement on the situation in Kashmir. [8796]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have had a number of discussions with our Indian and Pakistani counterparts. Both countries are playing important roles in the international campaign against terrorism. We have long called for an end to external support for terrorism in Kashmir, and we condemn all acts of violence there. The House was united in its revulsion of the terrorist attack on the State Assembly in Srinagar on 1 October, in which at least 38 people were killed—an act for which the terrorist organisation Jaish-i-Mohammad, linked to Osama bin Laden, claimed responsibility. We have continued to urge both countries to act with restraint, to respect human rights and to look constructively at ways to resolve the issues between them.

Mr. Prentice: Our eyes are fixed on Afghanistan, but the real powder keg is next door, in Kashmir. Only today, the Pakistan Government accused the Indians of state-sponsored terrorism, after 22 Kashmiris were killed and 26 properties were torched. I despair. Where will it all end? This has been happening for more than 50 years. General Musharraf has accepted an invitation to speak to the United Nations General Assembly on 10 November. Is there not a case for trying yet again to involve the UN in brokering a settlement? The issue has been festering for a long time, but a settlement seems as far away as ever.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right to say that the situation in Kashmir is serious, and he asked where it will end. The hopes of all of us are that it will end with a peaceful resolution.

My hon. Friend asked about the role of the UN, which I have thought about carefully. However, I doubt that there is a role for the UN in this matter, unless it is at the request of both Pakistan and India. In our judgment, the best hope for a peaceful future for Kashmir lies in a continuation of the talks that were started in Agra in July, but which then, sadly, stalled.

Mr. Crausby: My right hon. Friend will know that India, the largest democracy in the world, has suffered more than most countries from acts of terror over the past 20 years. Will he therefore support India in its efforts to persuade the UN to adopt a comprehensive convention against terrorism?

Mr. Straw: Not only do we support India's proposed comprehensive convention on terrorism, but we have been working actively with the Indian Government on its text. I discussed it in some detail with India's Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, when he was here a couple of weeks ago. We are both working hard to ensure that key sections of the text, which some member states want to be removed, are retained in order to ensure that the convention is effective.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the Government should take account of the various communities in this country, which may have a different perspective on this difficult problem? Will he undertake to avoid the mistakes of his predecessor who, every time he looked at the matter, managed to upset people on every side?

Mr. Straw: I shall leave that second point to one side, as I do not believe that my right hon. Friend the previous Foreign Secretary did upset people on every side. The truth is that the Kashmir problem is one of those issues—of which there are, sadly, too many around the world—in which emotions run high. That means that, if one departs from what are regarded as well-worn texts, it is possible for some people to take offence.

The hon. Gentleman asked about taking account of different perspectives in this country. My constituency contains about 13,000 people of Pakistani origin, and about the same number of people of Indian origin. The hon. Gentleman will therefore understand that I have been living with the Kashmir issue for many years.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), does the Foreign Secretary see any future in talks between India and Pakistan without the intervention of an international mediator, as has happened

in the middle east? Does he agree that the views of the people of Kashmir on both sides of the line of control should be taken into account?

Mr. Straw: Yes. The views of the people, wherever the final line is drawn, will need to be taken into account. However, with regard to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), it is worth bearing in mind that in recent years more than 200,000 people of the Hindu religion have been forced out of Jammu and Kashmir and many of them are now in refugee camps. It is a complicated situation.

Our judgment is that the United Nations or an external mediator will be able to have a constructive role only if it, he or she is asked to exercise that role by the two countries overwhelmingly concerned in this, namely Pakistan and India.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is the Foreign Secretary saying that the UN resolution on Kashmir which followed the 1948 war, as a consequence of which the UN observers were set up in the line of control, is no longer valid? If that is the case, does he have any confidence that an enduring solution can be found? Is it not true that the major powers ought to bring pressure to bear to ensure that opportunism does not occur at this critical time of crisis in south-west Asia?

Mr. Straw: Of course we take account of the resolution passed in 1948. However, one difficulty is that India claims that the terms of the 1948 resolution were superseded by the Simla agreement of the early 1970s, and Pakistan disagrees. Simply exchanging arguments about previous texts will not resolve the situation. It can be resolved only by direct discussion between India and Pakistan. That is why we greatly welcomed the Lahore declaration of two years ago—sadly followed by a resumption of violence—and the talks in Agra, near Delhi, in July. We look forward to a resumption of those discussions. A peaceful future for all the peoples of the area can come about only as a result of discussion and agreement.

Gibraltar

2. **Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): If he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the sovereignty of Gibraltar. [8786]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): The Government stand by their commitment to the people of Gibraltar set out in the preamble to the 1969 constitution, which enshrines the principle of consent of the people of Gibraltar to any change in sovereignty. Through the dialogue in the recently resumed Brussels process, we aim to build a better future for Gibraltarians, including normalising relations with Spain.

Mr. Rosindell: The Minister will have seen recent press reports suggesting that the Government propose holding a referendum in Gibraltar. Will he confirm that the Government will respect the result of any such referendum? Can he also confirm that the Spanish Government will respect the result of a referendum put to the people of Gibraltar?

Peter Hain: The answer to that is yes. That is it. The hon. Gentleman may have been referring to a report that appeared in *The Guardian*. I am sure that he reads it avidly and is a great fan. It said that a secret deal was being hatched over Gibraltar. It was so secret that the Foreign Secretary told the House on 22 June that dialogue with Spain had resumed, I told the House on 10 July that the formal process of Brussels meetings was taking place, on 19 July I told the House that the first meeting in the process had been fixed for 26 July, and on 26 July the Foreign Secretary and Spain's Foreign Minister, Mr. Piqué, held a press conference. Big deal. If *The Guardian* had said that the story was four months old, it would not have made the front pages.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I think that the point of the article was that a leak from the Foreign Office suggested that Gibraltar was to be handed over to Spain. I am glad that the Minister can confirm that he will respect and abide by the decision of the people of Gibraltar. I hope that he will put Gibraltar's case to Europe as well.

Peter Hain: We will abide by and respect the law, because it is enshrined in the 1969 legislation. My hon. Friend speaks on this issue, and I discuss it with him. I ask him and the people of Gibraltar not to take any notice of scaremongering and political posturing. Our objective is to improve life on the Rock and give Gibraltar a better future. To make progress, we need to unfreeze frozen minds in this House, in Spain and in Gibraltar. Then I think a better future will await the people of Gibraltar.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We understand the problem of frozen minds. We recognise that there has been no question of secrecy, but when meetings are fixed other things can be fixed, and the Minister will be aware that Ministers and other members of the Council in Gibraltar have written expressing their concern about the continual failure of Her Majesty's Government in negotiations with Spain to clear the airways and allow the people of Gibraltar, who are part of the European Community, the rights of other citizens in that Community.

Peter Hain: It is precisely such issues that we are discussing with Spain, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who represents a Northern Ireland constituency, will agree that talking is the best way to solve these intractable problems, dating back many centuries. I believe that there is the best prospect of making real progress on this matter—the Foreign Secretary has taken a lead on it—that we have seen for many a long year. The people of Gibraltar and the House should welcome that prospect.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is an anachronism that in 2001 we still effectively have an outpost colony within a major European Union partner? What deadline has he set for

building a sustainable future for Gibraltar and better relations between Gibraltar, the United Kingdom and Spain?

Peter Hain: That is our objective in these discussions. Spain is an important ally of this country. It is a modern, democratic power in Europe and in the world, and we attach great importance to our relationship with Spain and the close friendship between our two Prime Ministers. It is precisely in order to move forward our relationship with Spain, to which my hon. Friend alluded, and to enable the people of Gibraltar to normalise relations with Spain, that we are engaged upon these discussions—discussions that the Opposition also had when they were in government. They embarked on a similar process of dialogue, and they might need to be reminded about that if they get too uppity on the issue.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm the right of the people of Gibraltar to vote in European elections, and will he tell us when a decision will be taken as to where and how they will vote?

Peter Hain: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman got uppity and asked an important question, and I am grateful to him for the opportunity to reply to it. Yesterday, I had discussions on that matter with Minister de Miguel in the margins of the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg and I think that there will be progress. It is important that the Court judgment giving the Gibraltarians the right to vote in the next European elections is honoured and implemented, and we intend to do so, with Spain's agreement as well.

International Terrorism

3. **Angus Robertson** (Moray): What role the United Kingdom Government are promoting for the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe in the campaign against international terrorism. [8787]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): The OSCE has an important role to play in tackling the social, economic and political conditions in which terrorist groups win support and are able to recruit their followers. The UK is supporting and helping finance an OSCE conference in Kyrgyzstan in December on strengthening comprehensive efforts to counter terrorism.

Angus Robertson: When I met Secretary-General Jan Kubis of the OSCE several weeks ago, he emphasised the importance of the OSCE because it includes the former Soviet republics that border Afghanistan. Is the Minister not concerned by the recent reports of clampdowns on free media, and political arrests, in a number of those republics, which run contrary to the democracy-building efforts undertaken by the OSCE? Will the UK Government press for enhanced democratic standards in the plan of action on terrorism that is set to be agreed at the OSCE ministerial conference in December?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman raises important points, which I discussed last week in Bucharest with the Foreign Minister of Romania, currently chairing the OSCE. It is an advantage that the former Soviet republics are members of the OSCE and it is the Government's position that terrorism should be countered in a way that does not result in a diminution of human democratic rights in those republics.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does my hon. Friend's opposition to international terrorism include opposition to terrorism conducted by Iran and Syria in contravention of United Nations resolution 1373? Is he concerned that those countries are supporting and funding terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas? What steps is he taking to oppose that in Europe and elsewhere?

Mr. MacShane: As my hon. Friend is aware, this Government have taken the lead in banning in this country many of the organisations that she lists. The clear position of the Government and the House against international terrorism is well known.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): May I welcome the implicit assurance already given by the Minister that Her Majesty's Government will not support disreputable, oppressive or even tyrannical Governments, who may seek to use the tragic events of 11 September as an excuse to crush justifiable political dissent?

Mr. MacShane: We on the Treasury Bench are implacably opposed to tyrannical Governments and oppressive parties of any sort, anywhere in the world. The hon. Gentleman is right to draw our attention to the fact that the fight against terrorism must extend and promote democracy, not diminish it.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Does my hon. Friend agree, however, that it is important that any organisation or forum where we have influence concentrates in the coming months and, indeed, years on the need to bring about circumstances in which the laundering of money, either from terrorist organisations or from organised crime, is leant on very heavily indeed, especially as they are often two sides of the same coin?

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend is right. As the Minister with responsibility for the Balkans and Latin America, in which capacity I visited Colombia two weeks ago, I know that money laundering and the financial flows that help terrorists and drug dealers are one of the keys to solving those scourges. Since 11 September, there has been a new willingness to co-operate, and the Government and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor have taken the lead internationally in putting before banks their responsibility no longer to provide the conduit for money that promotes violence and criminality.

NATO

4. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): If he will make a statement on the dialogue with Russia about the expansion of NATO. [8788]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): NATO and Russia regularly discuss a wide range of issues, including NATO enlargement. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will visit Moscow tomorrow for talks on the campaign against terrorism and on other issues including co-operation between NATO and Russia.

Mr. Viggers: Does the Minister agree that the relationship with Russia seems to have moved on to a new and better footing recently, but that there is much scope for co-operation, not least in restructuring the Russian armed forces, which is much appreciated by Russia? Does he agree that it is in Russia's interest for its neighbours to be democratic, prosperous and members of NATO, and that the present preoccupation with terrorist concerns should not delay the expansion of NATO, but rather that it should be the basis of a new initiative?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes, I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Gentleman. There has been a sea change in relationships between NATO and Russia since 11 September. Some productive talks have taken place between the Secretary-General of NATO, Lord Robertson, and President Putin, and we hope that that will help to ease Russian concerns about NATO enlargement.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does the Minister agree that the events post-11 September have shown Russia in a positive and encouraging light, particularly in areas such as terrorism and security? On NATO expansion, will he keep in mind the comments that the Russian ambassador made in this Palace last night, when he said that unilateral decisions do not make for long-term security, so the need for co-operation and contact with Russia on such issues is extremely important?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes, that is why we are engaging in the dialogue. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Long before 11 September, Russia had suffered from some horrendous examples of terrorism against its own civilians, but Russia should not have a veto over the enlargement of NATO.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Will the Foreign Secretary raise with the Russian Government recent events in Abkhazia? Will he especially point out that, although armed conflicts on the Russian borders, particularly involving Chechens, as such events apparently did, are deeply unwelcome, a repressive response from Russia would be equally unwelcome and might cause a serious conflagration across the Caucasus and trans-Caucasus?

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary tells me that he will be happy to raise that matter when he goes to Moscow tomorrow. We are well aware of the problems that Russia has to face in Chechnya. We talk to the Russians at every opportunity about human rights, but we recognise that they have a legitimate right to protect their citizens against a terrorist threat which we know is linked to Osama bin Laden.

Middle East

5. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): If he will make a statement on the prospects for peace in the middle east. [8789]

9. **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): When he next plans to meet his Israeli counterpart to discuss the middle east peace process. [8793]

10. **Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): When he last met representatives of the Israeli Government to discuss the middle east peace process; and if he will make a statement. [8794]

14. **Mr. John Lyons** (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): What role he plans for the United Kingdom in pursuing the middle east peace process. [8798]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The situation in the middle east is extremely serious and fraught with danger, not only for the parties themselves, but for the wider world. The United Kingdom, like its European partners and the United States, is committed to the path for peace set out in the Mitchell plan. I am sure that I speak for the whole House in repeating my utter condemnation of the murder of Israeli Tourism Minister Ze'evy on 17 October.

We want restraint to be exercised on both sides; effective action by the Palestinian National Authority to detain and hold the extremists implicated in the murder of Minister Ze'evy and of many other Israelis; withdrawal by the Israeli defence force from Palestinian-controlled areas; and an end to extra-judicial killings. In our view, there can be stability only when there is full recognition of the state of Israel and the right of its people to live in peace with security, and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

Richard Burden: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. He will be aware, I think, that in the past 24 hours I returned from the west bank and Gaza, and on Friday was able to get into Bethlehem to see the aftermath of the destruction of homes and shops and of the shelling of the university and a maternity hospital by Israeli forces. I welcome what the international community has done to secure a partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian towns, but we need to go further and demand, without pre-conditions, the immediate withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Palestinian areas. We must also respond to the requests put to me by the mayors of Beit Jala, Beit Sahur and Bethlehem for an international observer force, so that the world can see what is going on in that part of the world.

Mr. Straw: I understand the strength of feeling on both sides of the issue, which my hon. Friend reflects in part having visited the west bank and Gaza and seen, among the suffering of many other peoples, the suffering of Palestinian people in the occupied territories and elsewhere. I do not think that a huge purpose would be served by making demands without pre-conditions. We must support the parties in getting back on the track of the very clear agenda set out by Tenet and Mitchell in their reports and in the Mitchell plan. Meanwhile, together

with the American Administration, we continue to play our part to try to reduce tension and to get that process back on track. There has long been a case for international observers, and that has been underlined by resolutions of the European Union General Affairs Council.

Mr. Francois: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that both the Palestinians and the Israelis originally accepted the Mitchell plan? Does he acknowledge that the Mitchell plan calls in the first instance for the Palestinians to halt violence in order to facilitate dialogue? Will he urge the Prime Minister to seek assurances once again from Chairman Arafat that he will make every possible effort to halt the current violence so that there is a chance for meaningful talks?

Mr. Straw: We know from the current grave situation that unless there is restraint and understanding on both sides—movement by the Palestinian Authority and President Yasser Arafat to ensure a 100 per cent. effort by them to restrain violence, movement by the Israeli Government to withdraw from areas A, which are exclusively run by the Palestinian Authority, and to end extra-judicial killings and exercise proper respect for human rights, despite the difficulties under which those involved work—the Mitchell plan will not get back on track. However, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that Mitchell was accepted by both sides and remains the best agenda for peace in the middle east.

Mr. Lansley: I have listened carefully to the Foreign Secretary. Does he share with the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), a recognition of the legitimate right of a state to protect its citizens from terrorism? Will he and his colleagues avoid trying to equate exercising that right with terrorism? Will he therefore make it clear to the Israeli authorities that we do not seek to equate their actions with terrorism? Will he also make it clear that we will urge the Palestinian authorities to act against the terrorists, whose activities are the starting point of the Israeli lack of security and, as such, need to be dealt with before Israel can de-escalate violence?

Mr. Straw: Where we can help is to have a balanced approach and avoid being partisan. It is true that a large number of Israelis have lost their lives as a result of action by Palestinian extremists and others in the region, and they were almost entirely innocent civilians. It is also true that an even larger number of Palestinians have lost their lives, almost all of whom were innocent civilians. We need a de-escalation of the conflict.

As for a definition of terrorism, according to international law it does not include acts by states, so it is not relevant to the state of Israel. However, states are capable of acts that are outside international law in other respects, as we well know. We need both sides to exercise restraint, respect international law and get back to the Mitchell process.

Mr. Lyons: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the present escalation of violence, caused by the assassination of Israel's Tourism Minister, to which he referred, and the disproportionate occupation of Palestinian towns and villages, has again underlined the need for the United Kingdom to be at the forefront of attempts to get the peace talks back on track?

Mr. Straw: Yes. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been tireless in his efforts to do that, as have I and many others in this Administration. However, we will get the peace process back on track only if we work closely in concert with our European partners and the United States Administration. The history of the conflict shows that if we work together, it is possible to achieve proper success, but if Europe adopts a different agenda to that of the US, it is extremely unlikely for success to arise.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I welcome the fact that the Foreign Secretary began by asserting the right of the people of Israel to live within secure boundaries, which is no more and no less than was given to them by United Nations Security Council resolution 242. Does he agree that the Palestinians see the continued expansion of settlements by the Israeli Government as highly provocative and that it makes the peaceful resolution of the problems very difficult? When Mr. Sharon visits London in a few weeks, will the right hon. Gentleman repeat, as successive Foreign Secretaries have at the Dispatch Box, that it is the opinion of the British Government that the settlements policy is illegal and contrary to international law?

Mr. Straw: I do not think that we need a visit by Prime Minister Sharon to this country for him to appreciate the position of Her Majesty's Government, which is, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman says, that the settlements in the occupied territories are illegal according to international law. We have asked as a minimum for them to be frozen and, in time, for them to be reduced as part of an overall settlement.

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): It is clear that one of the most effective actions by the international coalition against terrorism is to seize terrorist assets and freeze their bank accounts. My right hon. Friend will be aware that as part of the wider tragedy in the middle east, the suicide bombers of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others continue to cause enormous bloodshed. In conversations, meetings and discussions with the Governments of Iran and Syria and elsewhere, will he urge them to stop harbouring those terrorists and terrorist organisations and, instead, to join the international coalition throughout the world in seizing their assets and freezing their bank accounts?

Mr. Straw: I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that I have already done that. I underlined that message at a press conference that I held with my Iranian counterpart in Teheran during my visit there. The Iranians have publicly thanked me, as a former Home Secretary, for proscribing—banning—the Iranian terrorist organisation Mujaheddin e Khalq. The British embassy in Teheran has received 40,000 letters of thanks for that from members of the Iranian public. At that press conference and in private I pointed out that on the same list I had proscribed—and the House had approved the ban—the military wings of Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad,

and that there was therefore an agenda that we could discuss based on our unambiguous determination to eliminate terrorism wherever it arose in the world.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): When Mr. Sharon comes to London, will the Foreign Secretary take the opportunity to tell him that there are many right hon. and hon. Members who count themselves friends of Israel and who are totally committed to the continued existence of an independent state of Israel, but who nevertheless feel that many of Mr. Sharon's actions and words have been distinctly unhelpful? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell him specifically that to compare President Bush with Neville Chamberlain in the aftermath of 11 September was a crass thing to do?

Mr. Straw: I cannot say that I was especially impressed by the comparison either. I am happy to pass on the hon. Gentleman's views.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): While I agree with my right hon. Friend that the way forward is to get both sides around the table, does he agree that it does not help when Opposition Members demand that the Palestinians exercise control over anyone, given that control in the west bank and Gaza is exercised by the only military force in the area—Israeli defence forces? Unless and until security is handed back to the Palestinians, it is daft to ask them to exercise such a role.

Mr. Straw: I am genuinely sorry to depart slightly from what my hon. Friend has said, but I think that it is reasonable of us to expect the Palestinian Authority to exercise effective constraint in the occupied territories. It is not reasonable of the Israeli defence force to mount incursions into areas A. It must be borne in mind that the Palestinian Authority security forces have some 60,000 members. As we have repeatedly told President Arafat and his colleagues, we look to them to exercise 100 per cent. effort to restrain terrorism arising from the Palestinian Authority's areas. We do not and cannot expect—any more than we have in Northern Ireland—such organisations to achieve a 100 per cent. result where the results are wholly outside their control; however, we continue to expect the authority to show 100 per cent. effort.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Further to the Foreign Secretary's answer a moment ago, I applaud his initiative in visiting Iran. I know that he faced some criticism afterwards, but I think that his visit was an important milestone and absolutely the right thing to do.

If we are to take the sting out of Muslim opinion both at home and abroad, the Arab-Israeli peace process must be seen to be making progress. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore welcome the recent restraint shown by Israel in the face of some provocation, and its continuing withdrawal from Palestinian territory? Clearly, that is crucial to events elsewhere. To give new momentum to the peace process, should not the inconclusive negotiations at Taba be revisited and the objectives set out there be explored once again as a serious agenda for progress?

Mr. Straw: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks, which I greatly appreciate. I congratulate him on what I believe is his first appearance at the Dispatch Box as an Opposition spokesman at Foreign Office questions.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that one of the effects of the middle east conflict is to undermine support in many parts of the Islamic world for the wider coalition against terrorism—although, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the Welsh Assembly today, that is still holding up. There is no doubt about the linkage in people's minds, and that is one of the reasons why we have to work extremely hard for restraint on both sides and to get people back on to the path to peace.

We welcome the restraint shown this week by the Israeli Government. One of the many tragedies about Minister Ze'evy's assassination was that for 10 days—from 7 to 17 October—before that, there was, I think I am right in saying, no Israeli civilian killed—which given the short and dismal time scales in which people on both sides of the divide live in the middle east, was a relatively long period. We must try to return to that relatively benign path.

As for the agenda at Taba, it is crucial to return the parties to implementing the Mitchell plan, which is then an agenda for a wider peace settlement.

European Union

7. **Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): If he will make a statement on progress towards enlargement of the European Union. [8791]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): The Government are a champion of early and successful enlargement and of sticking to the agreed timetable of concluding negotiations by the end of 2002 with the most advanced candidates so that they can participate in the next European Parliament elections in 2004 as members of the European Union.

Mike Gapes: I am pleased with that reply. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the enlargement of the European Union, especially to bring in the countries of central and eastern Europe, will lead to an historic change in relationships after so many years of division? Does he also agree that it is strange that those who say that they are in favour of enlargement voted against the Nice treaty, which makes enlargement possible?

Peter Hain: I agree with my hon. Friend. Candidate countries, including long-standing friends of the United Kingdom—for example, Cyprus, Malta, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary—are puzzled by the Opposition's opposition to the Nice treaty. They are seeking to stop the enlargement process in its tracks and to prevent our friends from joining the rest of Europe and reuniting the continent, which we all want to see.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The whole House will know that Ireland voted against the Nice treaty yet it too, like the Opposition, supports expansion in Europe. However, does the Minister agree that that cannot be at

any cost? For example, the common agricultural policy will have to be reformed. Does he accept that the British taxpayer cannot be expected to pick up the tab?

Peter Hain: I agree that the CAP needs to be reformed. The Government have done more to take forward that agenda than anything that was done during 18 miserable years of Tory rule. The 1999 agreement—I think at Berlin—initiated a series of reforms and discussions that will result in time in the reform of agricultural policy in the EU. That will become even more urgent after enlargement.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Does my right hon. Friend accept that for many of the accession states EU membership is a spur for economic security? However, at the same time they wish to have membership of NATO for military security. The two processes are distinctly different, but will my right hon. Friend accept that they have much in common and that they should be taken forward in similar time scales?

Peter Hain: I agree that both processes should go ahead in parallel. I welcome the contribution that my hon. Friend is making to discussions with countries such as Lithuania and Estonia to bring the agenda forward. It is valuable for Members to engage with applicant countries. I hope that Opposition Members will undertake similar work. It is important that Britain is seen to be standing shoulder to shoulder with countries that we want in the European family, not seeking to keep them out.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The Minister is aware that not all members of the European Union are as good as others at maintaining cross-border security. What reassurances can he and his right hon. Friend give the House about the negotiation process for enlargement, and the steps that will be taken to ensure that cross-border security throughout the EU is as strong as it possibly can be in these difficult times?

Peter Hain: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point—it will be of concern to him, the whole House and, I guess, our constituents. We are ensuring that stringent border controls are placed along the external borders of the new applicant countries. In some instances—for example, between the Czech Republic and Germany—the existing border controls will remain for a period to ensure that there is a phasing in of the process, otherwise we could unlock many migration problems that we do not want.

International Terrorism

8. **Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe): What discussions he has had with representatives of the member states of the European Union following the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September. [8792]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): We have had regular discussions with our European Union colleagues, helping to achieve unprecedented solidarity with the United States of America and the international coalition against terrorism, as well as an EU action plan for a common definition of terrorism, a European arrest warrant, the freezing of assets, intelligence sharing and enhanced airline safety measures.

Mr. Betts: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. When I met with Muslim constituents after the horrific events of 11 September, they recognised that European Union Ministers were working much more closely together on all the issues that he mentioned. They asked me what else the EU could do regarding the peace process in the middle east. Quite frankly, their perception is that when the Americans alone are seen to lead on those issues, their approach is not necessarily even-handed. They believe that if the EU had a closer and more detailed involvement, equal pressure would be applied on the Israelis and the Palestinians to reach a long-term settlement. That is their perception of those issues. What role does my right hon. Friend therefore see for the EU in those matters in future? Does he see it playing a greater role, both as individual states and together in the EU, and can he say how the matter will be progressed in future?

Peter Hain: I agree with my hon. Friend—the EU has a most important and growing role, not just in seeking to find a peace process in the middle east, but in a wider global context, to make sure that the world is rid of terrorism and that international stability and peace are progressed. Some specific things have been achieved. Yesterday, the General Affairs Council, which my right hon. Friend and I attended, issued a detailed statement on advancing a number of initiatives. Of course, Commissioner Patten, special representative Solana and Foreign Minister Michel for the presidency visited Islamabad, Teheran, Riyadh, Cairo and Damascus only a few weeks ago precisely to engage on that agenda and other matters. We will continue to develop that.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The right hon. Gentleman will know that the borders of southern Europe are porous. Does he therefore agree that it is important that the Governments of the EU have urgent discussions with the Governments of, for example, Albania and the Mahgreb, to prevent the flow into southern Europe of people who may well be terrorist supporters?

Peter Hain: Again, the right hon. and learned Gentleman makes an important point. It is something that is very much on our minds, and we are pursuing it. I am happy to give him the assurances that he wants.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The security of the EU from terrorism rests very much on intelligence information. A lot of our intelligence information is drawn from nations of the Islamic world. Is it not felt within Europe that the bombing is creating a situation in which that intelligence begins to be at risk?

Peter Hain: The answer is no. Intelligence sharing is important and my hon. Friend is right to pinpoint it, but we have not found that that has been a problem so far. I remind him and others that the bombing, as he puts it, is designed to take out military installations and create air safety so that the forces involved can go out, track down Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network and destroy

their capability ever to mount a repeat action. It will also ensure that the Taliban forces that provide shelter for him are not able to do so.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Will the Minister join me in welcoming the way in which our European partners have been able, despite differences of emphasis, to adopt a firmly supportive position on the current international crisis and the coalition gathered against it? Does he agree, however, that that support would have been much more difficult to achieve, or would at least have been substantially diluted, if every member of the EU had been required by a common defence or foreign policy to sign up to identical levels of participation and action? Does not the current layered approach to the international crisis within the EU underline the benefits of a flexible Europe of nations and the dangers of further integration?

Peter Hain: That question started well but, disappointingly, tailed off rather badly. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that nothing at all in the European security and defence policy initiative will bring about the dangers that he foresees. On the contrary, we have seen an almost embryonic security and defence policy initiative from the EU in the way in which it responded with unprecedented solidarity and offers of practical support for the international coalition. A series of countries—France, Germany and others—have offered practical military support and co-operation. That is a good step forward. Of course, the ESDP is designed to provide a peacekeeping and humanitarian capability, not to seek to rival or outwit NATO, on which we will depend in our ability to mount necessary operations in areas like the Balkans, where, so far, we have not been able do so.

Afghanistan

11. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What recent discussions he has had with the US Secretary of State regarding the situation in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [8795]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I visited Washington last week to hold discussions with Vice-President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, other members of the United States Administration and senior Members of Congress on the military situation in Afghanistan, the work of the United Nations, the future of Afghanistan and the middle east.

Mr. Mullin: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the growing revulsion at the increasing number of civilian casualties arising from the bombing of Kabul and Kandahar, including the other day the slaughter of seven children and their father? Is he aware that the moral high ground in the dispute is rapidly being eroded by such mistakes? What are we bombing around Kabul and Kandahar, given that the Americans have said repeatedly that they are running out of things to bomb there? If that is so, would it not be best if we stopped?

Mr. Straw: The whole House seriously regrets civilian casualties in any military action. However, great care has been taken in targeting. I understand that across more than 3,000 targets, there have been misses in respect of five. That is five too many, but it indicates the care that has been taken. The death of any innocent civilian should diminish all of us, but while we are working to minimise civilian casualties the Taliban and the al-Qaeda organisation are working to maximise civilian casualties. It is precisely because of the appalling threats that they pose and the overwhelming truth that, unless we take military action, they will carry out those threats in the future, that we must take such military action.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Foreign Secretary address directly the question that he was asked? It is more than three weeks since the allies claimed air superiority, so why is there continued bombing of military targets in population centres, which carries a huge risk of mistakes and civilian casualties? Has he read the article by Abdul Haq published posthumously four days after he was murdered by the Taliban, in which he warns the allies that the bombing of civilian centres in Afghanistan is likely to strengthen rather than weaken the Taliban hold on the country? Has he read the article and understood it, and does he intend to do anything about it?

Mr. Straw: On the latter point, I regret that I have not read the article. I am certainly familiar with the arguments, which we heard at this stage in the Kosovo campaign, as well. In respect of Kosovo, it was argued here and elsewhere that the military action was only strengthening Milosevic. We heard that repeatedly and we are hearing the same argument now.

Bombing has had to be undertaken in order to take out the air capacity of the Taliban, and also to destroy the terrorist training camps of the al-Qaeda organisation and to degrade the overall military capability of the Taliban. Of course, there will not be bombing of targets that are not there or where the targeting has already worked, but the hon. Gentleman should be sufficiently aware of the nature and complexity of the terrain and the density of the Taliban's military operations in many parts of Afghanistan to understand that three weeks is a relatively short period, not a long period. We have said repeatedly—and the Prime Minister underlined it again in a speech to the Welsh Assembly earlier today—that we must be in for the long haul.

I say to the hon. Gentleman, as I say to others who are concerned about the military action, that I have yet to hear any serious alternative to counter the threat posed by the al-Qaeda organisation. Of course we would have preferred a peaceful answer. One was offered by President Bush in his speech to Congress on 20 September, when a clear ultimatum was issued to the Taliban to deliver Osama bin Laden and his key associates, to wind up the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation, and to allow international verification of that.

All those things could have happened without a further drop of blood being spilt. The fact that, sadly, they have not happened is the responsibility of the Taliban. Our responsibility is to keep the world safe from this kind of continuing threat, and, although I regret the fact that we must carry out the military campaign, it is none the less a necessity.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Do not all the indicators show that the appalling massacre of Christian worshippers in Pakistan was, in effect, carried out by

close allies of the regime in Afghanistan? If that is indeed so—and, as I have said, all the evidence seems to point to it—does it not, like 11 September, illustrate the nature of the enemy we are facing? In my view, to give in virtually before this has even started would be the worst kind of appeasement of tyranny.

Mr. Straw: I share my hon. Friend's opinion. Along with many other Members in all parts of the House, he has been steadfast in his resolution in support of the necessity of the military action.

What we need to understand is that, well before 11 September, the Taliban were marked out as one of the most inhuman and brutal regimes in human history. Their actions led, for instance—well before 11 September—to more than 4.5 million refugees having to flee their native land because of the brutality of that regime.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): It must be right that the Prime Minister reminded us today of the horrors and evils of the events of 11 September, as the cause of the current crisis and, indeed, the justification for the military action. Is it not also essential, however, to remind us all continually of the clear objectives that flowed from that atrocity, and which are the basis for Conservative Members' support for the action being taken in pursuit of them?

Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that there has been no change in, or dilution of, the objectives published on 16 October, and that they still include the bringing to justice of bin Laden and the destruction of al-Qaeda, the changing of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the alleviation of the humanitarian disaster facing so many people in that country and, in the longer term, the elimination of the threat of international terrorism wherever it occurs?

Mr. Straw: I can confirm all those objectives, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did in his speech today. We have just been speaking more about the military campaign, but a huge effort is being undertaken to get humanitarian aid into Afghanistan.

Last Saturday, when asked whether there should be a pause in the military action to allow food to get in, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, the United Nations Under-Secretary in charge of humanitarian affairs, said on Radio 4:

"The military strikes as such have not hampered in any significant way the delivery of humanitarian assistance."

The simple fact is that if we are to save Afghanistan for the people of that country, we must continue a military campaign that is targeted and focused; we must continue giving humanitarian aid; and we must continue our efforts to build a better future for Afghanistan under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mr. Ancram: Does the Foreign Secretary accept that, as well as sustaining political and international support—which is being done successfully—we must sustain the confidence of the British public in the actions that are being taken? Is not the greatest enemy of confidence uncertainty, and has the Foreign Secretary noticed, as I have, a growing public perception of uncertainty about the immediate relationship between the declared objectives and the current bombing campaign? Should not the Government move urgently to dispel that uncertainty by clearly and continuously setting out the specific reasons for the bombing, and—without, of course, disclosing sensitive strategic information—explaining how it is directly linked to the achievement of the vital objectives to which we all remain committed?

Mr. Straw: What is remarkable, but also heartwarming is the extent of the support in this country and abroad for the international coalition against terrorism and for military action. Notwithstanding that, I accept that we should continue to explain why we are doing these things and continue to explain to the public and to the wider world how the action is proportionate, targeted and consistent with international law.

Speaker's Statement

3.30 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make. Following the Home Secretary's statement yesterday, I made a comment from the Chair which some observers have interpreted as a political statement. I wish to assure the House that I am wholly committed to maintaining the long-standing tradition that the Speaker stands aside from politics. The remark I made yesterday stemmed from my personal experience with constituents in my Glasgow, Springburn constituency, particularly in the community of Sighthill. Members may be aware that there was a particularly tragic murder of a young asylum seeker in that area during the summer recess. If, contrary to my intention, my remark was subject to the interpretation that has been placed on it, I seek the indulgence of the House.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it be in order to thank you very much for what you have just said, to express sympathy with you as a constituency Member, but most of all to thank you for upholding the impartiality of the Chair?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

BILL PRESENTED

ANIMAL HEALTH BILL

Secretary Margaret Beckett, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Mr. Secretary Milburn, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Mr. Michael Wills and Mr. Elliot Morley, presented a Bill to amend the Animal Health Act 1981: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 39].

Firearms (Replica Weapons)

3.31 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to restrict the availability and use of ball bearing guns and similar replica weapons.

Last year, two girl constituents of mine who are sisters aged 12 and 15 were hit by ball-bearings fired from a gun while out walking in a public place. The experience traumatised both of them, especially the younger, whose quality of life suffered mentally for many weeks after. Fortunately, only their legs were hit. It could have been their heads, or, even worse, their eyes.

Since then, I have read all too many reports of local people being similarly targeted in public places, including children. In August, the Bournemouth *Daily Echo* reported a seven-year-old boy covered in blood having been shot in the forehead by a bullet from a BB gun. Such reports are frequently accompanied by the repeated warnings of the police about the carrying and use of BB guns and similar replica weapons in public. They are all too often called out in response to reports of the use of real handguns that turn out to be toys or replicas.

Last July in Bournemouth, a Dorset police helicopter was called out to lead a ground patrol to respond to a situation where a member of the public saw a 15-year-old boy with what appeared to be a real firearm. It was a BB gun. Of course, the police have no choice but to take such reports seriously, assuming that real weapons are being used. It represents a time-consuming waste of scarce police manpower.

I have no doubt that many hon. Members have read of similar experiences in their constituencies. That is the position that my Bill seeks to address. The guns that I seek to restrict are exact replicas, many made under licences issued by the major gun manufacturers: Colt, Smith and Wesson, Beretta, Uzi, Walther and so forth. Some are so-called soft air guns that shoot plastic bullets. Others shoot pellets or ball-bearings. They are marketed for fun gunning, whatever that is. They are freely available in toy, camping and gun shops, in markets, by mail order and on the internet. There are almost no restrictions on their purchase and use. As a result, they are widely used by children and young people, and criminals.

There is no doubt that the 1997 ban on handguns has contributed to the sharp reduction in the use of handguns in armed robbery. However, the legislation is being undermined by the alarming growth in the market for replica guns, estimated at more than 50 per cent. in the last two years alone.

This growing interest by children and young people, as well as criminals, should be a major concern to the House. It is creating insecurity and fear in our local communities. As I have said, it puts the police under pressure in the deployment of armed response to reports of replica incidents, which undoubtedly put the users at risk because the police must assume that the guns are real—and that could spark a tragedy, as indeed it has. The House will recall last July's tragedy when Metropolitan police officers shot dead a man in Brixton after he threatened them with what looked like a pistol but was in fact a novelty lighter. That strengthens the arguments for the police to be routinely armed, and may make it more difficult to recruit and retain quality police officers.

Dorset police regularly repeat warnings about BB guns and similar replica weapons ahead of school holidays, which see a rise in the number of such incidents. Officers talk to pupils at local schools and warn of the potential dangers. Regrettably, such warnings are proving unsuccessful in reducing such incidents. The fact is that some young people today want replica guns as fashion accessories to give them power and status. There are children who play with BB guns that shoot ball-bearings as if they are toys.

In response to this situation, countries such as France, Belgium and Japan have banned uncertified lookalikes and toys. Soft air weapons and other replicas are required to be brightly coloured and to look obviously different from real guns. My Bill could provide the vehicle for such a practical measure to be introduced here. It would not, however, deal with the firing of ball-bearings at people in public, which is the prime motivation behind my Bill.

The House will be aware that the Select Committee on Home Affairs gave detailed consideration to this issue last year. Its report "Controls over Firearms" was published in April 2000. The evidence given to the Committee by the Association of Chief Police Officers was very clear. I shall quote for the record what it said in support of my Bill. It stated:

"The police view the availability of replica and imitation firearms as a real risk to public safety. Replica and imitation firearms are regularly (at least 25-30 per cent. of cases) used in crime to threaten victims. It is not an offence to carry a replica or imitation firearm in a public place in circumstances which might cause alarm or distress. Police are often called to incidents where a person has deliberately or recklessly displayed a 'firearm'. Apart from the waste of police resources this represents a risk to the person concerned whilst armed police officers carry out an investigation. A number of fatal shootings have occurred because police officers believed they were facing a real firearm only to discover later the weapon was in fact an imitation. The police believe these weapons should be subject to strict controls or banned."

In its report, the Committee recommended that the purchase or sale of any imitation firearm by or to persons under 18 by telephone, mail order or on the internet should be prohibited. The Government have accepted that and propose to extend it to include sales through any outlet, including face to face.

Paragraph 54 of the Committee's report said:

"We recommend that when toy guns are offered for sale they must be clearly described and identified as toys".

It is that recommendation that the Government have accepted in principle. They want to consider whether it is possible to devise a clear distinction between imitation guns that might be properly sold as toys and the more realistic replica guns of the kind suitable for film and theatrical work.

That is where the matter rests. However, the then Home Office Minister, now the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), confirmed the Government's continuing commitment to banning replica weapons on Budget day in March this year when he opened an exhibition in the House by the Gun Control Network. It is now clear that the Home Office is concentrating on even more serious issues in response to international terrorism. It is unlikely to produce any such legislation for some time to come, so my Bill provides the House with the opportunity to demonstrate its concern that legislation be introduced to address the irresponsible use of BB guns and other replica weapons. Should the House allow my Bill to proceed, it could also provide a vehicle for the Government's intended legislation, should they be so minded.

My Bill to restrict the availability and use of ball-bearing guns and similar replica weapons has all-party support and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Atkinson, Mr. David Amess, Mrs. Annette L. Brooke, Sir Sydney Chapman, Mr. Tom Cox, Mrs. Ann Cryer, Mr. Bill Etherington, Mr. Mike Hancock, Rev. Martin Smyth, Bob Spink, Adam Price and Mr. John Wilkinson.

Firearms (Replica Weapons)

Mr. David Atkinson accordingly presented a Bill to restrict the availability and use of ball bearing guns and similar replica weapons: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 30 November, and to be printed [Bill 41].

Proceeds of Crime Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.41 pm

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The last Bill that I introduced on Second Reading, the Football Disorder (Amendment) Bill, completed its Committee stage in less than one full Committee sitting. I very much doubt that we shall have so much good fortune with this Bill, which has more than 400 clauses, but it is a very important measure.

The Bill is about taking the profit out of crime. The proceeds of crime have a corrosive effect on society and our economy. The wealth is flaunted and the message seems to be that crime pays. Such wealth is offensive to our hard-working and law-abiding constituents and establishes harmful role models for our young people. Moreover, businesses whose profits are inflated by criminal proceeds can gain an unfair advantage over honest competitors. The proceeds of crime also provide the working capital for future criminal enterprise. Recovering the money is therefore essential for crime reduction.

Traditionally, however, the criminal justice system has been much better at convicting criminals than at depriving them of their wealth. Far too many defendants pass through the criminal justice system with little or no effort being made to deprive them of the benefit that they have derived from their crimes. The Bill says that people should not be able to enjoy the proceeds of criminal activity. They should not enjoy the trappings of wealth when that wealth is built on the misery of victims or activities that damage and exploit society.

Organised crime is big business and the sums involved are huge. The value of drugs seized last year exceeded £735 million, and the value of illegal drugs transactions has been estimated at up to £1.5 billion annually. Cigarette smuggling annually costs the Exchequer almost £3 billion and loose tobacco smuggling about £900 million. The assets derived from organised crime represent about 2 per cent. of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product. Globally, the profits of some drug cartels are comparable to those of some of the world's major companies.

Like legitimate business, organised crime sets out to maximise profits and minimise risk. It forms strategic alliances. It continually diversifies into different commodities and services, depending on the market. The criminals concerned are cash-rich, and it is easier for them to dispose of the proceeds of their crime by investing in other criminal enterprises than to invest them in the conventional way. None the less, some of them use dirty money to buy and run legitimate businesses. They employ bankers, lawyers and accountants and they operate across international borders.

I believe that with this Bill, we shall be able to cut into the profits that are made from crime and increase the risk to those who indulge in criminal activities. We have to follow the commodity, as we do when we set out to seize drugs. We need to target people, as we do when we go after persistent offenders in the criminal community. We also need, however, to follow the money. The police and customs experts believe that following the money is an effective route in identifying major criminals, disrupting criminal organisations and, of course, relieving crooks of the proceeds of their crimes.

Money laundering is consistently given prominence in the annual threat assessment of the National Criminal Intelligence Service. That is why customs and the National Crime Squad now consider the financial aspects in every criminal investigation and why the detention and seizure of drug-related cash at the border is now a top enforcement activity for customs.

Mrs. Helen Clark (Peterborough): I understand that it has been hard in the past for police to define where laundered money has come from—from crime, drugs or indeed terrorism. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the Bill will remove that anomaly?

Mr. Denham: Certainly it is our intention to remove a number of anomalies that have prevented effective measures to recover the proceeds of crime. The different treatment of different types of criminal offence, including drug trafficking and money laundering, is one of the problems that it is designed to tackle.

The Government's view of the importance of tackling crime through its finances is one that is increasingly shared in other countries, leading other Governments to review their own laws on dealing with the proceeds of crime. To go further, which is the aim of the Bill, we need to put in place an effective legal framework and legal powers. The Bill will do that, and I shall explain its role and structure presently.

This important Bill needs to be supported by other action. First, resources and a new priority for financial investigation and the recovery of criminal assets are needed. That is why we have ensured that more than £45 million will be available in the current settlement period to strengthen asset recovery arrangements and we have recently announced funding for 86 additional financial investigators for the police service in England and Wales.

Secondly, we need expertise. The work is complex and it needs skilled people, more financial investigators trained to common high standards and prosecutors and judges equipped to deal with difficult cases. We are preparing for that now. We have recently announced the appointment of a development manager to plan a new centre of excellence in financial investigation, and to help us begin delivering improved training in advance of legislation.

Thirdly, we need international co-operation. Criminals use national boundaries to protect both themselves and their money. The United Kingdom is in the forefront of moves to establish common standards on money laundering and arrangements for cross-border co-operation in the European Union, the G8, the United Nations and the Financial Action Task Force. Improvements made by the Bill will apply to the recovery of money generated by crime overseas as they will to domestic crime.

There are major developments in the financial sector itself. The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 established the Financial Services Authority as the single regulatory body for financial business in the United Kingdom. Earlier this year, the FSA published a hard-hitting report on allegations that UK banks had laundered funds on behalf of General Abacha, the former

President of Nigeria, and his family and associates. The report made it clear that 15 of 23 banks identified had significant weaknesses in their anti-money laundering controls.

Under its existing powers, the FSA was able to order immediate action to rectify the deficiencies, but when the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 comes fully into force on 30 November, the authority will acquire tough new powers to make rules on money laundering, penalise breaches and mount criminal prosecutions, and it has stated publicly that those powers will be rigorously applied.

The Government have set a target of doubling receipts from the proceeds of crime by 2004. In real money, that is a target of just under £60 million. The Government and the law enforcement and prosecution agencies have drawn up a strategy for achieving this, which we will publish shortly.

The increased focus on asset recovery must be accompanied by a comprehensive updating of the legislation. I shall set out what we see as the problems in the current legislation. The confiscation and forfeiture powers and the money laundering offences are set out in the Drug Trafficking Act 1994 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988, as amended by the Proceeds of Crime Act 1995. Frankly, the legislation has failed to keep pace with the increasingly sophisticated measures used for hiding and laundering criminal assets.

For a start, the separate treatment of drug trafficking and other criminal activity makes the legislation ineffective against today's versatile criminal entrepreneurs. When dealing with criminal groups, it is often in practice impossible to distinguish between the proceeds of their drug trafficking and those of other activities. The courts have called for the abolition of this distinction in the criminal law on money laundering.

Secondly, to prosecute money laundering and confiscate criminal proceeds, it is necessary to find them. The law at present does not give the police and customs enough help; a search warrant on its own is of little use if they do not know where to search. With modern technology, money can be transferred from one bank account to another at the touch of a button. We need new investigative powers to facilitate the tracing of assets.

Thirdly, even if investigators find the assets, they have no powers to freeze them. Restraint orders, which prohibit defendants and their associates from disposing of assets, are not available until the defendant is about to be charged. That is far too late. By that time, the defendant will often have realised that he or she is under investigation and will have placed their assets beyond reach. Moreover, the restraint procedures themselves are costly and inaccessible, which is why last year fewer than 300 such orders were made.

The complexity of the confiscation system deters the courts and the practitioners. The system produces only about 1,200 confiscation orders each year, compared with over 65,000 defendants found guilty of offences in the Crown court, most of which are for acquisitive crime.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I fully support the Bill, but the Home Office commentary says that there will be protection for innocent third parties. Does that mean that the investigative and restraint procedures will be time-limited?

Mr. Denham: It is difficult to impose specific time limits. That is a matter for the court's discretion. The court has a wide power to vary the discharge of any restraint order if there is an application by the person affected by it. If a court were dissatisfied by the progress of an investigation, it would be able to discharge the restraint order. However, to put a time limit in the Bill would not be the right way forward.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On third parties, where a legitimate bill is owed—to a builder, say—and cannot be paid because there is a freezing order on the assets of a suspected person, who will protect the interests of the innocent third party, namely the builder? Is there some mechanism whereby the builder can get protection and at least some of the money that he is owed in good faith?

Mr. Denham: There is provision for the freeing up of assets to enable the continuation of the conduct of legitimate business. The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes a not unreasonable point, but the provision that he seeks will be available to the court under those circumstances.

In addition to there being relatively few confiscation orders, they are poorly enforced. Each year, receipts amount to only 40 to 50 per cent. of the value of orders made. Enforcement procedures need to be strengthened.

The institutional arrangements of the criminal justice system are stacked against asset recovery. The police and prosecution agencies have historically focused—understandably, perhaps—on detecting and prosecuting the criminal. Magistrates courts find it difficult to give priority to confiscation orders in their enforcement of a wider range of court orders and sentences.

There is a further problem. Except where drug or terrorist cash is discovered at the border, current legislation provides no means of recovering criminal proceeds other than after a conviction. However, many major criminal figures have become untouchable by criminal prosecution. They organise or finance the criminal activity of others and profit from the results, but remain remote from the commission of particular crimes. That often makes it impossible for law enforcement authorities to build a case against them.

Criminal proceedings may be impossible for other reasons, for example where the suspect is abroad and cannot be extradited, or where the suspect has died. In many of these cases, law enforcement has compelling evidence that assets were derived from unlawful activity, and this is often supplemented by evidence that property has been concealed and that no legitimate explanation for the property exists.

The law enforcement agencies regularly encounter cases such as those I have outlined, and a survey last year identified 400 individuals or groups with estimated combined assets of £440 million who potentially fell into this category.

I emphasise that the prosecution of criminals must always take priority, and will continue to do so. However, I do not believe that it is acceptable that ownership of the

[Mr. Denham]

proceeds of crime should remain immune from any form of legal challenge where criminal proceedings are not available.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will not the test of the Bill be the word "potential"? Have the Government thought through carefully how to overcome the degree of potentiality when it comes to assets? Although it might be easy to estimate the amount of assets involved in a case, has the Minister any plans to define and clarify the word "potential" in that context when the Bill is being considered in Committee?

Mr. Denham: Given that the Bill has more than 430 clauses, I am sure that the Standing Committee will have many opportunities to scrutinise many aspects of the Bill. However, as I shall make clear in a moment, the civil recovery of the proceeds of crime will take place by civil test, but in the courts. The civil test has degrees or scales of weight, and we expect that the recovery of the proceeds of crime will be a matter near the upper end of the civil test. We must remember that we are talking not about an executive or administrative process but about a court-based process. That process will be at the heart of what we are doing, but the Bill sets out in some detail the legal framework through which we can seek to recover the proceeds of crime.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Will the Minister explain the Government's thinking with regard to a person who has been subject to a criminal prosecution and acquitted? Will it still be permissible or appropriate for civil proceedings to be taken against the assets of a person in that situation?

Mr. Denham: Certainly, there could be circumstances in which such action could be appropriate because the action will concern the property, not the individual. Civil recovery is a matter not of finding a person guilty of a crime but of recovering the proceeds of crime, if that can be established to the satisfaction of the courts and according to the tests laid out in the Bill. It is clearly conceivable, therefore, that there could be circumstances in which a person's assets could be recovered even though his conviction on a specific offence had failed.

There is no moral right to enjoy the proceeds of crime. Given the corrosive effect that retention of such assets can have on society, and the vital importance for crime reduction and public morale of preventing their use to finance new criminal activity, the absence of any remedy represents a gap in the legislation that it is increasingly important to fill.

I shall briefly run through the Bill's main sections.

First, the Bill will establish the Assets Recovery Agency, which will share the confiscation functions of the law enforcement and prosecution authorities. In a criminal case, those authorities will be able to ask the agency to handle the financial investigation and confiscation aspects, while they concentrate on the criminal investigation and proceedings.

Secondly, the agency will have sole authority to operate the civil recovery and taxation functions that the Bill creates. I shall return to those functions in a moment.

Thirdly, the agency will train and accredit financial investigators, who will then be able to apply their skills in their own organisations.

Finally, the agency's director will advise the Secretary of State on matters relating to asset recovery. The director will play a leading role in the development and implementation of the asset recovery strategy.

The agency will operate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland for its taxation functions. It will be a champion for and raise the profile of asset recovery.

The Bill will remove obstacles faced by the authorities when they try to trace or freeze a suspect's assets and to obtain a confiscation order after conviction. The power to restrain the suspect's assets will be made more accessible. Restraint orders will be available at an earlier stage, from the start of the criminal investigation, and applications will be heard by the Crown court instead of the High Court.

Confiscation powers will be extended. A single conviction for drug trafficking, money laundering or any of a list of other offences to be specified by order by the Home Secretary will trigger the assumptions procedure. Under that procedure, the court will assume that all the defendant's assets are derived from criminal activity unless he can show to the contrary. Multiple convictions and offences committed over an extended period will also attract the assumptions procedure—that is, the convicted defendant will be treated as having a criminal lifestyle.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Under clause 11, four assumptions are set out. Am I right in assuming that all four have to be made by the court if it is to move on? I guess that they are to be based on statements of information, covered in clause 17. Does the prosecutor or the director have to give the grounds for his belief or merely make a bald statement that he believes such and such? I am puzzled as to how this mechanism will work.

Mr. Denham: The test is objective and factual, based on the nature of the offences of which the defendant has been found guilty. I do not have clause 11 in front of me, but certain offences, such as money laundering and drug trafficking, attract an automatic assumption. I think that it is a question of four offences over six years or an offence committed over an extended period of time. We have tried to make the test for the courts objective rather than subjective.

Mr. Garnier: The Minister is not doing himself justice. Perhaps he could have a look at clause 11 and come back to me later in his remarks, because I am not sure that he has answered my point. I do not expect him to know the detail of the Bill off by heart, even though it is his Bill, but perhaps he could take instructions from his officials during the afternoon and then advise the House.

Mr. Denham: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for his advice on how to handle this part of the Bill. If there are any outstanding points, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) can deal with them in the winding-up speech.

We have clearly set out the tests that we wish to be applied. Their application will be mandatory, on application from the director of the Assets Recovery

Agency. If any further ambiguity remains, I will ask my hon. Friend to return to it during the winding-up speech. It may, of course, come up during the debate.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I apologise for detaining the Minister, but I hope that he will ask the Under-Secretary to take advice on this point. It seems clear from subsections (1) and (7) of clause 11 that all four assumptions must be made except where an exception is specifically registered by the court. They are not tests but wide-ranging assumptions about what has gone on or is purported to have gone on. This is not a detail; it is highly material and we need an explicit answer.

Mr. Denham: I should be happy to clarify the point if necessary in the course of the debate, although I believe that the hon. Gentleman and I may be slightly at cross-purposes about the nature of the tests that then require the courts to apply the assumptions. Perhaps I may make progress, but if the opportunity arises to develop the point further I shall be happy to do so.

In the circumstances that I have set out—multiple applications, offences committed over an extended period, convictions for drug trafficking or money laundering or any of a list of other offences to be specified by the Home Secretary—the convicted defendant will be treated as having a criminal lifestyle. The assumption will then be that all the defendant's assets are derived from criminal activity unless he can show to the contrary. I believe that the use of assumptions in such cases is justified and a vital ingredient of the legislation. Their use has been upheld by the European Court of Human Rights as well as the Court of Appeal and Privy Council.

The procedure will not be available if the court considers that applying the assumption would give rise to a serious risk of injustice and the assumption will of course be rebuttable by the convicted defendant's demonstrating the legitimate origin of his assets.

Part 5 empowers the director of the agency to sue people in the High Court for the recovery of property that is derived from unlawful activity. That is a civil action to which civil rules and procedures will apply. In Scotland, Scottish Ministers will be responsible for civil recovery.

Civil recovery gets to the heart of the problem of criminal assets which currently remain beyond reach when criminal proceedings are not available.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok). I seek clarification of the way in which the process will operate. As I understand it, the Government wish to seize the assets of criminals, and lawyers wish to help the criminals to keep those assets. Let us assume that there is a process of search and certain assets are recovered, identified and seized. What will happen if other assets, which have successfully been hidden by lawyers and accountants on behalf of the criminal, are subsequently discovered? Will the Government be able to pursue those also or is it a one-shot gun, which gives only one chance to identify and seize the assets?

Mr. Denham: With the safeguard that assets must be the proceeds of crime, it will be possible to revisit, should further assets be identified as proceeds of crime. However, there is a distinction between the confiscation procedure on conviction and civil recovery. In the conviction-based approach, the assumption could be said to be that the assets are the product of criminal activity. On the civil side, the search is for those assets that are the proceeds of crime, which of course would include property that had been bought using cash that had been obtained by converting the proceeds of crime into cash. However, the broad answer to my hon. Friend's question is yes.

The director will have access to civil investigation powers. Where necessary, and if the court is satisfied that he has a good arguable case, he will be able to seek an interim receiving order that freezes the property pending the outcome of the case and places it under the control of a court-appointed receiver.

Civil recovery will not seek to establish guilt or innocence but will focus on whether particular property is or represents the proceeds of crime. Civil recovery will not be an alternative to prosecution, which will remain the preferred course wherever possible. The law enforcement and prosecution authorities will apply their normal evidential and public interest tests in deciding whether to pursue criminal proceedings. They will refer cases to the director for possible civil recovery only where prosecution is not available.

The scheme contains substantial safeguards. The burden of proof will be on the director. The civil standard of proof will apply, but the court will be able to require a high standard in practice, as is usual where allegations of unlawful conduct are made in civil proceedings. There will be a financial threshold below which proceedings will not be initiated and we expect to set that at not less than £10,000. Civil legal aid will be available, subject to appropriate tests, and where the director loses the court will be able to order him to compensate respondents for any financial loss that they have incurred. Any victim who has been unlawfully deprived of the property will be able to join the proceedings and the court will give their claim priority over the director's. There is substantial and detailed protection for people who show that they purchased property in good faith for full value and without notice of its tainted origins, and for other innocent interests. Similar schemes operate successfully in Ireland and the USA, and the Australian Government have recently introduced a Bill that includes such a scheme.

Mr. Letwin: I am doubly grateful to the Minister for his courtesy in giving way, but will he explain whether the Government think that the serious default provision in that compensation scheme will be effective?

Mr. Denham: Yes, we do. There has to be a scheme for those who are seriously wronged by the way in which the director goes about his business. The detail of how the scheme is intended to operate and the tests that will be applied are matters that will be considered in detail in Committee. We have given some care and thought to getting the matter right, and I look forward to discussing it further in detail, but it is important that the scheme exists as one of the protections under part 5.

Part 5 also provides for the forfeiture of cash in magistrates court proceedings. Under the Drug Trafficking Act 1994, provision already exists for the seizure and forfeiture of cash discovered at the border and suspected to be the proceeds of, or intended for use in,

[Mr. Denham]

drug trafficking. In 1999-2000, £4.4 million was forfeited in the magistrates courts under that procedure, but it is available only in relation to drug trafficking and cash discovered at external borders. Those restrictions are no longer defensible, so we propose that the police and customs should be empowered to seize cash that they reasonably suspect to be derived from, or intended for use in, crime, and to seek its recovery in civil proceedings. That power will apply to cash discovered anywhere in the United Kingdom.

To ensure that the powers can be exercised effectively, the law enforcement authorities will need to be able to search for suspect cash, where they believe that it is being carried by an individual or that it is on premises where they are lawfully present, so the Bill will establish a new search power for that purpose, with appropriate and substantial checks and safeguards. Like the existing cash forfeiture scheme, that power will only be available where a substantial sum of cash is discovered, perhaps similar to the existing minimum threshold of £10,000.

Part 6 will give the director taxation powers. Experience here and abroad has shown that taxation is a powerful tool for recovering criminal assets. Criminals and their associates are often unknown to the tax authorities and would be liable to heavy payments if their tax position were examined. Of course, current tax law does not exempt income and gains from tax liability simply because they are derived from an illegal business. So if the director concludes that civil recovery proceedings are not viable or should not be pursued, but has reasonable grounds to suspect a person of having received income or gains derived from unlawful activity, he will be able to assess the person's tax position and, if necessary, issue a tax demand.

The director will, with one exception, apply normal Inland Revenue rules and policies. The exception is that, unlike the Inland Revenue, the director will be able to raise an income tax assessment where he cannot identify the source from which the income has derived. Taxpayers dealt with by the director will have an avenue of appeal to the special commissioners and of complaint to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. The director will be required to treat tax information with the same confidentiality as the Revenue.

Neither part 5 nor part 6 will have any impact on the ordinary taxpayer, who will continue to be dealt with by the Inland Revenue. Evasion of tax payable on legitimate income or gains will not fall within the purview of the director.

Under the Bill, the distinction between the offence of laundering drug proceeds and the offence of laundering other criminal proceeds will be removed. The need under present law for the prosecution to prove whether the proceeds derive from drug or non-drug offences is one reason for the small number of prosecutions brought. It will be an offence for a person working in regulated sectors such as banking to fail to report money laundering. The offence will be committed if the defendant had reasonable grounds to know or suspect that money laundering was taking place, but the court will be required to take account of whether a defendant complied with industry guidelines. Under the Bill, those guidelines will need to be endorsed by the Treasury.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): My right hon. Friend mentioned the provisions in relation to bankers. He may be aware that, earlier this year, the Government introduced the Financial Investigations (Northern Ireland) Order 2001 to combat money laundering in Northern Ireland, and that article 6 created a power to issue a general solicitors circular under which solicitors are obliged to provide limited information about clients who are under investigation. Can he confirm that a similar provision will be included in the Bill?

Mr. Denham: As it stands, the Bill applies to the regulated sector of the financial services industry. However, as some right hon. and hon. Members know, a European directive is going through the system which may change the boundaries of the regulated sector. If it does, it will be necessary to consider whether the legislation requires any changes.

At the moment, the law makes it too easy for people to turn a blind eye to money laundering. The prosecution must prove that the defendant knew or suspected that there was money laundering. It is reasonable to expect people working in professions such as banking and handling high-value business to work to certain standards of competence and vigilance.

Part 8 provides powers for tracing and investigating suspected criminal assets. That will include a new customer information order requiring banks to inform the investigator if they hold an account for a person under investigation, and an account-monitoring order requiring banks to inform the investigator of movements of such an account over a period.

Civilian staff working for the police and customs services will for the first time have access to investigation powers, provided that they have been accredited as financial investigators by the agency. That will make it easier for police and customs to expand their financial investigation capacity. The Home Secretary will have power by order to list other law enforcement agencies and departments whose accredited financial investigators are to have access to the investigation powers.

The Bill also makes provision to extend investigation powers to the director of the new agency. The director will not have a law enforcement role, so will not carry out money-laundering investigations. He will, however, have access to the investigative powers for the purpose of carrying out either a confiscation or a civil recovery investigation. The additional power of a disclosure order, which is not provided for other agencies, will be available to the director, under which the director will be able to require persons to answer questions and provide information. That power is based on a similar power to that of the director of the Serious Fraud Office.

The Bill is innovative and strengthens the law substantially. I know that it will be the subject of much detailed scrutiny in Committee, and I am sure that many points of principle and substance will be raised in this debate. However, the Bill is fair and proportionate to the problem that it addresses—a major one for our society and our economy. The Bill forms part of a wider strategy. It will be backed by resources and expertise. Importantly,

the recovered assets fund, which we established earlier this month, will enable us to plough back a significant proportion of the receipts that the Bill generates into the fight against crime and the use of measures in the local community. That will help step up the battle against crime and to reduce crime. I commend the Bill to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that Back-Bench speeches are restricted to 15 minutes.

4.18 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): We on the Conservative Benches share the Government's desire to deprive people who profit hugely from very evil acts, but who cannot directly be related to some of those evil acts, of the ill-gotten gains on which they subsist. I suspect that that is common ground among members of all parties, and certainly between the Government and ourselves. For that reason, I shall not recommend that my hon. Friends oppose the Bill.

However, some of the provisions of at least two parts of this immense Bill—parts 2 and 5—give rise to serious concerns about the balance between the state and the individual, and about civil liberties. I shall explain in a moment why it is evident from the Minister's comments that the Bill has not wholly been absorbed by the Government Front-Bench team. Therefore, before I recommend that my hon. Friends vote for the Bill on Third Reading, we will need to be convinced in Committee that those concerns have been adequately handled.

The Minister, reading from a script all too familiar to those of us who are used to Whitehall briefings, described the contents of part 2 but did not give its flavour. The Minister and I first encountered one another on the Standing Committee that considered the Social Security Bill in 1997. Although I have a high regard for him and his sense of balance between the state and the individual, I am not convinced that the Bill's flavour has been conveyed to him, let alone to the House.

The purpose of part 2 is to allow the confiscation in criminal proceedings of property from prospectively evil individuals, but that is not how it is structured. Clauses 6(2)(c) and 70(1) are based on what can only be described as an Al Capone method. The House will recall that when Al Capone was rightly being pursued by the law enforcement agencies in Chicago, it proved impossible to secure a conviction for the many appalling murders that he committed. A successful effort was made instead to entrap him for tax evasion; broadly the same method is envisaged in part 2.

Clauses 6(2)(c) and 70(1) allow the process of confiscation to be triggered by a summary offence, such as the absence of a tachograph in a cab. So if our prospective villain owns a cab that does not contain a tachograph and is convicted of that offence in a magistrates court, clauses 6(2)(c) and 70(1) can be used to trigger the process leading to confiscation. The Minister might not believe me, but he needs to attend to the details. The Bill might not reflect his intentions, but it is how it is. I do not want to overstate the case. It is not true that that conviction alone would suffice to bring about confiscation, but it could trigger the process. That is an important consideration. As I describe the rest of the process, I hope that the House will remember that it can originate from a minor event that has nothing to do with a serious criminal action.

The next stage in the process is, I think, unknown to English law hitherto, and we have not had time to investigate how far it is known in other jurisdictions. The departure from English law should have merited a considerable description in the Minister's speech. The court has to decide whether the person—in this case, the individual responsible for the tachograph offence—also has a criminal lifestyle. That is the key feature of part 2. According to clauses 6(4) and 75(2)(c), a criminal lifestyle has the remarkable feature—I do not know whether the Minister was fully aware of what he accurately said—of consisting of any set of offences defined without limit by the Secretary of State in regulations that we have not seen.

We are dealing with a process that can be triggered by a minor summary offence that leads to an individual being reported to a Crown court by a prosecutor for an investigation into the possibility of confiscation. The court has to decide whether that person has engaged in a criminal lifestyle, which is defined without limit by the Secretary of State in regulations that we have not seen. *[Interruption.]* That is worrying.

Mr. Denham: Keen though he is to patronise me this afternoon, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman should persist in articulating such a distorted view of the procedure. First, in any case the prosecutor or the director of the new agency would have to decide whether to pursue the matter. Secondly, it is clear that the court must not make an assumption if it is shown to be incorrect or if there would be a serious risk of injustice if the assumption were made. That is an important part of the process, to which the hon. Gentleman does not appear to want to draw the House's attention.

Mr. Letwin: I apologise for the patronising tone—I meant my comments to be an outright attack. I was trying to be polite, but it seems to have been a gross error.

The Minister is about one quarter right—just to continue the patronising tone—

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): You will be giving him marks out of 10 next.

Mr. Letwin: I shall do so shortly, but they will not be high.

The Minister is right to say that the court is required by the Bill to act in a manner that seeks to prevent injustice—I am sure that any English court would act in such a manner in any case. However, the court also has to engage in statutory construction—it has to look at the legislation and the regulations produced by the Secretary of State. The Bill specifically allows the Secretary of State to define in regulations anything that he chooses—the House has not seen the proposed regulations—as a basis for a criminal lifestyle. As the Bill contains no other definition than the definition that includes the provision for the Secretary of State to produce such regulations, no court will know what to do if it does not happen to like the Secretary of State's choices, because they will be the definitions in the regulations. Therefore, I fear that the Minister is three quarters wrong.

[Mr. Letwin]

Things get worse, because once the court has decided that the individual hypothetically first convicted of a tachograph offence also has a criminal lifestyle—perhaps because he has fallen foul of items in the regulations that we have not seen—the court then has to make assumptions.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Is the hon. Gentleman's difficulty that he has such a sacred regard for the value of money that he is unable to recognise tainted money? Is that why Conservative Members did not recognise that Asil Nadir had a criminal lifestyle?

Mr. Letwin: No, I have a sacred regard for the preservation of the rights of innocent individuals in the face of the state, and I suspect that the hon. Gentleman and the rest of the House share that regard. In our joint earnest desire to pursue criminals, we should not throw overboard the entire structure of our common law and traditions, which were created to protect innocent individuals against an overmighty state. I should have thought that that was common ground between Members on both sides of the House. The question is whether the Bill adequately achieves that balance. My argument is that in the parts that I am discussing, the Bill does not, as yet, do so.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman is confused. He persistently talks about innocent individuals, but the parts of the Bill to which he refers deal with people who have been convicted. To alleviate my confusion, it would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman stated from which crimes he thinks individuals should be able to retain the proceeds. He clearly has in mind a series of crimes in respect of which individuals should be free from any threat of recovery, and I should be interested to hear his list.

Mr. Letwin: I beg the Minister to calm himself a little and attend to the problem that he is creating. I believe that if he thinks about it, he will not want to do what he is here doing.

We are not talking about the proceeds of particular crimes. The point about the assumptions under clause 11—which the Minister muddled up hopelessly—is that they ask the court to look not at the proceeds of the crime of which the individual has been convicted, nor at the proceeds of the crimes specified in the regulations, but at the entirety of the assets gained by that individual over a six-year period.

If the individual has committed a tachograph offence and has committed three offences specified in regulations that we have not seen, it does not automatically follow—we should not allow ourselves to be dragged into prejudging the matter—that that individual should be arraigned for all of his proceeds over six years. To make that connection, the person in question has to be a villain. The question is whether we have a structure that will adequately differentiate between villains and people who are merely believed by the prosecutor to be villains.

The assumptions in question are not tests. They are assumptions that the court is to be asked to make, and the broad assumption is that if the person has a criminal lifestyle everything that he gained over the preceding six years is part of that criminal lifestyle.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): It must be the proceeds of crime.

Mr. Letwin: If the hon. Gentleman attends to clause 11, he will find that it does not have to be shown that the items in question are the proceeds of crime. It merely needs to be shown that they are in the hands of someone who has a criminal lifestyle—a critical distinction. I am astonished to be having this debate with the Minister.

Mr. Ainsworth: There are two relevant provisions: first, that the recoverable items are the proceeds of crime and, secondly, that there is no risk of injustice. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that both defences would be acceptable?

Mr. Letwin: I will be happy to eat my words if I am wrong, but I think that the recovery of which the Minister speaks in the first part of his remarks refers to part 5 and not part 2.

Mr. Ainsworth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Letwin: If I am wrong about that, I apologise. I would like to see the relevant provision.

I have already accepted that courts will try to achieve justice, but they are guided by what is in the law and in regulations. If a court is told that someone has a criminal lifestyle and that they have committed three offences specified in the regulations, it will so decide. It will not have discretion to do otherwise.

The matter goes further. The authorities have a duty to confiscate not merely items that are in the hands of the person who has been shown to have a criminal lifestyle. Others who bought the items—perhaps honestly; perhaps at a discount store—could be brought within the provisions of clauses 41 to 46. As the Law Society has forcefully stated, their assets could be confiscated, too.

It is true that there is provision for compensation if, at the end of the process, the effort by the public prosecutor fails. However, when I asked the Minister about the serious default provisions, it became clear that he was not aware that compensation can be obtained only if the persons or authorities pursuing the matter have engaged in a serious default. They do not need merely to have gone wrong. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister knows that, I am astonished that he is as relaxed about it as he is.

An innocent third party who has bought something from someone against whom a rather rickety chain of actions has been taken, and that action has failed, could find themselves unable to obtain compensation for having been bankrupted because there was not a serious default, in the legal sense of the term, by the authorities that made the mistake and prosecuted. If that is not an imbalance between state and individual, I do not know what is.

I think that there is a serious practical problem. I apologise for adopting a tone that has riled the Minister. The Bill is the great work of the Home Office—it has 440 clauses, and I do not know how long it took to write instructions and draft the Bill, probably for the previous set of Ministers—yet relatively little attention has been paid to whether the fine balance between the individual and the state is being maintained. Notwithstanding the banter between us now, I hope that in Committee we can

go through these issues seriously to try to iron out some of the difficulties. Let us try to tighten the rules so that part 2 permits the confiscation of assets from real villains without exposing us to the risk that innocent individuals may be harmed quite unfairly. I feel confident that the Bill as drafted will expose us to that risk.

Mr. Davidson: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that when he speaks of the fine balance between the state and the individual he creates the impression that he and his party are soft on crime and are more interested in the civil liberties of drug dealers and criminals than in helping the Government to defend communities such as my own, which suffers considerably from the curse of drugs and criminals who, for a long period, have been virtually untouchable? If he is serious about supporting the general thrust of the Government's actions, could he not concentrate more on ways in which he could be helpful, rather than simply nit-pick and make derogatory remarks about the Minister?

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman and I differ about the purpose of this place. I do not think that it is a congratulations society for Ministers or Governments; its purpose is to ensure that we enact good law. We shall not have that if, in the justified pursuit of appalling villains who have destroyed thousands, probably millions, of lives around the country, we allow ourselves to be inveigled into establishing law that permits the state wrongly to pursue innocent individuals. I should have thought that that was common ground. I am genuinely surprised, as I thought that when those things were pointed out, Government Members would reflect on them, allow us to debate them in Committee and try to correct them. I had no intention of making a political onslaught; if I had, I would have adopted a different tone of voice.

Before turning to part 5, I want to mention a practical difficulty. I beg Ministers and Government Members not to regard this as a political attack, as my intention is serious. The practical difficulty arises from an item much loved by Ministers—the European convention on human rights, especially article 6(2). I do not maintain that the fact that there might be an incompatibility between the Bill and the convention means that the Bill is wrong and the convention right. That is not necessarily the position of Conservative Members, but the convention is in existence and, under the Human Rights Act 1998, Ministers have legislated for its incorporation in our legislation. A possible incompatibility is therefore a practical consideration. I know that the Home Secretary has signed the declaration that the Bill is compatible with the convention and I am sure that he has taken serious advice about that. I do not want to overstate my case, as he may well turn out to be right, but I wish to raise the matter because we shall need a clear exposition in Committee. An investigation must be conducted by the Joint Committee on Human Rights to ensure that none of us can pass legislation that is rapidly invalidated by the judges.

Article 6(2) of the ECHR states that everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent. That is a cardinal article of the ECHR. The exchange between my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and the Minister was important, because the presumption in clause 11 is that the court must make an assumption, as the Under-Secretary himself acknowledged, that the party involved is, so to speak, guilty; all of his assets, as the Under-Secretary confirmed from a sedentary position, are assumed to come from criminal activity. That is the only way in which the articulation in clause 11 can work. It is obviously wrong to confiscate the assets of someone with a criminal lifestyle, unless they have come from criminal activity. Clause 11 assumes that the person involved has gained his assets through criminal activity; that is a presumption of guilt, as the Under-Secretary confirmed when he said that the individual can rebut that. I agree; of course he can. However, guilt is presumed if an individual is allowed to rebut the charge and demonstrate his innocence. That is a very different pattern of activity from that envisaged by article 6(2). I suspect that legal advice to the Home Office put a lot of weight on the difference between criminal proceedings and ancillary proceedings under clause 11. I am not a lawyer, but I believe that there is a jurisprudential trail, which shows that difference to be not incompatible with article 6(2).

That is to say, I believe that there is a jurisprudential trail in which judges have decided that, in ancillary proceedings rather than criminal proceedings, it is reasonable in some cases to presume guilt. However, it may be rather difficult to put that amount of weight on that difference in the context of an action which seeks to deprive an individual of six years' worth of his entire assets, so we need to know whether the measure is compatible.

Mr. Garnier: Is not the force of my hon. Friend's argument all the greater when one considers that convention jurisprudence looks to the effect of the confiscation order and treats a confiscation order, whether it comes about through civil or criminal proceedings, as criminal? It is a penalty. My hon. Friend's point therefore needs to be dealt with rather more cogently than it is currently being dealt with by the Minister.

Mr. Letwin: That is a good point from a distinguished lawyer, unlike myself. If the case is as my hon. and learned Friend describes, the position is probably worse than I painted it. In any event, there is no substitute for the Joint Committee on Human Rights considering the matter carefully. None of us would wish to carry the Bill through Committee and discover that clause 11 invalidates the entire procedure.

Mr. Denham: Can the hon. Gentleman clarify his view of the use of assumptions in recovery proceedings under the existing legislation, which I believe was enacted under a Conservative Government, and his view of the fact that three challenges to the use of those assumptions under the European convention on human rights have all failed? He speaks as though neither assumptions nor tests of the ECHR have been a point at issue in the past. Indeed they have, and the finding was in favour of the use of assumptions.

Mr. Letwin: There is a difference between evidential assumptions and probity assumptions. In the present case, the assumption is not about evidence. The assumption is that there is a train of activity for which no proof needs to be adduced. It never needs to be shown by the prosecution that the six years' worth of assets were acquired illegally. There is not so much an assumption as a leap of faith.

[Mr. Letwin]

I repeat: these are matters of legal fact. To our minds, although perhaps not to Ministers', whether the measure is compatible with the European convention on human rights is not a cast-iron argument for or against this part of the Bill. In practice, it needs to be compatible in order to be effective. That is clearly common ground. All that I am doing is to raise the point, which needs investigation by the Joint Committee, which I should have thought would also be common ground.

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): I am struggling to understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and I may not be alone in that. For my benefit, if no one else's, can he say whether he has taken advice from the shadow Attorney-General on the matter? If he has, that might explain why we are getting into such a mess.

Mr. Letwin: I find it pretty surprising that Labour Members think that a point raised by three major outside bodies—Justice, Liberty and the Law Society—should be the subject of political banter. We are discussing the liberties of the subject and the effectiveness of legislation that is intended to cure a great social evil. That should not be the subject of banter.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the case of Phillips *v.* the United Kingdom, in which Phillips alleged that the statutory assumption made against him in relation to his financial situation for the previous six years had violated article 6(2) of the convention? Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that the European Court of Human Rights did not uphold that allegation?

Mr. Letwin: I have already tried to make the distinction between evidential assumptions and probity assumptions. I do not know why we are labouring the point. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State, Scotland Office says from a sedentary position that I am labouring it. All I am doing is recommending that the matter be examined by a Joint Select Committee that was established by the Government under legislation on which the Government insisted. That seems reasonable.

Mr. Denham: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman knows that the same assumptions are made under existing statute in the case of those convicted of drug dealing. He seems to be under the misapprehension that some fundamentally new principle is being introduced. If there was some confusion in the earlier discussion, it was, I think, because we did not understand what the Minister did not understand.

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the principle is already enshrined in legislation? The Bill undoubtedly broadens its application—that, after all, is the point of it—but will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge at least that the central principle already exists?

Mr. Letwin: It depends on what is meant by the central principle. It is true that if someone is convicted of a heinous offence—in this case, drug dealing—the assumption is made. What we are talking about here is someone who, prospectively, has been convicted of a tachograph offence, been reported to a Crown court and then been found guilty of offences specified in regulations that we have not seen, which may have nothing to do with the matters in hand. That is a critical difference, and I cannot understand why it is not evident to Labour Members. If the measure is referred to a Joint Select Committee, however, we shall see whether it considers it to be compatible. I should have thought Ministers would have agreed to do that by now.

Let me turn, at last, to part 5. I apologise for this, but we have rather more fundamental doubts about part 5 than about part 2. The overall aroma surrounding the agency that it establishes is remarkably similar to that of an agency well known to every Member, as we have all had to deal with the effects of it over the years. I remind Members that it was supported by every one of us, in all parts of the House—yes, I mean the Child Support Agency.

When the Bill creating the agency went through the House, no one squeaked. We have all since regretted that, have we not? It seems to me reasonable for us to say things about this agency, which has a remarkably similar role in some respects although in others it is very different, that at least mean we have a serious debate about it. That, surely, will be common ground.

Under part 5, we are setting up an agency that will have to act if, under clause 248(1), the agency "thinks"—not "reasonably judges"; and nothing in the clause forces it to take a series of steps to ensure that it has been duly diligent—that a person holds unlawfully gained property. This is a remarkable part of the Bill. The first step, or link in the chain, has parallels with the Al Capone case in part 2. There is a very wide—consciously wide, I assume—definition allowing the agency, if it has the merest thought that someone has unlawfully gained property, to institute proceedings.

What is much worse, however, or at any rate much more questionable, is that under clause 246(3)—the Minister was very clear about this—what the agency will then need to show in court is not that, beyond all reasonable doubt, there has been conduct which is unlawful, but that on the balance of probabilities such conduct has taken place.

Mr. Foulkes: That is the whole point.

Mr. Letwin: As the Minister says—he is keeping up a running commentary from a sedentary position—that is the whole point of part 5 as it is currently constructed.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) asked the Minister a very acute question.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: He got a straight answer.

Mr. Letwin: He did not get a straight answer; that was the problem.

When asked whether someone could be acquitted of an offence and then have his assets seized because, on a lesser test—the balance of probability test—the court had found in favour of the recovery agency, the Minister said, as I think the record will show, that someone could be acquitted of a specific offence and nevertheless be pursued on the lesser case. However, someone could be innocent of every offence. Someone could be wholly innocent according to the standards of proof required in

criminal law, yet be subject to pursuit on the balance of probabilities. That is a significant point. Thinking that someone is in possession of unlawfully gained property, the agency will have the power, and indeed the duty, to take that person, possibly after acquittal of any charge, to court and to recover their property on the balance of probability.

I accept—

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that part 5 relates to civil proceedings, not criminal proceedings, and proceeds upon the civil standard of proof? Therefore, we are talking not about convictions and the criminal standard of proof, but about the civil standard of proof. In those circumstances, it may be entirely appropriate that someone be acquitted on the criminal standard, yet still be held responsible under a civil standard of proof, repaying money that was ill gotten—the proceeds of crime.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I was about to say—in fact, I said the first two words of the sentence—that I accept it will be argued that it is a civil proceeding and that the balance of probabilities is therefore an appropriate test. That is the argument in favour of the clause. However, the state is not another person in any ordinary sense. The state is not in the position of someone who has been adversely affected in a commercial transaction, for example. The state is in a very special position in relation to the individual.

When civil proceedings are to be taken, there are huge inhibitions on individuals' pursuing one another through the courts. Some of us believe some of the time that those inhibitions may even be too great. They may prove insuperable in cases where people should have the right to pursue the matter through the civil courts.

It is the agency's sole duty to find this money. If I remember the figure correctly, the agency is being given £45 million a year by the Minister to pursue it. That should be sufficient for about 300 executives, assuming two thirds of the payments of the agency are on salaries and that the salary cost of an executive and associated staff is about £100,000—*[Interruption.]* If it is not 300, we need to look at the efficiency of the agency, but let us leave that aside. The agency should have about 300 staff.

Those 300 staff, or however many the Minister can squeeze out of the inefficiencies of the bureaucracy of this country, will be charged solely with pursuing people, will have all the money at their disposal and all the other law enforcement agencies on their side. Pursuing someone whom it thinks has unlawful property who has been acquitted of any offence, it can show on the balance of probabilities that that person's property should be forfeit. I do not say that this is a compelling argument by itself, but if the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) cannot see a difference between that and normal civil proceedings between two individuals, I do not share his view of the relationship between state and individual.

What we are doing is taking civil proceedings and moving them into a quasi-criminal context. That is a huge and important shift. We are not doing it on the basis of allowing the ordinary proceedings of the state to occur, or of allowing the Director of Public Prosecutions or the Inland Revenue to take on a special role. Given the experience with the Child Support Agency, we are creating an agency that has the sole purpose of making the provision effective.

I grant that what Ministers are trying to achieve is a noble thing. They are trying to enable the agency to pursue people who are evil. They are trying to get their profits. I accept entirely the Minister's opening remarks about altering the risk-reward balance of crime. Of course, that is common ground between us, but I beg Labour Members to attend to the question: have we not begun to alter the balance between individual and state to an extent that may give rise to serious concerns later?

Mr. Kidney: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to correct his comments en passant about the agency? The £45 million is for its setting up and operational costs from now until 2004, so it will not pay for 300 staff. However, the estimate is that there will be 100 staff.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. If that is the case, I made a mistake—*[Interruption.]* It is undoubtedly the case that, like other human beings, I do make mistakes. If there are to be only 100 staff, there will be fewer people doing the pursuing. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right that if that is the figure up to 2004—that was not clear from the Minister's remarks—100 staff would be about right if one divides by three.

Ian Lucas: What does the hon. Gentleman believe will be the difference between the Assets Recovery Agency and the present position of the Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise when pursuing civil proceedings against individuals?

Mr. Letwin: I assume that there will be a difference because I cannot imagine that Ministers would have gone to the bother of creating an agency if there were not. Ministers have presumably created a separate agency because they believe that in using its powers, which they have established by taking the trouble to produce an enormous Bill, it will be more effective. We welcome that. It follows, however, that the danger to civil liberties will be greater. That which is more effective is more to be concerned about. I am simply arguing that we have to achieve an adequate balance between effectiveness and the protection of liberties.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is making his case deliberately or whether he is genuinely confused, as he was over the money that the agency will have and the staff that it will be able to employ. Does he accept that the agency will not be pursuing criminal matters against individuals, but will be pursuing the proceeds of crime under civil litigation? It will not be obliged to act if it thinks that somebody has committed a criminal offence. It will have to take into account regulations under the European convention on human rights and will have to report to Parliament. Guidance will be issued about how it should conduct its business. It will pursue the proceeds of crime on behalf of the citizens of this country. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that that is wrong in principle?

Mr. Letwin: No, I am not saying that it is wrong in principle. It is not wrong in principle that the proceeds of crime should be pursued. It is right in principle. The question is how it will affect people's rights. When Maitland said that freedom lies at the interstices of the law, he was never more right than in a case like this.

[Mr. Letwin]

The Minister said that the agency will not be obliged to act simply because it thinks that someone has committed a criminal offence. Clause 248(1) states:

"Proceedings for a recovery order may be taken by the enforcement authority in the High Court against any person who the authority thinks holds recoverable property."

I accept that there is not a duty to pursue everybody, but the agency has a duty to act and the power to act if it "thinks" that someone holds recoverable property. That is a wide scope of power. The Minister is chuntering about the ECHR. I accept that the agency will be constrained by the ECHR, by the prospect of judicial review and by much else. Why then could not the clause be more tightly drafted? Why not incorporate references to those sorts of things? United Kingdom legislation is riddled with clauses about reasonableness, so why is it not here in this instance?

Part 5 of the Bill involves a series of issues, as does part 2, but this is probably more serious, and we need to consider them in detail in Committee. I am not arguing—*[Interruption.]* To respond to the Minister's further sedentary intervention, I have been speaking for 40 minutes because I have replied to about 15 interventions from Labour Members.

The Bill needs to be considered carefully in Committee, particularly parts 2 and 5. If we can cure the problems there, we will support the Bill. If we cannot, we will not support the Bill. I hope that in seeking to cure these problems we will have co-operation rather than adversarial banter from Ministers.

4.59 pm

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I welcome the Bill. In fact, it is overdue because it seeks to increase the powers against money laundering, which is a great social evil. It was disappointing that the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) spent no time at all speaking about the enemy that we all must overcome, but seemed instead to be concerned simply about the defence. Although the defence is an important issue, let us spell out what the Bill is seeking to tackle.

I have some reservations about the Bill, and I seek some reassurances from the Minister. One of my concerns is that we are told that the Treasury, perhaps in another Bill, is to take further action on money laundering and terrorism because of the events of 11 September, so we are not seeing the whole picture in our consideration of this Bill. Many of my comments and questions are related to the links between this Bill and what the Treasury may eventually do.

My first question is whether we have genuinely joined-up government. How are we to judge this important measure when other important activity is to follow it? I do not accept the argument that the financial and anti-crime measures required to combat terrorism are separate from the measures needed to combat other types of crime such as the drugs trade. For example, the income that bin Laden allegedly obtains from the drug trade will be tackled by this Bill.

The provisions of this brand-new Bill were judged to be necessary and adequate before the events of 11 September, but subsequently they have been judged by some to be inadequate. Some people believe that extra provisions are necessary. I should like to have Ministers' thoughts on that issue. The events of 11 September were simply horrific, but the Bill should have sought before that date to achieve the objective of recovering money from criminals and terrorists.

I should also like to know how the House feels about addressing money laundering. I am gratified by the large number of hon. Members present, because such issues do not usually attract so many. The Bill was mentioned in the Queen's Speech, but I do not remember it being mentioned by anyone, other than Ministers, in the debate on the Loyal Address. The House will react to the events of 11 September and to the need for money-laundering measures, and we shall consider the Bill tonight and in Committee, but that response is inadequate to deal with the complexities raised by this type of issue.

The House should consider establishing a body such as a Joint Select Committee, which may have to operate for years, to consider action on money-laundering issues and to ensure that our procedures are up to scratch. We have allowed our relevant procedures to become completely inadequate through lack of parliamentary scrutiny.

I am strengthened in that view by the statement of the incoming president of the Financial Action Task Force, which is seen as the key international body on the issue, who believes that that organisation will need a serious overhaul to tackle the financial flows from terrorism. I do not believe this, and perhaps the Minister will be able to convince me that it is true, but according to the *Financial Times*, the Financial Action Task Force—that key body—has a staff of five and an annual budget of just over £500,000. How is it possible for the body that is supposed to lead the world in tackling money laundering to operate with such resources?

I approach these issues from the viewpoint of the Select Committee on International Development, which in the previous Session produced a report on corruption that certainly changed my views on the issue. We conducted an inquiry on that because we had been convinced that it was a major obstacle to development in poorer countries. We believed that if there was corruption in those countries. the developed world would not invest in them. However, our focus increasingly shifted as we continued our inquiry, and we began to realise just how important it was for us to tighten up our own act if we were to help the developing world succeed in the fight against corruption.

Let us consider the most celebrated example. We invited the Nigerian Government to tell us what they had found when they came to office and needed to clear up the country. They, in turn, asked us what we were doing to help them get back the money that had been looted from the country. According to last year's Department for International Development report, we put about £15 million of bilateral aid into Nigeria. However, the Nigerian Government are trying to find £4 billion that the Abacha family took out of Nigeria and invested in the outside world. For every £1 that we put in to cure poverty, one Nigerian family took out £200. That is the scale of the problem.

There is not only a severe shortage of investment in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan countries but their own wealth is, albeit illicitly, invested in countries such as ours. We have to tackle money laundering for many reasons, and the problem of international development is

one of them. All the evidence, as the International Development Committee concluded, is that London is attractive to money launderers and is used by them.

The current approach does not do enough to recognise the importance of tackling money laundering, and that makes the City of London extremely vulnerable. We must protect its good name. When the Nigerian Government asked us to freeze the Abacha assets, we could not do it. Governments famous for their transparency—Switzerland, Liechtenstein—managed to freeze Abacha accounts, but it was only this month, two or three years later, that the courts in London said that the accounts should be frozen. The British Government said that they could freeze only when charges had been laid, but the evidence could be obtained only when the assets had been frozen.

I want assurances from the Government that that problem has been seriously tackled and that we will be proactive. All my life, Nigerian regimes such as those of Abubakar, Babangida and Abacha have been famed for their corruption—Nigeria was in Transparency International's league table of corrupt regimes—but we could not be proactive. We did not have the means whereby we could step in. Will that now change?

To take a contemporary example, the Prime Minister told us that Afghanistan was the source of 90 per cent. of the heroin on Britain's streets. What proactive steps were taken? What investigations have been undertaken to deal with the situation? To take another example, it was announced a few weeks ago that there were to be new regulations for bureaux de change. Apparently, we are the only country in the European Union that has not regulated them, even though the newspapers inform us that 65 per cent. of their trade involves money that is being laundered. How long has this been going on? How long has it been known?

In 1996, the Financial Action Task Force, the key international body, of which we are a member, said that bureaux de change are an important link in the money-laundering chain, since it is difficult to trace the origin of the money once it has gone through them. It recommended that they should be dealt with in the same way as banks. Why are the Government responding only now? I seek an assurance that every one of the 40 recommendations made by the FATF in 1996 is now being acted on.

Other countries in Europe—countries not famed for being at the forefront of financial management—have acted. On 3 December 1998, the Government of Zimbabwe acted on the matter and, in December 2000, the Bank of Zambia did likewise. Many hon. Members will have received a newsletter from the Sri Lankan high commissioner pointing out that in the view of the Sri Lankan Government, bureaux de change in this country have been responsible for years for financing the activities of the Tamil Tigers. There has been knowledge about the activities of some bureaux de change. Why did we not act? This is an area of great concern upon which we must act seriously to protect the City of London.

The Select Committee was very critical of the lack of resources in the Home Office for dealing with cases such as Abacha, including the case in which the Government of Pakistan wanted inquiries about money to be brought back to that country. Jeremy Carver, a distinguished member of Clifford Chance—the largest legal firm in the world—said that there was a real problem in the Home Office in that things went into it and did not appear to come out. In terms of action on money laundering, he described the Home Office as "a swamp". Will some of the extra resources go to the Home Office to make sure that the swamp is cleared, so that there will be prompt action on money laundering next time the Nigerian or Pakistani Government ask for it?

This is a very important Bill because the resources involved are considerable. The most recent book on the subject was written by someone called Peter Lilley—not the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley). He talked about the importance of the UK as a major laundering centre, stating that Russian and eastern European crime groups favoured London properties and were active in the vice trade, the London metal market, the art world and financial fraud. Hong Kong and Chinese triads and Turkish and Kurdish gangs were active, he said, adding that there was increasing evidence of Colombian groups using Heathrow airport as a gateway to mainland Europe; Nigerian criminal gangs were also active here.

The Bill is much needed and it will receive good scrutiny in Committee. However, I hope that we will not only deal with money laundering through this Bill, but take a continuing interest in it because, directly or indirectly, it is important to everybody in this country.

5.13 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): This is a welcome Bill. It is a sensible measure that closes loopholes and makes the law more effective in tackling crime—an objective that all of us will share. That is why the Liberal Democrats will support the Bill tonight if there is a Division.

That is not to say that there are not a number of details about which we have concerns and legitimately want to raise issues. I will refer to some briefly now and look forward to discussing them in detail in Committee. I hope that we can proceed on the basis of all-party support. Some hon. Members were a little harsh about the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who has now disappeared from the Chamber. He tried to be constructive—he may have been a little wrong on one or two issues—but he made a thoughtful speech. I hope that we will not have unnecessary confrontation on the Bill, either tonight or in Committee.

It is right that, as a nation and as a Parliament, we turn our attention to the financial aspects of crime. As the Government have said, some two-thirds of crime is motivated by profit. It follows that if we can significantly depress the likelihood of financial gain, the incentive to commit crime in the first place will be reduced. A precedent will be set for those thinking of following suit: the role models will be less attractive if there are no financial benefits to enjoy at the end. We must take away the status symbols—the fast cars, the luxurious swimming pools, the affluent lifestyle—that are so often built on foundations of crime, corruption and misery.

Incidentally, that may present a problem for the head of the asset confiscation unit that the Government propose. Judging by the experience in the United States and Ireland, that person may have difficulty in offloading casinos, racehorses and lap-dancing clubs. There is a limited market for those assets, but I am sure that the person concerned will do their best to ensure that they are sold off and the proceeds used for proper purposes.

[Norman Baker]

It is good to see the Government tackling the big fish in this way. It is easy to concentrate on what I would call simple criminals—the ones who rob banks and commit traditional crimes, who are often from the poorer elements of society—while more sophisticated criminals are allowed to get away with it. Such is the wealth and status that those criminals accumulate, and so extensive is their knowledge of the law, that they often become pillars of society, enjoying a respectability that is built on a foundation of corruption.

Mr. Foulkes: They could even be members of the Liberal Democrat party.

Norman Baker: I do not think that that is true, but you never know.

Criminals want respectability. Parliament should work to deny them that respectability, and to take it away from those who already have it. Hon. Members should work together to make sure that that happens, and that the Bill and the House send out the message that crime really does not pay.

The Bill will also prevent criminals from funding further criminal activities. I was struck that the brief from the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), stated that, in the period 1990–2000, confiscation orders worth £20.5 million were made against drug traffickers. The brief rightly says that that is equivalent to 1,000 kg of heroin. We all know the links between drug money and crime. The National Crime Squad has said that 1 kg of heroin is equivalent to stolen property worth £220,000, or the proceeds of 220 burglaries. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of pulling in criminals or those using money for improper purposes: we must also protect the population at large from the consequences of that activity.

The Bill's detailed powers will allow better tracing and securing of assets, and they include the power to seize suspect cash. It is right to close the loophole that allows some cash but not other cash to be seized. The Bill will also allow restraint orders to be made available at the start of an investigation, rather than at a later stage. That is worthy of support in principle, as these days assets can be moved out of reach, quickly and without much effort, by pressing a button or clicking a mouse. We need to even up the battle between the law enforcement authorities and the criminals, as the latter may have gained the edge in recent years.

The Bill also facilitates criminal confiscation, by establishing a new basis that covers all crimes. Again, that will affect the most versatile criminals, whose fiefdoms cross the boundaries between crimes involving, for example, drugs, prostitution or tobacco smuggling. The civil recovery scheme, as set out by the Minister in his introductory remarks, will make it easier to track down those criminals, to bring them to justice and to seize their assets.

The Bill also contains new taxation arrangements. Who can disagree that it is right in principle that undeclared or otherwise inexplicable income should be taxed? That seems to me uncontroversial. Other hon. Members have noted also that the provision will strengthen existing money-laundering arrangements.

I have one or two questions for the Minister. First, there is now a range of options for dealing with people and their assets. They include criminal prosecution, civil action to recover assets from people who have not been convicted of a crime, and the taxation of assets. Will the Minister clarify whether that range of options amounts to a strict hierarchy that will be applied? I see that the Minister is nodding. My colleague Jim Wallace, the Scottish Justice Minister, has said that prosecution of criminals must always take priority, and that it will continue to do so, adding:

"Civil recovery and taxation will not be soft options. They will only be used where prosecution and civil recovery respectively are not viable."—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 24 October 2001; c. 3249-50.]

I am pleased that the Minister endorses the hierarchy identified by the Scottish Parliament.

How will it be decided which avenue to pursue? There will have to be an assessment of whether criminal proceedings can be sustained. I guess that the normal test will apply, but sometimes such decisions are borderline. Can two avenues be pursued simultaneously or, if criminal proceedings have been started, will that prevent civil proceedings from taking place until the criminal proceedings have concluded? Can two such procedures take place in parallel, and do the Government regard that as a good or a bad idea? Some clarification would be helpful.

I understand from my Scottish colleagues that in Scotland both criminal and civil proceedings are initiated by the Lord Advocate, but in England initiation proceedings will be divided between the Crown Prosecution Service and the director of the Assets Recovery Agency. What mechanism will exist between the two bodies in England to ensure that appropriate action is taken at the appropriate level and that there is no overlap? Will the Minister also confirm that no conflicting action will be taken?

In an earlier intervention, I referred to a person who has been subject to criminal proceedings and has been acquitted. The Minister said in response that such a person could be subject to civil action. That was a clear answer, for which I am grateful. I understand that the test for criminal proceedings is different from the one which applies to civil proceedings. That is clearly set out in the legislation. To the person in the street, however, it may look rather odd if someone who has been subject to high-profile criminal proceedings has been acquitted and then the same information is used for a further action against that person, which may or may not be successful. If it is not successful, taxation action can presumably be taken. That will look a little odd unless there is a very good explanation for it. There is a potential problem here, at least in presentational terms. I draw it to the Minister's attention as I know that the Government are interested in presentational points.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Surely not.

Norman Baker: My hon. Friend says, "Surely not." Perhaps I am wrong and the Government are not interested in spin after all.

I am concerned that the new arrangements could effectively be akin to plea bargaining. Despite evidence against someone for dangerous driving, for example,

it may be decided that a prosecution cannot be guaranteed to be successful. Under those circumstances, a guilty plea would be agreed for the lesser charge of driving without due care and attention. If criminal proceedings might not be successful and assets can be returned or accumulated as a consequence of civil action, there might be a mechanism to guarantee—perhaps with the agreement of the person who holds the assets—that criminal proceedings will not go ahead. It is important to clarify that because that could be a dangerous road to go down—fewer criminal proceedings could take place if lesser actions were guaranteed to be successful. I am keen to understand the Government's thinking on that.

The shadow Home Secretary, the hon. Member for West Dorset, who is not yet back in the Chamber, referred to the important point about third parties. Those who are aware of the legislation will doubtless seek to ensure that even at the initial stage they take action to prevent their assets from being frozen. They may seek to transfer assets elsewhere—to another member of the family or to bank accounts in countries where the Government's writ does not apply. If there is no agreement between the two nations, the Government will not be able to retrieve the assets. How will the Government ensure that the law is not circumvented by such manoeuvres at that early stage.

Innocent third parties could be affected by assets being frozen. What about innocent family members, who may not be aware of illegal or improper activities undertaken by another family member or by a business partner? What about someone whose income may result from someone else's criminal activity but who has been at arm's length and unaware of that activity? Why should they be penalised in those circumstances? How will the Government seek to establish motives, and what safeguards will exist to protect innocent third parties without weakening the proper measures taken against those against whom the Government wish to proceed?

Mr. McCabe: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's argument, but I was intrigued by the reference to innocent third parties. Could a member of a family who is benefiting from clearly ill-gotten gains be described as an innocent third party? Is that the hon. Gentleman's view?

Norman Baker: It is, because it is a question of motive. For example, a third party who has benefited without any knowledge that illegal activities have been taking place may have decided to take a course of action that involves a financial commitment based on what they believe to be sound money only to find themselves very exposed as a consequence of action taken to recover that money.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Does the hon. Gentleman also agree that part 2 might give rise to the following extraordinary state of affairs? Let us suppose that a confiscation order was eventually set aside. Although innocent third parties from whom assets had been removed might recover those assets, the consequential losses that could flow to them from that removal would be recoverable only in the case of a serious default in having brought the proceedings in the first place.

Norman Baker: That is a valid point for discussion, which was raised in the Law Society briefing. It is possible that assets will be frozen, and that innocent third parties—not builders, as in the example raised by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg)—against whom action is taken that eventually proves unsuccessful, could in the meantime lose significant amounts of money as a consequence of the inability to use those assets, and, in extreme circumstances, go bankrupt. I am keen to know what safeguards are in place and what compensation will be available if action of a very serious nature is taken against an individual that subsequently turns out to be unjustified, or if the action taken in the courts is not upheld. That is bound to happen, and I have not heard a Minister deal with that point today.

Heavy weapons are being used in the Bill. I do not oppose the use of those heavy weapons because we are dealing with a sophisticated and difficult enemy, but heavy weapons need a stout remedy if they are improperly applied. We have not heard much about that today and I hope that the Minister will pick up that issue at the end of the debate.

What is the impact on the rights of a person who is accused, or whose assets are under investigation and have been frozen, to use those assets while they are frozen? Obviously they cannot be used for that person's financial gain, but can the person who holds those assets, or held the assets before they were frozen, gain access to them? If those assets concern company records, will it be possible to consult them for the purposes of financial dealings, or will they be off limits? If the latter, what happens to the people employed by that company? They, too, will be subject to possible unwanted consequences.

I shall not deal at length with retrospectivity, but I want to return to the subject in Committee. The Government appear to be moving closer and closer to the use of retrospective legislation, which as a principle is not welcome. Not too long ago, the Home Secretary suggested that he would introduce retrospective legislation to deal with hoax telephone callers. The legislation provided for a six-month penalty, which he proposed to increase to seven years retrospectively. It was wholly unnecessary to do it in that way. I suggest that, had the matter been that urgent, he could have obtained agreement from all parties in the House to railroad the legislation through Parliament in a day or less. The Government's increasing tendency to accept that retrospective legislation is justified represents a dangerous step, so I hope that we shall have a chance to consider that issue in Committee and to determine whether it is justified and consistent with human rights legislation—a point made by several people who have written to us.

As a member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights I feel that it is important to have an opportunity to consider whether the Home Secretary's statement, which appears on the Bill's cover, that it is compatible with the European convention, is justified. In fact, it would be helpful to see the advice that enabled the Home Secretary to take that decision. I hope that the Government will publish that advice, so that we can see why he has reached that conclusion.

Lastly, there is an opportunity, perhaps even a need, to tighten up the organisational approach to such issues. A number of bodies are now involved in law enforcement—such as the police, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, Interpol, Europol, Customs and Excise, the Inland Revenue and now the Assets Recovery

[Norman Baker]

Agency—and although each has a specific brief, they could overlap, perhaps like concentric circles, and we should perhaps take the opportunity provided by the Bill to discover whether there is a chance to rationalise how those bodies interact with one another to ensure that no unnecessary duplication or contradiction occurs. We might even consider a common force for borders, for example.

None of that diminishes the support that my colleagues and I are very happy to give, in principle, to the Bill. We want the Bill to be as robust as possible. We think that it contains some very good provisions, but we want it to be as fair as possible, and I am confident that we can propose amendments in Committee that will help to achieve that aim.

5.31 pm

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife): May I say how grateful I am to the House for allowing me to make my maiden speech this evening? I feel particularly honoured and privileged to be a Member of the House and especially to represent my constituency. I am interested in the Bill, and I shall explain how it could represent a positive aspect of life in Fife and to my constituents in particular.

I have to say, however, that it is not the happiest of times to make a maiden speech in the House. Only yesterday, I visited a local company in Glenrothes, which is in my constituency, to be confronted with the fact that four of its employees had been killed during the atrocities of 11 September in New York, in that deliberate, callous and calculated attack on innocent people. Of course, my condolences go to those people and their families.

The people of Fife and I welcome the spirit of the Bill, which is intended to tackle drug trafficking. Of course, drug trafficking had a big influence on the terrorists' ability to carry out that atrocity, but let us not forget that many young people are continually getting caught up in the drugs culture and are losing their lives because of drugs. I shall allude to how we can continue to educate young people to discourage them from entering the drugs culture, but at the same time let us not forget the loss of life caused by terrorism.

My predecessor as Member of Parliament for Central Fife, Henry McLeish, was clearly a tireless, dedicated and committed Member of Parliament. He was well respected in the constituency. I thank him for all his dedication and hard work; I hope that I can carry on his good work.

Most hon. Members may or may not find this interesting, but I seem destined to follow my predecessor in many ways. When he left Fife regional council, I became its leader and held that position for nine years. Lo and behold, he went to the Scottish Parliament and here I am following him again. It is important to point out that there was no design or plan behind that action. I reassure hon. Members and, more importantly, Henry McLeish that I have no ambition other than to serve the people of my constituency in this House. I look forward to that challenge, which is quite a sufficient one.

Members who are not familiar with my constituency might not know that it lies between the city of Dundee, which is divided by the River Tay, and the city of Edinburgh, which is divided by the River Forth. It is within the ancient kingdom of Fife. It is a very proud and passionate part of Scotland and, indeed, the United Kingdom. It has been and is home to many famous people—none more famous to hon. Members than my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in whose capable hands the economy rests.

I should like to tell the House something about the traditions and heritage of my constituency. As a former coal mining area, it is steeped in the history of that proud industry. Like so many coal mining areas, it suffered greatly from the industry's quick demise. Unfortunately, with that came high unemployment. Despite the Government's best efforts since taking office, which have been appreciated, they have managed only to reduce rather than make a severe impact on the very high figure. I assure the House that, in hoping to create the necessary opportunities, particularly for young people in the area, I will do everything on behalf of my constituents to tackle that problem.

With high unemployment comes the great influence of drugs—hence I felt it important to speak in this debate, and I appreciate the opportunity to do so. With high unemployment and a drugs culture comes a high incidence of crime. An average heroin addict, I am advised, requires about £30,000 a year to feed their habit. To someone who is unemployed but requires £30,000, there is only one way to acquire such resources. Therefore, not surprisingly, drugs, unemployment and crime rise similarly. My constituency suffers badly from the scourge of the drugs industry, so there is little doubt that the Bill will be welcomed in principle by my constituents as a means of beginning the process of tackling such challenges.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) quoted the interesting and enlightening figures of £220,000 and 220 burglaries. I picked up from the Bill that the value added by illegal drugs transactions amounts to an amazing 1 per cent. of gross domestic product. I also noticed that the confiscation figure for 1999–2000 was £25 million, which is startling. Clearly, if such efforts can be intensified, we can make a greater impact on the drugs culture.

The challenges that we face in Fife require the Bill's provisions, although we have already done much to support the principles behind it. We have considered the rehabilitation process and introduced methods to discourage young people from entering the drugs culture—through education and by offering support services in the community. I should like to give the House two good examples of that.

The Fife youth drugs team deals with 14 to 16-year-olds who have committed offences and are involved in drugs. The initiative is a partnership between Fife council and Fife constabulary. We are rightly proud of the strategic benefits of that multi-agency approach, to which the Bill refers. Working in that way can produce results.

The second example is the drug treatment testing order, as established in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. It is a partnership between the health service and social services and, importantly, has strict criteria attached to it. People who are caught up in drugs have the option of rehabilitation and random testing instead of immediately being taken through the prosecution process. Not only does that help to keep them out of the prosecution system

and to reform them, but it rightly helps to release services, which otherwise would be overburdened, to provide a much needed back-up. We are proud of that.

The ability to use the orders has allowed us to produce figures, and they are given strict consideration. There have been 78 orders since July and 273 referrals, which shows that they can make a difference. Unfortunately, there has been a 100 per cent. increase in new drug users in Fife among 15 to 24-year-olds. I believe that there is an increasing awareness that help is available. That gives us a better chance to influence young people at an earlier age and make a difference by preventing them from being drawn into the serious drug culture.

According to reports to the services that we set up, heroin is the main drug used, although cannabis is the most widely used drug by people aged between 13 and 21. The problem for the support services is that my constituency is predominantly rural. Trying to offer a wide range of services to rural communities—other hon. Members may suffer from the same difficulty—is challenging. Nevertheless, we all appreciate that drugs have a wide-ranging impact. They do not affect simply the user, but everyone in the community—next-door neighbours, sons, daughters, employees and, unfortunately, school chums. Many people are affected by drugs.

I emphasise—this is reflected in the Bill—that strategic working produces great benefits. I have witnessed that happening in a small way in Fife. I should like to share my experiences with other hon. Members during my time here and, I hope, gain from their experiences so that we can make an even greater difference.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. In offering support, many hon. Members reassured me that it is not a daunting experience. I can assure everyone that it is. Each and every hon. Member remembers that, but no one wanted to tell me. The support is appreciated and I look forward to serving in the House. I also look forward more proudly and passionately to serving my constituents in Central Fife.

5.43 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall), who made an excellent maiden speech. He told us about his constituency and, in particular, that Fife was an ancient kingdom. I empathise with him. Sutton Coldfield is a royal town, so we have something in common. He spoke about the ramifications of the dreadful events of 11 September and the fact that they had been visited on his constituency. He mentioned the menace of drugs and said, with expertise and wisdom, how we should ensure that young people in particular do not enter the drugs culture.

The hon. Gentleman spoke eloquently about his predecessor, who was greatly respected in the House and a friend of many of us. At one point, he wondered whether the House would find his speech interesting. I can assure him on behalf of everyone present that we certainly found what he said interesting. We look forward to his future contributions to our proceedings. The only reservation that I would put to him is that he referred to the Liberal Front-Bench spokesman as his hon. Friend. He will discover that the one thing that unites his party and mine is the belief that the Liberals are not our hon. Friends.

I should at this stage declare an indirect interest, which will of course appear in the Register of Members' Interests. I am a director of Lazard and some of its subsidiaries, although my role is minor. Lazard is not a retail bank, so the interest is indirect.

The Bill is important and I am glad that it commands general support throughout the House. It builds on the approach adopted in the 1990s by the Government of which I was a member. I hope that Ministers will listen with care to the words uttered by my hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary, as his speech was an important one. He strove to support the Government, but made several important points that will have to be discussed in Committee. The words that should have caused a tremor to run down the spines of Ministers was his likening the new agency to the Child Support Agency. The Minister of State, Scotland Office will recall that I had ministerial responsibility for that agency from 1995 to 1997, when I left the House. The Government should pay heed to my hon. Friend's comments on that point.

The Bill consolidates and reforms existing money-laundering provisions to create a single regime for offenders. That is an extremely important development. When in 1997 I returned to the City, having lost my seat, I was struck by the change in attitudes that had occurred, especially the vast amount of new regulations that had been introduced. It is not generally known that people who want to work in the City have to take an examination, which I found challenging. Although I cannot recall every tenet of what I learned for that examination, I do remember that the maximum penalty for being involved in money laundering is 14 years in jail. There has been a huge change in the way in which the regulatory framework and the administrative back-up that accompanies it is implemented in the City.

I apologise in advance to both Front-Bench teams for the fact that a long-standing and unbreakable commitment might result in my being a few minutes late for the winding-up speeches. I have only three points to make, and I hope that they will be helpful.

The first relates loosely to clause 324, which deals with the offence of failing to disclose. Previously, the terms applied to drugs and terrorism offences, but they are now to apply to money laundering. My understanding is that if a relatively junior employee of, for example, a finance house turns out to be a rotten apple and is caught offending, the financial institution as a whole will be held to have committed an offence—notwithstanding the fact that it has its own rule book and has made substantial compliance efforts.

It strikes me as hard to impose criminal liability on people who should have known what was going on but did not. It is especially hard, given that the new regulatory regime—I pay tribute to the Government for having listened carefully to practitioners before N2—under civil law is not yet even up and running. It will not be operational until 1 December. Under the Bill, people will be punished and in some cases jailed under criminal procedures when the new, carefully crafted civil procedures, which were debated at length by Parliament, have yet to be introduced. In his opening remarks, the Minister dismissed that point, but I urge him to consider it in Committee.

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

Substantial powers are now vested in the Financial Services Authority. I have great faith in Sir Howard Davies, who is a fine public servant, but we must hope that his successors will wield what is a very big stick sensibly in their regulatory tasks.

Mr. Kidney: On the widening of the duty of those engaged in financial services to report suspicious transactions, I understand the concern that is being expressed about the change from an objective to a subjective test. However, did not the hon. Gentleman go a little too far in saying that a company could comply with all its procedures and still be convicted? Does not the Bill specifically state that following industry guidelines is a defence against such an allegation?

Mr. Mitchell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is right, but that is not my understanding of the effect of the clause; nor is it the understanding of many in the City.

There is clearly a significant problem with money laundering, but no one seems to have the faintest idea how substantive it is. There is a danger in implementing or crafting a solution to a problem that is unquantified. How great a menace is money laundering? How successful are we in seeking to combat it? How does it happen? Where does it happen? Is London good, bad or indifferent in its attack on money laundering? Should not we define the problem first?

When we open a bank account, we are required to send, among other things, our passport or a number of other documents. It is an enormously burdensome and bureaucratic procedure. If it helps the process, it is necessary and we are right to do it. However, has anyone established whether it helps? Bureaucrats have mushroomed, along with departments that police us all and internal auditors. Is 90 per cent. of all this a complete waste of time? We do not know. It would be interesting to have an answer. Perhaps the Minister will be able to help us when he replies.

I know that the FSA is worried about hedge funds. It believes that they could be vehicles for money laundering. They represent the fastest growth area of investment management, and by definition they are global. They are colossal businesses. They deal with individuals rather than institutional money, and they are clearly not so well regulated as other sectors of the industry. Hedge funds are the nerve ends of capitalism, but do the authorities have any idea of the extent to which money laundering is taking place? We must not set in place a solution to an unquantified problem.

My final point was touched upon by the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), who spoke from the Liberal Democrat Front Bench. Whatever we do in Britain or in British territories overseas will be ineffective unless it is replicated elsewhere. There is no point in blocking the fox hole in London if the foxes reappear in another jurisdiction. The European Union has a major part to play. It may warm the cockles of the heart of the shadow Attorney-General, my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), if I note that this is an area where, as with macro-environmental issues, there is a role for the EU. These issues need to be dealt with on a supranational basis.

This is an example where the EU would not be interfering in the minutiae of national life, but would be doing a great service to the financial community world wide. It would be policing its own member states and influencing other states. For example, there is much concern about how the Swiss deal with money laundering. There was a headline in a newspaper on 19 September stating that the Swiss were to take another look at money-laundering regulations following a scathing report. There had been recent press coverage of money-laundering links between Swiss banks with hidden funds for Helmut Kohl, Sani Abacha and Slobodan Milosevic. The Swiss Minister of Finance, Kaspar Villiger, was recently quoted as saying that banking secrecy is no protection for criminals. I beg to disagree with him.

It is hard to come to a conclusion other than that the Swiss reputation for banking excellence is all too often based almost exclusively on its secrecy rules. As recently as 14 July, a journalist on *The Guardian* investigated the issue. He found that it took 20 minutes to hide his cash in a Swiss bank account. I pass over the advertisement which I believe appeared in *The Economist* for a job in a Swiss bank as "Head of money laundering". I presume that that was a misprint. In any event, that underlines the concern about these matters.

I conclude where I started. The Bill is an important measure and I hope that it will benefit from a bipartisan approach. I hope also that, in taking major powers to tackle significant problems, we can retain a degree of humour and common sense between those on the two Front Benches to enable us to get things right.

5.55 pm

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): I never envisaged speaking in the Chamber on an occasion when the Conservatives would be seen as the party of civil liberties, although they were only the party of civil liberties for the wealthy with no noticeable means of support. Nevertheless, it is a welcome step forward. However, it is clear that they operate in a different world from the rest of us. If someone has managed to buy a big house and has a business and several flash cars but no visible source of income, it is not usually assumed in my community that the money has merely been inherited but that it has come from somewhere else. That is the difference between us.

I was fascinated by the shadow Home Secretary. It is on such occasions that I think, "Thank you, God." His speech portrays Conservatives as the friends of criminals. They are more interested in the one or two who might be dragged through a court unnecessarily than in protecting working-class communities such as the one that I represent from criminals, including drug dealers, who prey upon them.

Mr. Grieve: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's remarks about assumptions. He will know that in part 2 there are assumptions. Assumptions are to be made in Scotland as in England and Wales. Is he aware that in Scotland the courts are allowed not to make assumptions, whereas under the Bill courts in England and Wales will have to make them? Is he saying that the parts of the Bill that have been drafted for Scotland, a part of which he represents, should be changed so that there are mandatory assumptions there as well as in England and Wales?

Mr. Davidson: Yes, I am in favour of that change and of that assumption. It is an inappropriate anomaly.

I return to the remarks of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). It is a fair bet that our positions will change ere long. I suspect that I will be a Government Back Bencher for longer than he will be an Opposition Front Bencher. I am prepared to offer odds of 3:1 that he will not last until next Christmas. However, I digress.

It is clear that the Tories are soft on this area of crime. I was struck by the extent to which they were indulging in nit-picking rather than agreeing strongly with the Government about taking broad sweeping action against those who benefit from crime. The communities that we represent would be much happier if they thought that in principle there was unanimity in the House; we could then have some disagreements about implementing that principle. I am not certain that the Tories are committed to the principle of chasing down the gains of criminals.

I was appalled by the remarks of the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), who seemed to speak for about 10 minutes on vested interests. His speech was all about defending our banking system and the value that flows from that. We should understand that there are people in British banking who are crooks. They have benefited from crime for a considerable period. Some of us have travelled to other jurisdictions, where we are told that Britain is good at telling them how they should improve their systems. However, they say the City is the dirtiest washing machine in the world in terms of the amount of illicit money that goes through it. Looking at the recent Abacha case in Nigeria, it is clear that ill-gotten gains acquired by that family and several others were welcomed by bankers in London with open arms because they made money out of them. We should not take too pusillanimous an attitude when dealing with that. There is a crisis in communities such as mine, and if a bit of rough justice is meted out to wealthy people, so be it. If that makes me appear new Labour to my colleagues, I am prepared to bear that burden.

The Bill is not perfect, and I wish to raise some points with Ministers so that they can pursue them. I am concerned that there is insufficient capability under the Bill to allow the system—the law—to pursue the relatives or friends of criminals who have had assets transferred into their names. It is common to find that a house cannot be seized because it is owned by someone's wife, son or daughter who has no identifiable means of support or income. Again, that is a difference between the Conservatives and me; I do not assume that it is an inheritance or a legacy from a long-lost aunt. In many cases, the dogs in the street know that it is the gains of crime. The individuals involved might not have committed criminal acts but, none the less, they are benefiting. We need to know that those assets will be pursued.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davidson: Certainly, it would be a pleasure.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman has completely misunderstood the point made by the Opposition about relatives. We are not concerned about the ability to recover assets from relatives who acquired them from criminals in the knowledge of their criminality or, indeed, recovering them from people who have acquired them and have simply got them. However, if people have obtained assets innocently and their removal will create serious prejudice against them, when they are innocent of any wrongdoing or knowledge of wrongdoing, am I to understand that the hon. Gentleman feels that that is just an instance of being unable to make an omelette without breaking eggs? That would be a nice Stalinist precept, to pick up what he said earlier.

Mr. Davidson: Thank you, God. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that Stalin dealt with things more roughly; he did not simply break eggs. Then again, perhaps the hon. Gentleman had a sheltered upbringing.

I was not referring to the Opposition, but the hon. Gentleman has made a helpful point. If someone suddenly receives from his father, who has no visible means of support, an enormous sum of money, and does so entirely innocently, the natural assumption is that he would consider where it had come from. The hon. Gentleman and I obviously live in different worlds. Most people in my constituency, if they suddenly received an enormous gift from someone they knew, would start to wonder where it came from. I do not assume innocence in that regard. However, if the hon. Gentleman has some money to spare, I would be happy to see him afterwards in the bar or the venue of his choice.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Davidson: May I carry on, as I want to make a couple of points?

Those who assist criminals are as bad as, or worse than, the criminals themselves; I refer to lawyers, accountants and bankers. Many criminals in the west of Scotland, whence I come and which I represent, would be unable to conceal their assets but for the professional help that they receive. Those individuals—accountants and lawyers—are clearly known to the police and other lawyers, which raises several issues. Not only is there the question of the inability of the Law Society and other professional associations to police their own members, but the penalties are insufficiently severe to act as a deterrent. I hope that the Bill's provisions will be applied vigorously to identify lawyers, bankers and accountants involved in concealing assets, punish them severely and send a message to others. For far too long, the only people punished for drug dealing have been people from communities such as mine at the very bottom of the tree; those who are much higher up get off scot-free. That is not fair, and not what a Labour Government should be doing.

We will apply different legislation to terrorism, drugs and crime; they will be treated as three separate issues. It has already been said that there are spillovers and tie-ins linking the three, and there are a couple of instances in the Bill where the distinction between crime and drugs is made too strongly. Perhaps there is an opportunity for loopholes to be exploited, contrary to the purpose of the Bill. I hope that Ministers will look at that.

I also seek clarification of the extent of the mechanism by which there will be an opportunity to review the Bill's operation to close loopholes, as the Chancellor does with the Budget every year when he closes tax evasion and avoidance loopholes, and deals with similar misbehaviour. We do not want to decide issues here on the assumption that they mean one thing, only for them to be reinterpreted by the courts in a way that we do not wish; we want the opportunity to step back and sort matters out without going through the full range of parliamentary procedures.

[Mr. Davidson]

On the question of law and lawyers, may I mention judges? We are perhaps giving them too much discretion at several points in the Bill. They are unlikely to be as unsympathetic to the prosperous as we would wish them to be. They are frequently harsh on the little men and women but let off the prosperous. It is inappropriate for me to give examples in case they sue me when I get out. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] No, I will not be tempted. There ought to be an assumption that assets will be confiscated except in exceptional circumstances; it should not be merely an option available to the court.

I agreed with the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield about overseas boltholes. As he said, it is no good stopping up boltholes in this country if places such as Guernsey, Jersey, the Isle of Man and other communities that are basically parasitic on Britain's financial community can be boltholes for people to hide ill-gotten gains. Much of the work done by the Financial Action Tax Force with overseas territories, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the G8 is helpful, but I am concerned that it does not go far enough. The same standards need to be applied across the world; if boltholes and weaknesses are discovered in certain places, the money will flow there. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point about hedge funds and the like.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Gentleman is making an important point about British overseas territories and the Crown dependencies. Very often, people abroad simply do not understand why the United Kingdom's jurisdiction does not seem to apply to them; people can do what they want in them, yet we are responsible for them in international law. We cannot have treaties with them, so we need equally strong legislation in the British overseas territories and the Crown dependencies.

Mr. Davidson: I am satisfied that we are making great progress on that; Bermuda, which I know well, has cleaned up its act considerably.

To follow precedent, I should have started by saying that my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) is a wonderful man and made an excellent speech. May I say so now? He is undoubtedly one of the good guys in politics and will make a great contribution to the House, as he already has to local government. I would say more wonderful things about him, but I hope that he will excuse me for rushing on to a point about incentives.

If money is to be seized, may I have some of it, on the basis that my constituency is one of those where the ill-gotten gains of drug dealing are generated? It seems reasonable that the proceeds should not disappear into the maw of the Treasury, but be hypothecated so that they go back into communities such as mine, to show that the system works on their behalf. As I raised the point, may I be guaranteed that my constituency will be among the first to receive some of that money?

6.10 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I congratulate the hon. Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) on his useful grass-roots comments on fighting drug crime.

The main part of the Bill sets up the Assets Recovery Agency and the various new mechanisms for the recovery of the proceeds of crime through both civil and criminal proceedings. All hon. Members must support that in principle. The mechanisms to date have not worked well. It is wrong in principle that there should be an incentive for people to benefit from crime and, even if they are caught and sent to prison, to come back and live comfortably on the proceeds. It must therefore be right to tighten up the law in this area.

It was wrong for some hon. Members to belittle the comments on human rights made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). As many outside professional bodies have pointed out, there are aspects of the Bill which may not be satisfactory from a human rights point of view. I hope that those will be addressed in detail in Committee.

The Crown Prosecution Service, the Assets Recovery Agency to be established by the Bill, the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the Financial Services Authority will all—dare I say it—have their snouts in the trough of the money recovered through the proposed initiatives. The particular roles of each body, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) pointed out, and the costs should be examined and possibly simplified.

From conversations with members of the Crown Prosecution Service about whether it is justifiable to introduce legislation that could lead to injustice, it seems that the view of those responsible for catching crooks and finding drug money is that it does not matter too much that the law may lead to injustice. They want it so that they can go for the real crooks and argue that it will never be their intention to use the law against innocent staff or unreasonably. That is probably a fairly held view, but it sits slightly uncomfortably with the principle of Anglo-Saxon law—"the law's the law." It is not to be used only when it suits people; it is to be obeyed by everybody.

There are concerns that with the use of the civil courts to confiscate assets, people could be found not "guilty" but "probably guilty". That would trespass across the barriers of our tradition that a person is innocent until proven guilty, rather than guilty until proven innocent. The Law Society and others have pointed out that third-party businesses could be caught in the Bill's net. An independent trader could go bankrupt as a result of having assets restrained as part of a larger investigation over a protracted period. Although it is not very likely, no one would want such an injustice to occur.

On money laundering, I welcome the regulation of exchange bureaux. I have long thought it extraordinary that they were not properly regulated, although they were obvious targets for money laundering. I am somewhat concerned about the new criminal offence of failure to disclose suspicions that another person is engaged in money laundering. It is one thing to report knowledge; it is another thing to report a suspicion, but as others have pointed out, reasonable grounds for suspicion are subjective.

I should declare an indirect interest. As the register records, I am still chairman of the investment management business which I built up over 20 years. The requirements that apply to such a business are slightly different from those that apply to banking, but one of the positive aspects has been working with the police.

They come in with videos and teach the on-line staff what to look for. That should remind the House that it is not grandees who might suffer injustice, but ordinary junior on-line staff. When money flows through, they are the people at the coal face who must look for evidence of money laundering and who in future will have to look properly for terrorist funds. Do the Government intend to include in the Bill, through amendments in Committee, their proposals relating to terrorist finance, or will those be the subject of a separate Bill?

Mr. Connarty: I respect the hon. Gentleman's disclosure that he has some knowledge of the industry. If someone came into his business with a large sum, would he investigate where the person got it, or would he just take the money and invest it for them? If he was unhappy with the answers given, would he consider bringing in the authorities, or would he say to the person, "Take your money elsewhere. I don't want to be involved with it and I don't mind where you got it"? If the matter is not drawn to the attention of the authorities at the level of his business, how will the authorities ever have a chance of getting on to such people?

Mr. Flight: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. First, if someone came in with a large sum in cash, one would immediately report him. Failure to report is a criminal offence for which one could go to jail. Secondly, if a potential new client says, "I want you to manage some funds for me," one has to check where the funds come from, check the person's identity and get references. There is a lengthy procedure to establish the propriety of that individual. If people are investing in unit trusts, there are procedures similar to banking procedures to check that the money has come from a proper bank and who the potential investors are.

There are already at retail, so to speak, and at higher level quite demanding procedures to identify money laundering. One of the reasons why the rules have been tightened up is that some banks have no doubt been lazy. That accusation is directed at London and even more so at the United States. There are other countries where nothing at all has come to light, not so much in British dependencies, as we have heard, as in the whole of Latin America, Africa and Asia. I suspect that the proceeds of drugs are largely ending up not in bank accounts in North America or London but in assets in certain other parts of the world. That problem has not yet been effectively addressed.

Mr. Connarty: The hon. Gentleman's answer raises my estimation of his integrity. My question was whether, if someone's response to his questions did not satisfy him, he would report that person to the authorities, and whether he thought that anyone else in his position should do the same?

Mr. Flight: Absolutely yes. It is already an offence not to do so. If someone cannot answer questions in a way that allays any suspicion that they may have been involved in money laundering, it is an offence under the Proceeds of Crime Act 1995 not to report that individual.

Clause 325 is the "tipping off" clause and is extremely important. The practical collaboration between people in the financial services industry and the police is just as important as the law. When the Bank of Credit and Commerce International—BCCI—applied to the UK for a banking licence, the licence was granted, but ironically, when it applied to Guernsey, the application was turned down. The Guernsey Financial Secretary had contacted the international police authorities immediately, and had been advised that the organisation had a bad name. He therefore refused to grant it a licence.

Banks need to know what businesses to look out for, and potentially even which individuals to look out for. They need to be able to open the books if inquiries follow. Such collaboration needs the backing of the law: neither banks nor investigating authorities can act illegally. I feel that there is scope for much more practical collaboration, and I welcome measures to increase the investigative powers of the police, but I fear that some parts of the Bill could be detrimental to co-operation that is already crucial and will become even more important in the pursuit of terrorist money.

Clause 325, incidentally, contains a drafting error, of which the Government may be aware. It refers to a "disclosure", in the context of a disclosure to a third person who is not a constable or an authorised person, but it does not actually say that: it also uses the term "disclosure" in a different sense from making a disclosure to a constable. That needs to be tightened up.

The Minister probably knows of the practical issues raised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in relation to the money-laundering provisions. I am sure that they will be considered in more detail in Committee.

It is crucial for efforts to combat money laundering to be focused, and not sidetracked to other agendas. Allusion has been made to unfair treatment as between smaller and larger countries. Some activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development were sidetracked into what was seen as the pursuit of unfair tax competition, and the establishment of sanctions against smaller countries, mostly in the West Indies, at a time when there were arguably far greater "unfair tax advantages" in Holland and in certain American states.

I am pleased that, in May, the United States Financial Secretary reversed US policy on that front. He did not want the pursuit of money laundering and terrorist funds to be sidetracked into other political agendas. The Bill currently going through Congress, while encouraging the use of sanctions to pursue terrorist money, makes it clear that they should not be used to further political objectives such as tax harmonisation. I trust that when we get around to producing measures for the pursuit of terrorist funds we will take the same stance.

It is strange that the initiative on money laundering never took account of the problem of terrorist funds where clean money is used for filthy ends, concentrating purely on dirty money being made clean. The aspects are different: they will require different focuses and different codes of conduct if those in the finance industry are to pick up what is needed and report it duly to the right authorities.

The Bill, especially if there is practical collaboration, has the potential to tighten things up here; but we must then ensure that they are tightened up elsewhere in the world. There will be fewer problems, potentially, as a result of the tightening up that is already proceeding in the United States and is due to begin in continental Europe, which is ahead of us in some respects; but we must face the issue of how to tighten up in other parts of

[Mr. Flight]

the world if we are not to drive a problem that has been intermittent here into territories where there is little or no scope for policing.

6.24 pm

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): At the risk of incurring the wrath of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), I must confess that before entering the House I spent 16 years practising at the criminal Bar. The only saving grace is that sitting between my hon. Friend and me is another lawyer, my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), who I am sure will come to my aid if necessary.

I have another confession that may upset my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok, who seems to have survived the first. I strongly agree with the tone and the sentiment of his speech. I want to help the system to help his and my constituents, who bear the brunt of the war against drugs.

I have practised in Manchester. I know that other Members have practised there too, and will know of cases such as those with which I have dealt. A nine-year-old on Moss Side would be delivering heroin on his BMX bike; a 12 to 16-year-old would be either forcing or cajoling him to do it. They would be armed with automatic weapons: there would be gangland warfare, with boys shooting each other. Sadly, I represented a number of those kids, and I do not believe that one of them is alive now. That is the limit to which the drug problem can take us.

Behind such tragedies were the Mr. Bigs. They lived in another part of Manchester, in the big houses to which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok referred, with no other visible means of support. I would back any legislation intended to disrupt that chain of human misery, and I believe the Bill is intended to do precisely that.

I confessed to the shadow Home Secretary in an intervention that I was mystified about the source of his thinking. A White Paper was published in March, and there was heavy consultation on it. I see that his colleague, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), is now deep in conversation, but I hope that we shall be told in the winding-up speech whether any of the pedantic little points made by the shadow Home Secretary filtered through during that consultation. As I think he admitted in the end, they are really points for the Committee stage rather than for a debate on the principle of a Bill. It is a shame that there cannot be a more positive approach to such important legislation. I welcome the approach of the Liberal Democrats, woolly though it was, as usual.

Mr. Grieve: I note that, like me, the hon. Gentleman is a practising member of the Bar. Does he really think it pedantic to highlight areas in which, if the Bill does not work as it is intended to work, it will cause grave injustice? Are such points merely pedantic rather than points of general principle?

Stephen Hesford: If there is a point to be made, it should be made in Committee; but, with respect, I do not agree that a point was being made.

I merely ask Opposition Members to reflect on whether they warmly welcome the Bill. I suspect that some do, but I hope that we shall hear a more positive announcement in the winding-up speech. I want to know why they support a Bill to protect the communities that Labour Members want to protect.

In many ways, the Bill is a consolidating measure. It is complex—it has more than 400 clauses—so it is not surprising if there are some errors of drafting, but, again, this is not the time or place to discuss them. The debate is more about the principle.

Drug trafficking is an evil. It is a black economy. My hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) said that it accounts for 1 per cent. of GDP. My understanding is that it accounts for 2 per cent. It is a disgrace if, in a civilised country in the 21st century, we cannot get our hands on that money and put it to better use. That is what the Bill is about.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman will obviously be familiar with the way in which the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 has worked. One of the things of which he is likely to be aware, as I have been in practice, is that over the years the amounts that have been assessed for confiscation have consistently turned out to be higher than the assets available for seizure. Does anything in the Bill make that less or more likely to happen? If the Bill is to work, we will have to make assessments that lead to the money being seized, rather than, as has happened under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act, less and less money being taken year by year.

Stephen Hesford: I do not want to get bogged down, but in my experience the procedure under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act was cumbersome. No one really believed in it. This Bill has been introduced not only to consolidate measures, but to make the procedure work better. I welcome that, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman does so too. Rather than just nit-picking, Conservative Members should look forward to procedures coming into operation that will make the principle work better in practice in our courts.

The Bill will change the culture. The culture of court life, if I may put it that way, must change in two ways. The judicial culture must change. Often, half the judiciary were not interested in chasing assets, and the other half—the hon. Gentleman, in a sense, made the point—were ham-fisted in doing so. They overkilled the case and brought the procedure into disrepute.

More important, there must be a change in culture among defendants. I mainly defended when I was at the Bar. I can probably count on one hand the defendants who genuinely thought that their assets were at risk; many brought a soul-destroying smugness to the court process. I want to see the smile wiped off their faces. If the Bill, in changing the culture of the court, gets anywhere near doing that it will perform a major service.

Part 1 sets up the Assets Recovery Agency. I welcome that, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to deal with the following point either in his winding-up speech or in due course. The aim of the procedure is to make the recovery of criminal assets work better, but I worry whether agencies will speak to each other sufficiently clearly that they will know which one is doing what. I understand from the outline in the Bill that not only the director but the Director of Public Prosecutions, Customs and Excise and the Crown Prosecution Service can make an application. There should be clear demarcation about

who will make the application. The director may be the best person to do so, but in practice smaller cases may be devolved to the other agencies. I see the Minister nodding. That is helpful, but there is a potential problem: cases may fall between two stools. Otherwise, I welcome part 1.

Part 2 deals with confiscation. One of the key things is the timing of the application. Clauses 4 and 7 make an important change: confiscation orders can now be made at the beginning of the process—I welcome that emphasis—rather than at the end. That is a significant change in focus.

Some of the wording in the Bill is novel in terms of criminal legislation that I am used to dealing with, but that is not a criticism. It may be a welcome change, but I raise a question about the phrase "criminal lifestyle", which may be slightly problematic. Perhaps the concept of criminal lifestyle needs tightening. Otherwise, I welcome the principle of including the phrase "criminal lifestyle" in the Bill.

I welcome clause 29, which deals with the absconding unconvicted offender who sees the writing on the wall and, along with his assets, disappears to the "Costa del Crime". If it is properly administered, clause 29 will be a major bonus.

Mr. Grieve: I am sorry to take the hon. Gentleman back a moment, but I noted with care his comments about criminal lifestyle. Would he care to amplify what gives him cause for concern? It is defined under "Interpretation" in clause 75. Is the interpretation causing him concern or some other matter?

Stephen Hesford: It is a new concept. My concern is a general one. If we are going to introduce a new concept, let us get the thing nailed down so that it works. That is the point that I am making. I hope that that helps the House. Clause 41, which deals with restraint orders, will be particularly significant.

Part 5 deals with civil recovery of proceeds and brings us into line with jurisdictions such as the United States of America and Australia. The United States has particular expertise in going after drug cartels. If it can set up a civil recovery of proceeds procedure, it is no bad thing that we should go down the same route.

I welcome the redefinition of money-laundering offences in part 7. As other right hon. and hon. Members said, it simplifies the system, which must be a good thing in terms of getting Mr. Big.

If the Bill does work—I believe that it will if we get it right—it will change the culture and it will enable criminal proceeds to be recycled, to the benefit of us all. I look forward to that.

6.39 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I suppose we should be grateful that the Government have deigned to engage Parliament in its much heralded war against terrorism. After all, judging by the stream of policy announcements made by the Home Office to favoured newspapers in recent weeks, a stranger to House procedures might conclude that the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs and the Home Secretary had unfettered authority over domestic affairs.

First, we have seen the nonsense of proposals for compulsory identity cards for all. It was then unilaterally announced that there will be a seven-year sentence for anthrax hoaxers, and 10 days ago it was decided that incitement to religious hatred would be made a criminal offence. Perhaps this debate, and I hope others in the future, will be a timely reminder to the Home Office that we live in a parliamentary democracy.

I may be one of only 166 Members of the official Opposition, but I am certain that the people of Cities of London and Westminster sent me to this place to stand up for the ancient freedoms of the people of this country and to hold this increasingly illiberal and intolerant Government to account. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may laugh. I realise that, whatever I say today, this Bill will almost certainly become law in some form or other, but I hope that there will be careful scrutiny in Committee. I know that in the years ahead, I shall look back upon my contribution to this debate with a sense of honour, whereas I suspect that many Labour Members will feel a sense of shame when they realise how they have allowed themselves to so cravenly approve many of the measures.

I should remind the House that this legislation was originally published as long ago as March and was intended to prevent criminals from laundering the proceeds of their offences.

Stephen Hesford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Field: No, I want to get on.

The now apparently indispensable measures that target the financiers of terror were added only as an afterthought. Last week's press release—this goes back to a point made by the hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford)—made it clear that the Government intend this legislation to deprive international drug barons of their ill-gotten gains. Apparently, the top five Mr. Bigs at large have illicitly amassed some £204 million in assets. On that basis, one might ask what objection any reasonable person would have to these measures.

As ever with this Government, the devil is in the detail. The proposed scope of this Bill goes considerably beyond the handful of multi-millionaire crime bosses. In effect, it allows the State virtually a free rein to investigate the financial affairs of each and every one of us, placing the burden upon the individual to explain his every economic action.

Politicians have an overriding responsibility, especially during times of international crisis, to resist taking a populist approach to appease the understandable public demand for swift action against crime. After the appalling terrorist outrages of 11 September, I entirely understand the temptation facing the Government to introduce a whole raft of new laws—part of this was drafted post-11 September—to pacify a nerve-racked population. That temptation should be firmly resisted. Equally, amid the current uncertainty surrounding our military action on foreign soil, I can appreciate the fact that the Government find themselves under intense pressure to be seen to be doing something on the home front.

I represent an inner-city seat in the centre of the capital and I accept, as I think we all do, that we will have to grow accustomed to wider surveillance of certain groups of people in our country. That may involve tougher laws on money laundering and other things. However, it does not justify the wholesale erosion of our liberties that is heralded by the Bill.

[Mr. Field]

The traditional values of freedom and tolerance, which were referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), have underpinned our open society. The implicit attack upon the presumption of innocence that is contained in the Bill will go a considerable way to dismantling those democratic freedoms, which so many of us hold close to our heart.

My party recognises the importance of fostering the values of individual responsibility and self-determination in our fellow countrymen. Many of those coming to our country from abroad do so from nations where all authority flows from a centralised state and where all too little reliance is placed on individuals having the freedom to live their life free from the demands of officialdom.

The Bill proposes to confiscate the assets of people who may have been convicted of no crime at all. As many hon. Members have said, the mechanism of the Assets Recovery Agency involves the introduction of the use of presumptions about a person's past conduct as a "criminal lifestyle". On that basis alone, an individual's assets may be confiscated on the grounds that it can safely be presumed that they must be the proceeds of crime. The presumption of innocence, which is at the centre of the rule of law, is thus replaced by the notion that the police and other authorities "know" that the accused is guilty.

Worse still, the Bill introduces into English law the entirely novel concept of "unaccountable wealth". If you or I, Mr. Deputy Speaker, cannot explain the source of our income, the state will apparently have the authority to confiscate assets, either directly or by means of punitive taxation. As if those presumptions were not bad enough—we must remember that this applies to people who may not have been convicted of anything—the ability to remove people's assets will be on the basis not of the criminal test of proof "beyond reasonable doubt", but on the civil test of the "balance of probabilities". In essence, a criminal sanction will be imposed without the normal safeguards.

As has been mentioned by a number of Labour Members, these provisions were originally directed specifically at the proceeds of drug-related crime. However, we must look carefully because, as was made clear by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, the civil forfeiture regime has been extended to apply to all offences.

I have the privilege of representing Cities of London and Westminster and, as had been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), I must report to the House that there has been considerable disquiet in the financial services community as to the likely effect of the money-laundering provisions in part 7 of the Bill. Although this may stretch the incredulity of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), under the current regulations, bankers, lawyers and accountants are already under an obligation to report to the police any suspicions they may have about someone's financial assets. That was made clear by my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight). Indeed, failure to do so amounts to an offence under various money-laundering regulations. However, the courts still have to prove beyond reasonable doubt that a financial intermediary knew of or suspected money laundering.

These provisions, particularly clause 324, severely dilute the burden of proof. In future, a prosecution will be upheld if a judge determines that a professional adviser should objectively have had reasonable grounds for suspecting that another person was engaged in money laundering. It strikes me that that goes to the very heart of the client-professional adviser relationship. Such relationships should be based upon mutual trust, yet these regulations put an almost impossible burden on the very scrupulous and ethical professional whom the police should be trying to engage in co-operation over the most serious and flagrant instances of criminal wrongdoing. Instead, as soon as a lawyer or accountant passes on suspicions to police—he will be guilty of an offence if he fails to do so even when there are merely reasonable grounds for suspecting that money laundering has taken place—professional ethics will prevent him from continuing to deal with that client's affairs and he will not be able to alert the client to the fact that he has made a report to the police.

As well as eroding the sense of trust that underpins any professional relationship, it is fair to say that in the sphere of financial services the Bill will create a community of informants. It will undermine the essence of professional relationships and will involve bureaucratic procedure that will not come cheap. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield pointed out, all organisations in the financial services industry will now face the enormous cost of employing an army of compliance officers and other internal regulators. That flies in the face of the City's attempts to remain highly competitive in the fast-moving global market of financial services and adds a further significant layer of regulation—there has been a significant amount of regulation recently—at a point in the economic cycle when the City is already under intense pressure over profit margins.

I realise that we are dealing with many issues, but I shall concentrate on the money-laundering provisions. There are some serious practical considerations that suggest that some of the money-laundering provisions might be unlikely to be effective against terrorists. There is a key difference between terrorism and organised crime such as that involving drug barons. Drug barons usually try to obtain their funds illegally and seek to use the banking system to conceal that fact whereas, by contrast, terrorists often acquire their funds by entirely legitimate means.

Osama bin Laden, for example, is the son of a wealthy industrialist and built up a considerable fortune not only by means of political donation but by engaging in large-scale Government contracts. There is little to suggest that the funding of his sophisticated network of international terrorism would necessarily fall foul of the Bill's money-laundering provisions.

It seems that the likely effect of many of the Bill's provisions would be to add a significant regulatory burden to our financial services industry. It would also work to dissuade potential depositors from using City of London institutions and would shroud our entire financial sector in an atmosphere of mutual distrust. It would do that while failing to have a serious impact on the funding of global terrorism.

Contrary to what the Government tell us, none of the provisions will make Britain a remotely safer place: international terrorism will continue to evade with ease the money-laundering provisions and many of the Bill's

other provisions. I believe also that the most prolific drug barons will continue to find the wherewithal to escape the clutches of state control.

Like many Opposition Members, I have been instinctively suspicious of many of the often self-serving arguments of civil libertarians. However much the Home Office likes to try to persuade us that this Bill which it now seeks to rush through Parliament will curtail only the legal rights of terrorists, drugs barons and their associates, I implore hon. Members on both sides of the House to consider carefully before approving this barrage of ill-thought-through and draconian measures.

One should remember that when a state adopts draconian powers against strangers today, it will use them against friends tomorrow and against oneself the day after that. In a world in which the influence of lawyers seems to be ever more intrusive—

Mr. Davidson: Hear, hear.

Mr. Field: I thought I might receive praise on that point alone from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Davidson: No one is beyond redemption.

Mr. Field: Perhaps I should make it clear that I too am a former lawyer. All that, however, was some years ago.

In a world in which lawyers' influence seems to be ever more intrusive, it is easy to be dismissive of a highbrow defence of the rule of law. However, it is especially in times of such national crisis that the rights of the individual must be defended with particular vigour.

6.52 pm

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): It is a clear comment on our parliamentary democracy that I have the good fortune to follow the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field). Although the two of us ostensibly agree on the Government's proposals in the Bill, it would be hard for anyone listening to his comments and then mine to make that connection. I make it clear from the outset that I welcome the Bill, and that I am on the side of the little person who has suffered too much at the hands of the criminal Mr. Bigs who have been getting away with it. The Bill is all about addressing that issue, and that is what we should be concerned about.

I do not know what it is like in Cities of London and Westminster—that inner-city constituency—but one thing that we have to contend with in my constituency is people selling heroin to primary school children at the school gates. They are changing the price of heroin so that it approximates to the price of school dinners to draw children into their net. I want those who are gaining from that marketing activity—the Mr. Bigs who are behind it—to lose their comfortable lifestyle.

As for those who can take over council housing tower blocks and run them as private establishments—they use a panoply of equipment usually associated with security firms for their own intimidatory purposes to operate their drugs markets—I want their equipment confiscated and their ill-gotten gains taken from them. I also want the pubs in Birmingham where people conduct drug deals in full view of the public, using mobile telephones to contact their business masters, to be prevented from carrying on that trade. I want every penny that those people and their masters gain from that trade to be taken off them. That is not an unreasonable ambition.

There are other examples in our society that show how people have benefited from illegal activities to enhance their own lifestyle. Anyone who is not familiar with Northern Ireland need only drive round the Holywood area to see the lovely lifestyles maintained by some people to realise why there may be no incentive in certain quarters to ensure that the peace process succeeds. We should try to tackle those who illegally maintain such a lifestyle.

Other hon. Members will have shared my horror when, last year, a container was opened to reveal the bodies of unfortunate people who had been promised a new life but suffocated in their attempt to reach this country. Had they survived they would have been sold into a life of slavery and prostitution. We talk about illegal asylum seekers and the problem of human traffickers, but the truth is that a market and huge financial incentives drive that trade. Some people make enormous profits at the expense of those unfortunate folk. I believe that we are justified in taking any action that we can to ensure that we take that money off them.

The Bill is largely a consolidation measure and parts of it should not surprise anyone. Some earlier remarks, such as some of those of my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford), were lost on me as they seemed to be dealing with practices that have already been implemented. It seemed a pointless use of the time available. Nevertheless, there are one or two legitimate concerns about how the provisions will operate in practice. We can make it clear that we support the Bill's fundamental principle of going after those who enjoy a lifestyle that is far too good at the expense of others while questioning how the legislation will operate in practice.

Although I am not sure that I want to associate myself with the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), and I am sure that he would not want to associate himself with me, he drew an interesting analogy between the Child Support Agency and the Assets Recovery Agency. He is not the only Member to have had that thought. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider precisely how the ARA will operate. Does it have as a target the recovery of £60 million by 2004? If it does, can we be certain that it will recover that sum by going after those whom we really intend to catch in the legislation, and that we will not get the soft-touch response for which the CSA was validly criticised in its early days? I ask for his reassurance on that point.

I am also interested in how the agency director will perform his or her functions. Although I am clear that I want the director to have those powers, I do not want him or her to be able to go on fishing trips. Some years ago, when John Stalker, then deputy chief constable of Manchester, was under intense investigation, various such fishing trips were undoubtedly conducted into the business activities of some of his friends and associates, resulting in untold damage. Although I am clear that the agency that we are establishing and its director will not have such powers under the Bill, these provisions will outlive many of us. I am anxious that we make it clear that the agency and its director should not be used for such purposes.

[Mr. Stephen McCabe]

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) and others mentioned the trade-off between the civil and the criminal route. We have had assurances that the criminal route will be pursued first, and of course that is what I want to hear, but we have not always been entirely satisfied with the performance of the Crown Prosecution Service. Will there be monitoring of which cases take which route, so that we can be clear that there is no temptation to go for the softer option because it seems too difficult to pursue the criminal route?

People will be delighted to know that we are taking away ill-gotten gains, but recovering money is no substitute for justice, which we should pursue first and foremost.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman is making a thoughtful contribution. Does he think that there should be a target at all? Is a £60 million target appropriate, or should not we simply ask the agency to do its very best to recover assets? Arbitrary targets may have been one of the reasons why the CSA got into so much difficulty.

Mr. McCabe: I do not mind if the Government have a target based on a notion of how much money is available, but I do not want the agency to be tied to that target, in which case the way in which it is achieved might be an issue of dispute.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: To clear up any confusion, the £60 million target is for the asset recovery strategy, which is already being introduced. It is not a target for the agency, which we will expect to target those at the top end to get the highest returns. It will not be tied to the £60 million target in any way.

Mr. McCabe: I am extremely grateful for that clarification.

I am conscious that previous Department of Trade and Industry inquiries have been alleged to have undermined subsequent prosecutions. Can we be certain that the director's powers to compel an individual to supply information and produce documents will not undermine a prosecution because the defence will be able to argue that the individual was forced to produce information under duress?

The hon. Member for Lewes seemed to insist that there would be innocent parties, and I do not doubt that, but my point is that when someone who has taken advantage of and exploited countless people decides to use the ill-gotten gains to pay for school fees, skiing holidays and finishing schools—perhaps through some carefully arranged legacy—I regard the child in those circumstances not as an innocent party but as a beneficiary who is gaining at the expense of people who have suffered a far greater hardship. I am not as concerned as some Opposition Members are to protect the interests of such so-called innocent parties. If one gains in that way, one has to accept that what has been got by unfair means can be taken away just as quickly. I see no problem with that.

To return to a hobby-horse of mine, would clause 11 enable us to recover proceeds from those whose lifestyle has been partly financed by fraudulently obtaining libel damages?

7.5 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The SNP-Plaid Cymru group fully supports the thrust of the Bill. The system being established seems to be similar to the Criminal Assets Bureau in the Republic of Ireland, which I understand has seized assets worth £6.5 million in the past three years. By contrast, under the current legislation, confiscations in Scotland have amounted to £1.7 million since April 1999.

It is interesting to note that the vast majority of those confiscations—68 out of 81—have been for drug offences. As the hon. Members for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) and for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) so eloquently stated, drugs are a major menace in all our constituencies, be they rural or urban. The Bill will go a long way towards tackling the problem of assets acquired by drug barons.

We welcome the fact that the Scottish Executive will be the enforcement agency in Scotland, although I have some doubts about the role of the Lord Advocate. We call on both the Scottish Executive and the UK Government to use funds realised under the legislation as additional resources for tackling crime, and for combating drug use in particular. It would not only be justice but poetic justice if the assets of those involved in that vile trade were used to reduce it.

Some have expressed concern about human rights. I, too, have some doubts about the human rights aspects of certain parts of the Bill. As another recent escapee from the legal profession, I raise the matter because I am concerned that we should not get into the situation that arose in Scotland after the passing of the Scotland Act 1998 and the incorporation of the European convention into Scots law. We had severe problems with temporary sheriffs, road traffic cameras and various other matters. We want to get the legislation right so that the people against whom it is targeted are caught and dealt with quickly. We must not leave loopholes that can be exploited.

I have a particular concern about disclosure orders and the role of the Lord Advocate. A person made subject to a disclosure order may be liable to self-incrimination, which might jeopardise the chance of a fair trial. As I understand the Bill, the Lord Advocate will be involved both in the criminal prosecution, should there be one, and in the civil recovery proceedings.

If the Crown Office believed that someone was using assets gained from crime to set up an apparently legitimate business but did not have sufficient evidence to gain a criminal conviction, it could serve a disclosure notice in the name of the Lord Advocate under clause 379 to obtain information for the civil recovery action. However, supposing that during that action information was disclosed that would warrant a criminal prosecution, would there not be a problem with the Lord Advocate being involved in both proceedings? That could create a problem under article 6 of the European convention on human rights. Some thought should go into the separation of the two roles.

The problem will not arise in England, where the Assets Recovery Agency will deal with the civil aspect while the Crown Prosecution Service will deal with the criminal aspect.

Mr. Harris: My understanding is that the unit in the Scottish Executive that will be entirely responsible for civil recovery will be answerable exclusively to the First Minister and not to the Lord Advocate.

Mr. Weir: My understanding was that it would be dealt with through the Crown Office and the Lord Advocate. If the hon. Gentleman is right, there may not be such a problem. However, if the matter is under the remit of the Crown Office, there may be a problem. In the Bill, there is provision for a separate director for Northern Ireland, and some thought should be given to the situation in Scotland.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful for the opportunity to make a standing, rather than sedentary, intervention in the debate. The First Minister will designate the Lord Advocate as the appropriate person to pursue these matters, but he will be acting as a Minister and not as a Law Officer. The hon. Gentleman will know that Lords Advocate in the past have had to separate these two roles, and have done so pretty well under different Administrations. Also, information obtained in relation to civil proceedings would not normally be disclosed in criminal actions. I hope that those two points reassure the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Weir: I am grateful to the Minister, although some thought still has to go into this matter. Given the previous problems with the human rights provisions, we do not want the Bill to get bogged down.

I wish to refer to clause 94, which is central to the confiscation process and lays down the conditions that the court must take into account in dealing with confiscation. However, it does not make the prosecutor bring before the court at that point the statement of information that is necessary under the subsequent clauses that deal with the situation where matters have to be reopened at a later date. This matter has been referred to by the Law Society of Scotland, and perhaps the provision could be brought forward to an earlier date so that all information is before the court before there is a decision to proceed.

I wish to refer also to the question of funding. The Minister talked about £45 million being set aside for the proposed Assets Recovery Agency. However, I note that the agency will not operate in Scotland, apart from on Inland Revenue matters. I hope that sufficient funding will be available in Scotland to enable the Bill to proceed. That may ultimately be a matter for the Scottish Executive, but I ask Ministers to raise the matter with the Treasury to ensure that the proposal does not fall foul of the problems of underfunding. This is not a matter that should be taken lightly.

The hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) talked about drug traffickers in Liverpool. [HON. MEMBERS: "Manchester."] I apologise; I am getting my English cities mixed up. One of my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament highlighted the case of a person convicted in Scotland of heroin dealing who was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment and made the subject of a confiscation order under the present law, which is largely to be re-enacted under the Bill. This person was reputed to be worth some £4 million but, after a brief court hearing, was reported to have punched the air with delight when he was ordered to pay just £32,000.

It was said at the time that the Crown Office had just two full-time staff dealing with the seizure of criminal assets and that it had neither the time nor the resources to get to the bottom of that person's finances. As has been made clear today, the finances of those involved in serious crime, particularly drug-related matters, can be complex, and sufficient funding is needed to investigate them.

Under clause 109, there is a power to reopen the matter within six years if new information comes to the attention of the prosecutor. I have to ask what chance there is realistically of matters being reinvestigated in the future if there are insufficient resources to undertake the original investigation. Funding is crucial in this matter.

Why does clause 94 give the power to make a confiscation order against someone who has been given an absolute discharge? I find it difficult to imagine a situation where a court would grant an absolute discharge and then seek to impose a confiscation order. I appreciate that the provisions on criminal lifestyle may have a bearing on that.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman touches on an interesting point. My understanding is that, in English law—and, I suspect, in Scots law—an absolute discharge is normally given in circumstances where a person is held to be blameless, though technically guilty, of an offence. It is being used here as a device to introduce that person into the confiscatory mechanism. Does the hon. Gentleman think that that is correct in principle?

Mr. Weir: In terms of Scots law, the hon. Gentleman is slightly wrong as to whether the person is blameless. The point about an absolute discharge is that a person is guilty of the crime, but that it does not count as a criminal conviction; that is not quite the same thing. I cannot imagine anyone convicted of crimes who is given such a discharge then being subject to a confiscation order.

Mr. Davidson: Can the hon. Gentleman not envisage circumstances in which a strong prosecution case collapsed because of a mistake, because time had run out or because the evidence had been collected wrongly, but in which the accused was clearly as guilty as sin and was able to get away with it? Should the accused be allowed to keep their ill-gotten gains? I hope that that is not the position of the Scottish National party.

Mr. Weir: That was not the point I was making. The hon. Gentleman misunderstands what an absolute discharge is. The point is that a person is convicted of a crime, but the court decides that it was of such a minor nature, or that there were such special circumstances, that it does not count as a criminal conviction. In the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman sets out, there will still be civil recovery. I would have no qualms about that; the whole point of the proposal is to deal with such circumstances. The hon. Gentleman spoke earlier about problems with drugs in Pollok. Had he been here when I started my speech, he would have heard me say that that is a problem throughout Scotland, in urban and rural areas.

I support the Bill wholeheartedly, but I am anxious that we should not get bogged down in legal technicalities and allow people involved in serious drug offences or other serious crimes to get out on technicalities.

7.17 pm

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) on his maiden speech. I am sure that, like his predecessor, he will serve his constituents in this place to the best of his ability, and that that ability will be much to the benefit of everyone in his constituency.

Crime, especially organised crime, has the potential to affect each and every one of us, whether in this place or in our communities. We all have experience of constituents coming to our constituency offices to complain bitterly about dubious individuals who live in the same neighbourhood and seem to have a more than reasonable lifestyle. Often, we hear, "Who says that crime does not pay?" or, "Don't tell me that honesty is the best policy." Such statements have a hollow ring to them and people leave our constituency offices extremely upset and angry because of what is happening in their communities.

I very much support the Bill. At long last, we can take forward what can only be described as a battle against organised crime and the criminals who perpetrate it. Right across the country, decent, honest and law-abiding citizens will be delighted that we are looking to tackle head-on those whose only motive is profit. That profit, and its provenance, is immaterial to criminals. It does not matter to them that they are involved in pushing drugs or trafficking in them, in smuggling goods or in dealing with illegal immigrants, as long as money is collected and paid to them so that they can boost their bank balances and improve their already excellent lifestyles. The misery suffered every day by individuals, families and communities is the last thought on the minds of the people coining the cash.

Much of the publicity surrounding the Bill has centred on drugs and drug barons, and all of us have a fair idea of the impact of drugs on modern society. Some would call drugs modern society's scourge, and would say that we have to live with them and battle against them. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) described what goes on in his constituency, and his was a true portrayal of what is happening across the country. The only difference between what happens on council estates and on private residential estates is that violence is present on the council estates.

Neighbours complain about drug pushers and suppliers, and their lives are turned upside down by the disturbance and disruption caused by cars coming and going all evening, early and late, and all through the night. People who push and supply drugs have an altogether different lifestyle. They sleep through the day and conduct and transact business in the evenings. The culprits party all night, as a constituent of mine—an elderly gentleman of nearly 80—told me recently. He said that he and his wife were at breaking point. His wife could no longer leave their house, but had to go to bed in the day to try to get some sleep. This constituent visited me three times and, on the third occasion, he told me that his doctor had prescribed Valium because what was going on had left him such a wreck. The woman next door to this constituent was making lots of money. She was not interested in him or any other neighbour.

To a degree, I blame the local authority: the police have tried their best to clamp down on the trouble, but the local authority's housing department has not helped at all. The result is a terrible environment for our children. I have been told that children on the estate that I have described leave their respective families' flats at 8 o'clock in the morning to visit drug suppliers. They then return to their families for breakfast—if they get breakfast at all. We do not want young children to be brought up in such an environment in our society.

Drugs and drug abuse create all sorts of misery. I worked in a drugs initiative group in my constituency for a short time, and I recall a police officer telling us one evening about how witnesses of drug abuse in the family undergo something that resembles bereavement. I am sure that all hon. Members know that bereavement is difficult to overcome, but watching a household member who is heavily into drugs is like watching that person die. Not much can be done to help: families try to pull together, but what they suffer is almost the same as bereavement. We have to try to prevent the spread of drugs through our communities.

Other hon. Members have spoken about figures and statistics. Those statistics give a true picture of the misery that 1 kg of heroin can cause on the street, and what it costs people, families and communities.

I was fortunate enough to hold an Adjournment debate 11 months ago on the smuggling of tobacco and alcohol. I said that the problem went beyond those visitors to the continent who purchase an extra 200 cigarettes or bottle of spirits, or the people—business men and women, or lorry drivers, for example—who carry back a small amount of goods for friends or relatives. The problem has to do with bootlegging—the process by which tobacco and alcohol products are purchased on a large scale in countries with lower tax rates, and then illegally sold to people, distributors and retailers in the UK. The white van trade, as it is called, appears to account for about 25 per cent. of smuggled goods.

I said earlier that criminal activity can affect all of us. By its nature, bootlegging can lead to the closure of those small corner shops that are so much needed in many rural constituencies. Criminals generate profit by cornering the market, and local people lose the convenience of having a shop in their villages.

It is reassuring to see that the Bill contains a range of measures to assist police and courts with the confiscation of the proceeds of crime. The establishment of the Assets Recovery Agency is to be welcomed, and the agency's mechanisms will prove helpful in providing the expertise necessary to carry out investigations and confiscate criminal assets.

The agency will have powers, similar to those granted to the police, to investigate, freeze and confiscate. That, too, is welcome, but the agency will have to pull together the work of investigators, accountants and lawyers. In that regard, I do not envy those in the agency charged with securing the co-operation of accountants and lawyers. When I hear hon. Members condemn each other for having been either an accountant or a lawyer in a previous life, I worry about what they think of one another.

In the past, it was all too easy for criminals to move assets when they came under pressure from the law, but the Bill will allow assets to be frozen at the beginning of an investigation, rather than when a person has been charged. I am pleased about that, although I know that some hon. Members are worried about the provision. However, we need to be bold in order to move matters forward. Banks will also be obliged to report the accounts of people under investigation to the police and customs.

Other provisions in the Bill include the power to seize substantial sums of cash derived from crime, or intended for use in crime. That money can then be forfeited in civil proceedings in magistrates courts. I see nothing wrong with that, nor with a civil recovery scheme that will give the Assets Recovery Agency the power to sue people in the High Court to recover property derived from crime. In my view, there is nothing wrong either in tackling the tax position of convicted criminals by giving the Assets Recovery Agency the power to assess a person's tax position and issue what I hope would be a substantial tax demand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) made the plea that money should be returned to communities that have suffered at the hands of despicable criminals. I sincerely hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will clarify the matter. I believe that the Bill provides that money confiscated from criminals can be used again in our communities.

Many people in our communities see what is going on around them. They know that something is desperately wrong when a person who seems to be unemployed and living on benefit runs around in several cars, all of which have personalised number plates. That person may have a large American camper van at his door, and may also own a boat. There is something sadly wrong with that. I am sure that the Bill will improve our communities, and I shall very much support it during its progress through the House.

7.29 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I wish to make a couple of general observations about the Bill, the principle of which I support, before moving on to specific concerns about a number of clauses, particularly those relating to the controversial new powers of civil forfeiture.

I begin by taking issue with something that the Home Secretary said in his speech to the Labour party conference at the beginning of the month. He said that it was not lawyers and judges who secured the liberty and freedom of our people; it was political action bringing about change. He expanded on the theme the next day in an article in *The Times*, saying:

> "Freedom springs not from abstract legal process but from political action. After all, British democracy was not created by lawyers and judges."

I hold no brief for lawyers—I think that I am about the only speaker so far who has not been a lawyer, although my wife was once. However, I believe that the Home Secretary profoundly misunderstands our history and the development of our freedoms. We in Britain were proud of our constitution before we were proud of our democracy. Our constitution was formed as much from the steady development of our common law by our courts as by the political actions of politicians in this House and elsewhere. The essence of the constitution is that the actions of the state are subject to the rule of law. The freedoms of each one of us, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) reminded us, occur at the interstices of the laws.

Primary among those freedoms is the freedom to live without fear of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. It has been enshrined in common law for centuries and is known as habeas corpus. Equally important is the freedom to hold property. I take issue with some Labour Members who talk as though that freedom applies only to the very rich. For people who own their own council flat or have a small building society savings account, the freedom to hold property is very important. It is a bulwark between the power of the state and the freedom of the individual. That is why we should treat with care and examine with caution any Bill—particularly one as complex as this—which threatens the institution of property.

The Cabinet Office report which led to the Bill refers to "a significant extension of the powers available to the State". Our freedoms are not absolute, and it is the difficult duty of any Government to attempt to balance the competing freedom of the individual with the freedom of society to live free from the fear of crime. According to the Cabinet Office report:

> "There is a careful balance to be struck between the civil rights of the individual and the need to ensure that the State has the tools to protect society by tackling crime effectively."

The mere mention of civil rights has Ministers reaching for their revolvers, but, unfashionable though it is to say it, I think that civil liberties are important and need constant protection. There are always good reasons why one civil liberty should be undermined, why another should be eroded and why a problem can be resolved by a change to yet another. Civil liberties need constant protection and there are always good reasons for undermining them. That is why we must be constantly on our guard.

Is the threat to our society from organised crime or money laundering such that it warrants a restriction of the rights of the individual? If we accept that the threat warrants it, do the powers in the Bill go beyond what is necessary to achieve our objectives? I accept that the threat to our society and our security from large-scale crime, drug dealing, organised crime and money laundering is very real. I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford), for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall), who made his maiden speech, and for Dumfries (Mr. Brown). They all spoke movingly about the problems that drugs cause in their constituency, as they do in mine. I do not pretend that mine is a deprived inner-city area, but drugs are nevertheless a major concern for my constituents. Drugs pose a very real threat, and we lack the means to tackle it effectively. We also lack the means to tackle the way in which terrorist organisations are funded, as they rely largely on the proceeds of organised crime.

Fighting the crimes which corrode our society and starving terrorists of funds must include getting hold of the huge sums that people earn. Being caught must not simply be a career hazard for a criminal—it must destroy his career. We must find a way of reaching those whom the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs described in his opening speech as the untouchables. The Home Office estimates that about 400 criminal bosses are sitting on profits of £440 million, half of which is held by only 39 people.

Despite a succession of confiscation laws passed by Governments of both parties, it is clear that the laws are not working. The Bill passes the first test that I set it. There is a significant threat to our society from large-scale crime. One way of tackling that is by getting at the profits of the criminals, and we lack the means. That justifies restricting the individual's right to hold property.

Whether the Bill passes the second test is another matter. Are the new powers that the state proposes to take upon itself necessary, or do they go beyond what is

[Mr. George Osborne]

required? Many of the Bill's provisions are necessary. The creation of a national Assets Recovery Agency is clearly necessary when individual police forces lack the expertise or, I suggest, the will to pursue complex financial forfeiture actions. It also makes sense to unify the various money-laundering offences, although I note what my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) said about that.

At the heart of the Bill is the change to the existing criminal confiscation regime and the creation of the new civil power of forfeiture. Pressure groups such as Liberty and Justice have criticised both as unacceptable erosions of the liberties of the individual. They object to the so-called reverse burden system that puts the requirement on persons convicted of a certain number of offences to prove that their assets are not the earnings of a criminal lifestyle. Some of my colleagues may disagree with me on this, but I have no problem on civil liberty grounds about the clauses that strengthen the criminal confiscation regime. There is a huge distinction between people who have been convicted of a criminal offence in a court of law and people who have not.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset made the point that we do not know what these offences are and I hope that during the Bill's passage we will be given some idea of the nature and seriousness of the offences under discussion. However, I assume that they will be fairly serious. When a person commits a serious criminal act and it is proved beyond reasonable doubt in a courtroom that they have done so, they have in my view forfeited many of the liberties that the rest of us enjoy. The consequences include the possibility of being locked up in prison and losing the assets that they have earned through their criminal activity.

Why does clause 75 restrict criminal confiscation orders, except in the case of drug crimes, to persons who have been convicted of a number of offences? If they have been convicted of one offence, they need to be convicted of the same offence on two separate occasions in the past six years or of four offences on the same occasion. Surely being convicted of one serious offence such as arms trafficking or the trade of prostitution should be enough to call into question a person's lifestyle and the legality of their assets. If Ministers are right to say that we are dealing with criminal untouchables, requiring the police to catch those people red handed not just once but several times seems to undermine the whole point of the Bill.

A harsher criminal confiscation regime would also make less necessary the one part of the Bill that I find it difficult to accept—the proposed new power of civil confiscation. It allows the state, for the first time, to seize the property of people who have never been convicted beyond reasonable doubt of a criminal offence in a court of law but who merely, on the balance of probabilities, are deemed likely to have taken part in unlawful activities. That gives the state major new powers of a totally unfettered kind, the full nature of which is spelled out in the explanatory notes.

Of clause 245 the explanatory notes say:

"This is an entirely new right of action . . . Cases where criminal proceedings have not been brought would include cases where there are insufficient grounds for prosecution".

Of clause 246 they say:

"The criminal standard of proof, under which matters must be proved beyond reasonable doubt, does not . . . apply".

Of clause 247 they say that

"it is not necessary to show that property was obtained through a particular kind of unlawful conduct, so long as it can be shown to have been obtained through unlawful conduct of one kind or another."

In other words, the Bill is giving massive legal force to the old lament of the policeman: "We know he did it; we just can't prove it." Indeed, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) echoed that lament when he said, "They got off but they are guilty as sin."

I believe that the Bill undermines the very foundation of our freedoms, which is that people are innocent until they are proved guilty, that the state cannot merely seize the property of the individual but must establish that the individual has forfeited his liberties under the rule of law. The way that we do that in our society—the way we have always done it—is to take individuals to court, establish beyond reasonable doubt that they are guilty, preferably to a jury of their peers, and prove that they have committed a criminal offence.

The new power of civil forfeiture is born of an understandable frustration at our inability to pin things on certain individuals, but it is a sloppy and dangerous short cut to improving our criminal law.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): My hon. Friend suggests that trial should preferably be by jury. Does he accept that in many cases of the type that we are discussing, concerning money laundering and major fraud, juries are absolutely incapable of understanding what is put before them? I am afraid that there are too many examples of that already.

Mr. Osborne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He makes a good point about juries in complex financial fraud cases. The central point that I am making is that, regardless of whether it is a complex fraud case and regardless of whether there is a jury, a criminal conviction still has to be established beyond reasonable doubt. What is proposed in the legislation would change that and allow a court to bring a civil forfeiture action, which is simply on the balance of probabilities.

Stephen Hesford: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman missed the snippet in my speech in which I said that this procedure was common practice in the United States. Is he saying that that sophisticated democracy has got it wrong?

Mr. Osborne: I am not familiar with the regime in the United States, but I will take the hon. Gentleman at his word. In the United States there are of course very powerful other protections for the civil liberties of the individual, such as an enshrined Bill of Rights that is enforced by a Supreme Court, and it is a very different system from the system under which we live, which is a common law developed over hundreds of years and which protects our liberties under the law.

I finish by referring back to the Cabinet Office report, which asks a pertinent question. It asks who seriously believes that the police will waste their time putting together complex criminal charges against these people

when they know that they can pursue a much easier civil route. Therefore, far from bringing the so-called untouchables within our grasp, the new powers will make them more untouchable—more untouchable by the criminal law. Although I support much of the Bill, I will need a lot of persuading by Ministers to convince me that I should support the draconian new powers of civil forfeiture.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Nine hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. If each hon. Member who is called takes their full allocation, only six hon. Members will be successful. I hope that the mathematics will be understood by everyone present in the House.

7.43 pm

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute, sooner than I had anticipated, to a debate on an issue of paramount importance to my constituents. Over the summer recess and during the general election campaign, they told me on the doorstep that crime was their No. 1 concern. They wanted the Government to deal with the drug industry, which permeates many families across the black country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) said, they know that, for too many people in Britain, crime does pay, and they expect Parliament to put an end to it. I hope that the Bill will go a long way to meet their concerns.

The recent British crime survey figures, which showed crime falling by 12 per cent. last year, were welcomed in the west midlands, but people recognise that there is still a long way to go. If the Government are going to be tough on crime, they must be tough on the dirty money that funds and motivates crime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) said that many hon. Members live in a different world from their constituents. For many people in my constituency, organised crime is a strange faraway world that they feel does not relate to them, but it has a strong impact on everyday lives in many communities in Britain.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) vividly outlined how £1 million taken from a drug baron can take 50 kg of heroin off the streets of Britain, and yet, with all the new technologies—the mobile phone drug markets, the complex series of dealers—the Mr. Bigs at the end of the supply chain often evade capture. Yet we all know who these people are. On 18 October, the Sandwell edition of the *Express and Star* reported that Britain's five biggest drug barons were collectively worth £200 million. The Bill will allow us to tackle the Mr. Bigs of Britain; everyone in the House should welcome that.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) expressed his frustration that, for far too long, the police and the courts had not placed a high enough priority on the recovery of criminal assets. When we consider that the proceeds of crime account for 2 per cent. of gross domestic product, we realise that the scale of the problem is so great that we must collectively tackle it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) spoke about the money-laundering industry surrounding General Abacha, worth $4 billion alone. However, in 1999 in the United Kingdom, the value of receipts from confiscation orders was only £25 million—a tiny proportion of the overall gains made by criminal gangs. In addition, when drug trafficking convictions are secured, confiscation orders are issued in only one in five cases.

The Home Affairs Committee recommended in 1995 that the Home Office working group on confiscation should continue to keep legislation under constant review. That working group called for a more radical analysis of the case for extending the UK's existing, limited powers for confiscation without a criminal conviction. I congratulate the Government on responding to those recommendations.

I believe that the Bill recognises the scale of the challenges ahead. I welcome the creation of the new Assets Recovery Agency, because if we are to unravel the labyrinthine complexities of the dirty money audit trails, we shall need specialists to do so. As we found with the bin Laden network, Governments must act much earlier to freeze criminal assets before the dirty money disappears. The Bill rightly allows that to happen.

I believe that we have all recognised the responsibility that banks have to their communities to report any suspected dirty money transactions. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) raised a pertinent point when he expressed his concerns for finance industry workers. I know that the finance union UNIFI is concerned about the possible implications of clause 324 in respect of

"reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting"

that a transaction is being made with criminal money. I hope that the Minister will be able to allay the fears of its 160,000 members and persuade them that the law will target hotshot City financiers—like the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field)—who are the accomplices of the criminal gangs, not the front-line staff who work in the banks.

I hope that, as many hon. Members have said, we can send a clear message to civil liberties organisations, especially Liberty, that decent, hard-working people should have the right to live in a society free from the fear of crime and the menace that the drug cartels hold over our communities. We all need to make it clear that honest, hard-working, law-abiding citizens have nothing to fear from the Bill. The shadow Home Secretary may have a problem with certain smaller aspects of the Bill, but most people know who the people involved are.

I welcome the Government's commitment to double the value of recovered assets by 2004, and I hope that the Minister will set far more ambitious targets for the Assets Recovery Agency. The £45 million already pledged for asset recovery and the extra money for the new squad of financial investigators will go a long way to achieve those targets. The investigators will pit their wits against criminal masterminds who move money and assets around the globe, but with their success they will help to break the cycle of crime by cutting the cash that supplies funds for yet more criminal activity.

In conclusion, this is a good Bill. It will go a long way to disrupt the drug supply chains; it will take out crooked accountants; and it will undermine the financial base on which criminal gangs get their ill-gotten gains.

7.50 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): We on the Liberal Democrat Benches also welcome the Bill, and perhaps with more enthusiasm than some hon. Members on this side of the House. I am quite impressed by the way in which the very limited role of the provisions on profit confiscation will be expanded. It is important that we recognise the interrelation of different sorts of crimes. Crimes relating to drugs offences, money-laundering offences or whatever do not exist on their own; there is a clear and intricate interrelation between the various different species of crime. It is very important for the credibility of the wider criminal justice system that that is recognised and that legislation such as the Bill is put on to the statute book.

Several hon. Members have spoken about the impact of drugs in their constituencies. As I have already said, the important thing about the Bill is that it will take confiscation beyond drugs. However, my constituency is about as different as one could hope to find from those represented by the hon. Members for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) and for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford). It is occasionally thought that we do not have a drugs problem in the northern isles, but I assure the House that, although we may not be as far down the road as some urban constituencies, we are very much on that road and we look with horror to see what awaits us unless something is done. I therefore welcome the Bill as part of an overall package.

Hon. Members will be aware that many of the Scottish provisions in the Bill are the result of a Sewel motion passed by the Scottish Parliament. In passing, I would say that a mechanism must be devised to incorporate more effective accountability, or the involvement of Ministers in the Scottish Executive, when that happens. Some of the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) about the rights and position of innocent third parties could quite easily be assuaged if answers on the availability of legal aid could be given, but they are obviously not presently available to hon. Members. I simply put that down as a marker for future modernisation of the procedures.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, but I assure him that officials from the Scottish Executive have been involved at every stage in the Bill's drafting, and they will be involved during the Committee stage. I intend to serve on the Committee, as will many of my colleagues on both sides of the House who represent Scottish constituencies, so that we can ensure that the Scottish interests are properly considered. Last Wednesday, I attended the debate on the Sewel motion in the Scottish Parliament and found it very helpful to our consideration.

Mr. Carmichael: I am obliged to the Minister for that reassurance. He may be aware that, by virtue of politics and geography, I have perhaps better access to Ministers in the Scottish Executive, especially in relation to justice matters, than many hon. Members, but that is my good fortune, and to leave such matters to that sort of accident is less than desirable.

I should like to say a few words about innocent third parties. Several Labour Members—in particular, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok—spoke about people who have no visible means of support. Of course, that is a very legitimate point, but a number of other people who will fall foul of such proceedings have some visible means of support. They may be engaged in a cash-rich business, such as construction, or perhaps a security firm, which gives them a veneer or facade of respectability, beneath which there is a rather more murky picture. Some people can be properly called innocent victims in such circumstances.

A very lengthy fraud prosecution might well take the police 18 months or two years to investigate and a further year or 18 months to be dealt with by the procurator fiscal and perhaps another year as successive advocate-deputes kick the case on to one another in the High Court, finding a good reason not to proceed with it. If the proposed restraint orders were used at the start of such cases, which may well happen, innocent parties might be deprived of their legitimate enjoyment of their property for a prolonged time. I wonder whether the Minister could assure me in replying to the debate that if it ultimately transpires that someone has been deprived of the enjoyment of his or her property in that way, the Crown will be liable for damages as a result of wrongful diligence. It seems that a strong parallel can be drawn between the existing law of interdict and the proposed law on restraint orders.

The other danger to innocent third parties comes from the interaction of the confiscation provisions and the law on bankruptcy and corporate insolvency. I understand that, under profits confiscation orders, the property will be removed from the estate of a possible sequestrated person before the estate is determined, so those who have a legitimate claim on a proportion of a bankrupted person's estate will find that they are significantly worse off. Those people may have entered into a contract with the person who was the subject of the confiscation order. I wonder how much consideration has been given to people in those circumstances.

My final nagging doubt relates to the provision of search powers. I am no great fan of legislation that reintroduces powers that already exist, and there is a danger that we shall do so under the Bill. All the powers given to the police under it already exist under section 14 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. That is a live concern for the efficient and effective operation of the law on search because many hon. Members will be aware that there has been considerable conflict in the past between the law of search under the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980 and section 23 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Why are the search powers in the Bill necessary?

Finally, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes said, a clear hierarchy of confiscation procedures can be followed, such as those on conviction, on civil recovery and on taxation. I hope that that will be followed stringently. Indeed, it would be beneficial to require the Lord Advocate to give his consent before the director can take taxation actions in Scotland. That would preserve the Lord Advocate's position as the primary actor in the first and second instances. In many ways, those are quibbles that can no doubt be resolved in Committee, but tonight my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I are more than happy to support the Government.

7.59 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael). Orkney is my favourite holiday destination and I urge all hon. Members to go there as soon as possible.

I speak as yet another lawyer, albeit happily retired, so I hope that I can bring some valuable insights to the debate. I have practised as a defence criminal solicitor and also been involved in the regulation of financial services in a firm. It is important that we consider the Bill closely and that we strike the correct balance in dealing with such matters. It is most important, however, that we put this Bill in context.

It is difficult to overstate the effect of illegal, addictive drugs on our society. They are the predominant source of crime; they prevent people from making a positive contribution to society's well-being; they create misery for those who take drugs and for their families. The response by successive Governments to the problem has to date been strong on rhetoric but, I regret, largely ineffective. I am afraid that there is little doubt that the problem of drugs in our society has got worse, not better over the past 20 years.

It is in that context that, in passing, I welcome last week's announcement that the classification of cannabis under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is to be reconsidered. I also welcome the Bill, because it seems to be part of a shift of emphasis towards the specific targeting of those who treat drugs as some kind of legitimate business. Whether those people are traffickers or launderers, they must get the message that the trade is a sick one, that it devastates those who are affected by it and that we as a society will no longer put up with it.

As I mentioned, I had some experience of drugs in the criminal courts. I worked as a solicitor, often with juvenile offenders, on Merseyside and in north-east Wales in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Much of the crime was committed to feed heroin addiction. The use of cannabis was not a factor in the commission of theft, burglary or robbery. The use of heroin was the major factor. In many cases, without heroin there would have been no crime. Without the crime, people's fear would have lessened and the community would have been stronger and happier. The connection really was that simple.

Seeing a 14-year-old who is a victim of heroin addiction is a formative experience. I represented one 14-year-old who had committed 24 dwelling-house burglaries. Twenty-four people suffered the life-changing experience of feeling threatened in their own homes. The child concerned had no moral sense; he lived only to feed his habit. His family, who were so supportive in court, mattered to him only in so far as they gave him money. Often, he stole from them. He cared nothing for the hurt that that caused his mother, and less for the fear of victims remote from him—the people whose homes he had burgled.

It struck me then how often I represented the victims of heroin addiction and how seldom I represented those who profited from trade in the drug. Those traders seemed almost immune from prosecution—able to build their wealth by exploiting the young heroin addicts who were their customers. Their further victims were the people whose houses were burgled. There seemed to be no strategy to get such traders. Large-scale traffickers and launderers were never the specific targets of the law. I welcome the Bill as a clear statement that such people are now in our sights and that concentrated action will be taken against them. They are as big a threat to society as any individual drug addict.

As I said, later in my legal career, I was a supervising officer under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. As Conservative Members will accept, that was an onerous burden. Frankly, it was a pain in the neck; it involved constant form filling, much supervision of a financial adviser who worked for me and many interviews with people from the regulating authority, but it was necessary. Weighing that against the effect of heroin on our society is not difficult. The effect of the trade in heroin is so profound that it demands the far-reaching measures in the Bill.

I welcome the concern for civil liberties expressed by Conservative Members, although I am surprised that they seem to adhere to that topic only when discussing lawyers, accountants and bankers.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Lucas: I am delighted to give way to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve).

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman clearly has not listened, and certainly not to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). He highlighted not the money-laundering provisions, on which there may be little disagreement, but the draconian and wide-reaching legislation that could affect those who, far from being lawyers and accountants, are rather vulnerable members of society.

Ian Lucas: I do not accept that for one minute. The thrust of Conservative Members' comments has been advocacy of a limited section of society. We did not hear such advocacy at any stage while the Conservative party was in government—quite the contrary.

Mr. Cameron: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Lucas: I must move on.

We must make it clear that profit from the crime of trade in heroin is so intolerable that we are determined to seek to eliminate it. The mandatory nature of the confiscation procedures proposed is essential. It sends a clear message that there will be no profit from crime. The piecemeal measures taken in the past few years, though welcome, have diluted the message that Parliament must send to the traffickers: "You will be pursued."

The creation of the Assets Recovery Agency is a bold step, expressing the importance of acting against those who profit from crime. We regularly hear press reports of the astronomical amounts made in the criminal drugs industry. I agree that we must set ambitious targets for the sums to be recovered from traffickers. We must find the most experienced and committed staff for the agency. We must monitor the agency to ensure that targets are met and that there is a regime so effective that those who are convicted of profiting from crime surrender all that profit. I would also like the money recovered to be used

[Ian Lucas]

exclusively to compensate victims. It should also be used to treat offenders who become victims themselves through the use of drugs.

The creation of a structured basis on which to build action against those who profit from the proceeds of crime is long overdue. It provides the opportunity to proceed against criminals in a systematic and consistent manner within the rule of law. As a former lawyer, I recognise the importance of fairness in procedures and the establishment of guilt before legal action seizing property is authorised, but we must recognise the truth that our present policy against crime profiteers has been ineffective, that a new regime is needed, and that that regime must be rigorous to achieve its aims. The House should take it from me that there is no satisfaction in representing in our criminal justice system the heroin addict who repeatedly offends and is repeatedly caught. There is even less satisfaction in knowing that so-called respectable people in our society are making money from the wrecked lives of their victims.

The Bill strikes the right balance between the rights of society and those of the individual. We must make the criminal realise that he will not retain the profit of his trade if he is convicted; that the days of the drug baron serving a prison sentence and thereafter enjoying the proceeds of his crimes are gone. We must get the message through to these people that their trade is despicable, that they are the target of this legislation and that we are determined that they will be caught and made to pay.

8.8 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I start from the simple proposition that when a Government introduce a Bill of such size and scale, they must prove why it is so necessary. That is doubly true when liberty is being curtailed. There is no doubt that the Bill curtails liberty in some ways. The briefing that we have all received from Liberty and the Law Society made that point clear.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), although he was rather unfair to those of us on the Conservative Benches when he said that we defended only the civil liberties of bankers, lawyers and rich people. I made a speech two weeks ago in the debate about football hooliganism. I do not want a reputation for defending football hooligans one week and bankers, lawyers and drug addicts—or whatever he said—the next. If one cares about liberty and the rights of the individual as against the state, one sometimes may appear to be defending odd groups of people. Actually, one is defending a principle.

I accept that there is compelling proof—my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) made this point well—that some legislation is necessary. First, the figures provide clear evidence that only a small number of confiscation orders have been served. In 1998, there were 7,000 drug convictions, but less than 18 per cent. of them resulted in a confiscation order. Those figures probably underestimate the true scale of the problem because only the more serious drug offences make it to the courts. One would hope for a much higher percentage. The Minister was convincing on that.

The second reason for legislating is that there is a piecemeal approach to legislation and the bodies responsible for recovering the proceeds of crime. We have the central confiscation branch within the Crown Prosecution Service, which has just 10 people working in it and a budget of £1 million, and the asset forfeiture unit which is part of Customs and Excise, with a staff of just 13 and a budget of about £1 million. It is easy to get the feeling of a higgledy-piggledy organisation of different bodies that are responsible for recovering the proceeds of crime. Clearly not enough is being done, which is why Conservative Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton and I, welcome a Bill and measures being taken.

The third reason to legislate is the importance of deterrence. Conservative Members very much believe in deterrence. We want people to be frightened of being caught and punished. It is a powerful deterrent if people not only lose their liberty when they are sent to prison, but fear losing their money. We all remember the beginning of "Porridge" when the voice-over says, "Norman Stanley Fletcher, you seem to view prison as an occupational hazard." Many criminals—drug dealers in particular—view prison as an occupational hazard because they know that when they get out they do not need to have another occupation owing to their ill-gotten gains.

No one more than I wants drug dealers—many Labour Members spoke movingly on this subject—stripped of the proceeds of their crimes. Friends of mine have had their lives ruined by heroin. I want heroin dealers to lose their cars, houses and money. When they are convicted, I want them to suffer in the same way as their victims. I do not know, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether you, like me, are a fan of "The Sopranos", but in that magnificent American television series a mafia boss poses as a waste management executive. He has an incredibly lavish lifestyle—an enormous house, a swimming pool and dozens of cars. We want the smiles wiped from such people's faces when their assets are removed once they are convicted, as they should be. That is why we support the concept behind the Bill. There is proof that a Bill is needed, but many Opposition Members want to know whether it goes too far: has the performance and innovation unit got a little carried away?

I am not sure that the Minister completely addressed that concern. When liberty is being removed, we want to believe that he has a grip on every detail and clause that will affect us. We want to feel that pulsing through his veins, but I am not sure that I did. I shall listen carefully to the Under-Secretary's response.

I welcome certain aspects of the Bill. The concept of an Assets Recovery Agency is right. If the agency has clear goals and the resources that Ministers intend to give it, and if it is accountable and publishes its results in reports, it can do better than existing organisations. I also welcome the idea of tidying up current law. That is important because there are anomalies. It is clear that drug trafficking confiscation laws should be extended to all types of crime. At the moment, criminals can plead guilty to non-drug offences, because that enables them to protect the money that they have made from drug deals.

In addition, I welcome many of the new powers mentioned by Labour Members. We want a robust response. However, I have three concerns and a warning of what worries me in the future. My first concern relates to the new process of civil forfeiture. I understand the

frustration at the fact that it is difficult to get the level of proof that is needed. As it says in the briefing document, one aim is to

"permit recovery of criminal assets where a criminal conviction has not been possible."

The problem is simple: we are discussing a civil offence; it will be part of the civil process, and the civil law burden of proof will apply—which is, as we all know, lower than the burden of proof for a criminal offence. As a result, will there not be a danger of miscarriages of justice, especially when we consider—my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) put this well—the scale of the Assets Recovery Agency compared with the scale of the individual? I want to hear more about the safeguards that will prevent miscarriages of justice when there is a lower burden of proof.

Many hon. Members have received the Liberty briefing document. Sometimes when we talk about civil liberties they are too obscure and do not appear real. Liberty states:

"Imagine you have been given money by a secret admirer, or left money in someone's will and you decide to buy a new car and have a holiday and spend money for the first time in your life. This lavish lifestyle comes to the attention of the police because your bank reports the 'unexpected' payments to them. Under the proposed new law the police will be able to sue you in the civil courts and in reality (if not in the law) the onus will be on you to prove that the money does not come from the proceeds of crime."

That can happen to anyone, not just drug dealers and criminals. Such considerations sometimes have to be brought to life.

My second concern relates to the role of the Assets Recovery Agency. I welcome clarification if I am wrong, but it seems that it is to be both investigating and prosecuting. The power of prosecution was removed from the police and given to the CPS because it was thought that there was a conflict if a body both investigated and prosecuted.

My third concern relates to the confiscation orders set out in part 2. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset made this point clearly. The judge of a good speech is how many notes get passed from the box to the Minister, and a veritable relay went on at that stage. Notes passed like batons. *[Interruption.]* I have experience of passing the notes, and I was going to say that it is sad when they do not fly thick and fast when one is speaking.

My hon. Friend made the point, which is clearly set out in the explanatory notes, that the confiscation orders can be triggered by minor offences. The notes state:

"a confiscation order may be made following any conviction in the Crown Court or the magistrates' court."

I am glad to see that notes are flying thick and fast as I enter the fertile territory that my hon. Friend opened up so brilliantly. We need that concern addressed.

Mr. Grieve: I shall try to pre-empt the note. My hon. Friend may agree by way of qualifier that one has to show that there has been a benefit under those convictions, rather than just punching someone in the face, or a pecuniary advantage. However, what constitutes a pecuniary advantage is an interesting matter for speculation.

Mr. Cameron: As ever, that is the advantage of having lawyers and non-lawyers present. I am one of the few Conservative Members who is not a lawyer, and it is possible to combine a feeling about the general principles with the razor sharp mind of my hon. Friend, who can get to grips with such problems.

Let me end with a warning. It is interesting that on the front of the Bill the Secretary of State has signalled that he is content that it will be acceptable under the European convention on human rights. Many hon. Members will have read about the McIntosh case, in which the court of criminal appeal in Edinburgh ruled that the confiscation of the assets of convicted drug traffickers contravened article 6(2) of the convention because they were built up in the years before the criminal conviction.

We want to hear Ministers say that they really believe that the Bill, with all its clauses and all the subjects it covers, is judge proof, and that it will not be struck down under judicial review. The Bill has more than 400 clauses and we will spend hours debating it in the Chamber and in Committee; it will be a waste of time and bring the House into disrepute if the legislation is quickly struck down because the legal advice on which it is based was not correct. My brief experience at the Home Office tells me that if officials warn a Minister that there is a danger—a small danger—that a measure will be struck down under the European convention on human rights, that cloud no bigger than a man's hand will assuredly grow larger, until the measure has become history because a judge has spoken.

There will be a lot of discussion about the European convention on human rights in the coming weeks, especially in connection with the forthcoming terrorism legislation. We have to get the Proceeds of Crime Bill right.

Norman Baker: The hon. Gentleman has, rightly, spoken at length about civil liberties and the Bill's impact on human rights legislation. May I take it that he and his colleagues now recognise the value of the Human Rights Act 1998?

Mr. Cameron: No, that does not necessarily follow. I tend to agree with the Home Secretary, whom my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton quoted. The right hon. Gentleman has said that our liberties are based predominantly on the actions of Parliament, and that Parliament has done the job of defending our rights. Although I supported the principle of the European convention on human rights, I think that the way in which we signed up to it and the Government wrote it into our law via the Human Rights Act has resulted in the Government and Parliament sometimes being unable to do things that all reasonable people accept are the right things to do.

I suspect that we will find that the same restrictions apply to the terrorism legislation that is soon to be introduced. I do not want to stray from the subject of the debate, but it is worth noting that just the other day the Home Secretary admitted to the Select Committee on Home Affairs that in dealing with terrorism he would like to have available to him both deportation and detention, but that because of the convention and the Act he will not have the option of deportation available to him; instead, he will have to rely on detention. Sometimes we tie our hands too tightly. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on that point.

Finally, I issue a warning about the European convention and the Human Rights Act. I plead with the Government not to dig a hole for themselves. They may

[Mr. Cameron]

find that not only the Proceeds of Crime Bill but other Bills will be caught up on those hooks. They must leave themselves some flexibility, because it might be that they want to take action, with the support of the Opposition, that is not possible under the convention or the Act. We must get that issue sorted out before passing Bills on the scale of the one before the House tonight.

8.22 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I am delighted to have the chance to participate in the debate. I did not receive the Law Society briefing; that is probably because I am not a lawyer, but I am sure that the House will not hold that against me.

For too long, we have paid insufficient attention to the financial aspects of crime. Let us not forget that the motivation for many crimes is money: it is estimated that profit is the ultimate goal of 70 per cent. of all recorded crime. Last year, total assets of organised crime were estimated to be £18 billion—that is, 2 per cent. of gross domestic product.

As the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) said, half the £440 million in profits held by 400 crime bosses are in the hands of only 39 big bosses. Crime barons whose assets are not stripped are often responsible for generating further crime. Assets left in the hands of the perpetrators of crime can be used to fund further criminal activity, which leads to an impenetrable cycle of crime that devastates communities such as that in my constituency, which has one of the highest rates of drug crime in Scotland.

I am pleased that the Government are addressing the issue through legislation. Many criminals regard prison as an "occupational hazard", as the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) said, and use the money made from their activities either as a nest egg awaiting their release from prison, or to keep their businesses going outside and ensure that their loved ones and families are well looked after while they are inside. Although no one wants innocent family members to suffer, people cannot benefit or be seen to benefit from crime.

Arrest and conviction alone are not enough to reduce crime significantly, as they can leave criminals free to run or return to their illegal enterprises. Legislation to strip criminals of their working capital has been widely welcomed by police forces throughout the country. I commend the principles of the Bill. All the responses that I have seen agree with the Bill, which is designed to strengthen and extend existing legislation on confiscation and recovery of the proceeds of crime. The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) appears to have in mind the case of Al Capone—pronounced by most normal people with a silent "e"—but that is hardly surprising, given that his party robbed the country for 18 years. Many criminals—some of them members of the Conservative party—have evaded prosecution because of loopholes in current legislation.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The hon. Gentleman said that all the responses that he has seen have welcomed the Bill. Has he read the responses of organisations such as Justice and Liberty? We Conservatives have become accustomed to hearing Labour Members talking about the importance of civil liberties, so I would be surprised to hear that he had not seen those organisations' responses.

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not listen to the start of my speech, when I said that I had not received them, attributing that to my not being a member of the Law Society or having any connection with it.

Given that many criminals have evaded prosecution, I seek clarification on several points to ensure that the loopholes will be closed. Clause 67 deals with the seizure of money and applies to money held in bank or building society accounts, and clause 42 deals with the use of restraint orders in the early part of an investigation. Both clauses have been widely welcomed. In the past, people who became aware of police interest attempted to arrange the disposal of their assets. The Bill rectifies that—or at least it should. However, we must also consider cases in which the perpetrators of crime have already used the names of associates to register property, or have signed over assets to friends and family to avoid seizure. Unfortunately, such practices can be extremely difficult to prove.

Like many hon. Members, I want the Bill to contain clear safeguards to protect innocent third parties who, by association, might be unfairly targeted and have legitimate financial assets confiscated. The Human Rights Act 1998—mentioned by many Conservative Members who have taken the road to Damascus—enables individuals more easily to challenge decisions of the police should the latter fail to adhere to the standards laid down in the European convention on human rights. It is crucial, therefore, that the rights of third parties to claim lawful ownership of property under dispute be closely observed by law and enforcement officers.

Concerns have been raised about access to bank records held in Scotland. Financial institutions based in Scotland operate accounts on behalf of other banks. Access to these accounts is required quite frequently. However, orders issued by the Crown court in England are not valid. Access can be gained only by means of an order obtained in Scotland from the sheriff via the procurator fiscal.

This process can be extremely time consuming and bureaucratic. It can often result in the line of inquiry not being followed up. It is therefore necessary that, under any new legislation, production orders issued in England should be valid in Scotland, and vice versa.

Concerns have also been raised about how the legislation will apply to Scottish law. I hope that the Minister will keep in contact with his counterpart on the Scottish Executive—he has already said that he will, so perhaps I need say no more about that.

Concerns have also been raised about the provision of funding for the new legislation. Detective Superintendent Langdon of Merseyside police has said:

> "Whilst not taking issue with the merit of the Bill, the financial implications are likely to be significant. Although, obviously, the Bill cannot stipulate the funding issues I would seek assurance that the costs are properly identified and some element of Government funding be applied to secure a seamless transition."

The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland has also raised this issue. It has said that, with the new legislation, there will be ramifications for the Scottish police services and for police forces throughout the

country, especially in relation to sufficient resourcing to make an impact upon the wealth of those involved in criminal activities. It points out also that the new legislation will still require the police to report cases of potential asset confiscation, but the crucial difference is that the Bill will introduce asset confiscation which could proceed to civil proof, and there are likely to be occasions when police intelligence will form part of the Crown case. I am sure that that aspect of the Bill will be carefully managed.

It is vital to ensure that financial investigators are fully and properly trained in all areas of the new legislation, as breach of process could lead to claims for compensation. I seek assurance that funding and training will be carefully considered. The Bill is important and a landmark in the fight against crime and the criminals who plague our communities. The Government should be commended for introducing it.

8.31 pm

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) on his well-constructed and thoughtful maiden speech. I look forward to many more of his contributions.

The Bill will play an invaluable role in the fight against organised crime. I understand that some may regard it as controversial in regard to civil liberties, but I think that we should see it as an opportunity to strengthen and assist the police, customs officers and other agencies in their war against serious crime. The proposals contained within the Bill will remove the constraints that have seriously inhibited the effectiveness of previous legislative changes. The change in emphasis from merely law enforcement to targeting the profits that criminals and their associates make from crime is particularly welcome, and is one that all hon. Members should support.

In my short contribution, I shall remind hon. Members why the Bill is necessary. Those who will be subject to the proposed legislation have a devastating effect on our communities. It is widely acknowledged that the proceeds from past criminal activity fund the relentless upward spiral of profits from organised crime. I believe that the Bill will strike at the heart of the problem. It will target those who enjoy a lavish lifestyle from the proceeds of drug dealing and money laundering.

More often than not, the criminals who are apprehended are the small fry. They are those who, for various reasons, have become victims and have been forced into a life of crime. They are often expendable and easily replaced. They take the fall for those who appear to the public to be untouchable and above the law.

The law has not thoroughly and systematically addressed the issue of the proceeds of crime. For example, the Home Office has stated that during 1999–2000 only £49 million was recovered from criminals through existing powers. In 1995, it was estimated that £400 million could be recovered. That demonstrates the scale of the task. That is why I welcome the fact that the Bill forms part of a wider Government programme to reach the so-called untouchables—those who profit by leeching on the misery of others.

We have an opportunity to correct the failures of previous legislation. The Bill includes substantial and effective measures to do that. I especially welcome the allocation of resources for the creation of an action programme that will create specialist training for law enforcement and prosecution agencies. I applaud the development of a multi-agency strategic approach to improve performance in the pursuit of all proceeds of crime. The failures of the past are of deep concern and it is crucial that proper training and accreditation of the proposed financial investigators and other agencies takes place as soon as possible.

In support of the proposal, we need only refer to recent history. Unfortunately, there are numerous examples of drug trials that have collapsed. There are other examples of such cases that have been lost on appeal owing to the errors of the police, the Crown Prosecution Service or customs investigators. I shall give an example which is pertinent to many people who have expressed concern about civil liberties. An article entitled "Drugs in Britain: Special Report", which appeared in *The Guardian* on Friday 9 June 2000, stated:

"Customs and Excise could be stripped of its power to prosecute after official inquiry reports into the collapse of Britain's biggest drug cases uncover a litany of incompetence and chaos that led to 'two of Britain's biggest gangsters' walking free.

Although the retired judge, Gerald Butler, who carried out the inquiry, said that almost everybody involved had some input into what went wrong, his recommendations made clear that the judge who threw out the case against both men had been mistaken.

His report cleared the customs officers involved of accusations that they acted illegally in their undercover bugging operations, faked evidence or lied under oath . . .

But the report, published yesterday, identified incompetence in the customs prosecution and said that the official authority for their bugging operations was based on 'hopelessly defective documentation' and that the records on all their bugging operations at the time were chaotic.

The collapse of the case left the taxpayer with a £50 million bill".

Two individuals were cleared of smuggling £34 million-worth of cocaine into Britain. The report continued:

"At the time of their arrest in 1995, customs hailed a spectacular raid on the yacht, The Frugal, at Pevensey Bay, East Sussex, as part of Operation Stealer, as 'the best knock ever'.

The two ring leaders were jailed for 24 years each.

But the case turned sour when the appeal court judge, Mr Justice Turner, threw it out on the grounds that the prosecution had wrongly withheld the information that the suspects' hotel rooms had been bugged without official authority."

Judge Butler said:

"A lot of people are to blame. I cannot point the finger at any one person or group of people. Things went wrong from the off and they never recovered. Almost everyone had some input in what went wrong."

That clearly demonstrates the need to look carefully at the way in which we apply the Bill's provisions so as to make sure that such incidents cannot happen again. The training that will be given will, I hope, eradicate the problem in future.

In July 2000, *The Guardian* reported that an individual accused of involvement in a £50,000 cannabis ring in Scotland was freed because a deadline had expired, amazingly, because a judge could not be found to try the case.

Mr. Cameron *rose—*

Mr. Tynan: I am sorry, I want to make progress.

The Bill would permit the assets of those criminals who, for whatever reason, escape prosecution, to be frozen and seized. While a botched criminal investigation

[Mr. Tynan]

may enable them to remain free, it would not safeguard their ill-gotten gains. It is abhorrent to everyone that they flaunt their success with lavish lifestyles, flashy cars, large houses, expensive clothes and often substantial business interests. They sometimes become unacceptable role models for our young. Confiscating their illegal funds will strip away the belief that crime pays and will highlight to impressionable young people the fact that those criminals will pay the price for the misery that they create in communities throughout the United Kingdom.

I remind those who express doubts and concern about civil liberties of the many young men and women in our constituencies whose lives and families have been torn apart by the tragedy of drug addiction. Young people are actively targeted by the dealers in death, even at primary school, as has been said tonight. During the by-election at which I was elected in 1999, South Lanarkshire experienced its 100th drug death. A young woman who had been at school with my youngest daughter, who is 25, was found dead in a Hamilton flat, another victim of the drug barons. In 1997, there were 22 drug-related deaths in Lanarkshire; by 1999, that had risen to 27. In 2000, drug users in South Lanarkshire were 17 per cent. more likely than users in Scotland as a whole to be using heroin as their main drug. That situation is repeated across the country every day. The trend must be reversed and the Bill can play an important part in that.

I believe that, given the opportunity, the community can identify the drug dealers in its midst. One need only look at the successful national campaign run by the *Daily Record* in Scotland. By enlisting the help of the people, the newspaper was able to name and shame those who peddle drugs. If the Bill is successful, we can gain the confidence of the people in every community in the UK and enlist their help in targeting the drug dealers and money launderers. The *Hamilton Advertiser* also plays an important role in its opposition to drug dealers. It recently ran a hotline in conjunction with the local police, which was extremely successful.

Recent history is littered with examples of criminals who have escaped the law. The Bill is, among other things, an excellent example of the fact that UK-wide legislation is necessary to combat organised crime. I applaud the action of the Scottish Executive in ceding some of its authority to Westminster in this matter to ensure that criminals have nowhere to hide. The Bill is tailored to Scottish law and contains some elements that are unique to Scotland. The fact that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scotland Office is helping to pilot the Bill through the House emphasises the importance attached by the Government to the Scottish aspects of the Bill, as do the 110 clauses relating directly to Scotland.

The fight against crime is one that we cannot afford to lose, and the Bill will be an invaluable new weapon in our anti-crime armoury. The beauty of it is that it will target not just the criminal minnows, but the gangland bosses and the criminal bigwigs, who will sleep less easily in their opulent residences tonight because the Bill sends out a clear message that crime does not pay.

8.41 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I am grateful to be called to speak, as I acknowledge that I have not been in the Chamber for the entire debate. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State, Scotland Office, who is a very nice man, asks why not. With my new-found domestic responsibilities, I find spending the entire day listening to a Second Reading debate in the Chamber a little more difficult than I did previously.

I associate myself with some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) in his impassioned speech about the reasons why it is necessary to attack the drug traffickers and the profits that they make out of innocent people, especially innocent young people. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the reason behind the Bill, which we can all support, is to go after the Mr. Bigs—the criminals who somehow manage to get away with it and in so doing scar the lives of the constituents not only of Labour Members, but of all of us. Those whose lives have been scarred will certainly welcome the measures that the Government are taking tonight.

The purpose of the Opposition's argument is to sound a note of caution. Although we all endorse the aspirations behind the Bill, there are some obstacles and difficulties, which were eloquently outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the shadow Home Secretary. I should tell the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), that my hon. Friend is a very clever man and he would be well advised to listen to the points that he raises. *[Interruption.]* The Minister may also be a very clever man, but on our Benches, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset is considered somewhat superior, even in these intellectual circles, and he raised some pertinent points. No doubt the Minister's civil servants will be busily trying to answer some of them and putting the Minister right in Committee. We look forward to that debate.

We all recognise that the criminal justice system sometimes lets us down. As the hon. Member for Hamilton, South said, people who are clearly guilty sometimes manage to escape justice. We hope that the measures before us will tackle that abuse. We want to see such people behind bars where they deserve to be and deprived of their liberty. If they cannot be deprived of their liberty, we can at least deprive them of their lifestyle, their assets and their wicked daily business. We recognise the Government's aims in that respect, and hope that they succeed in catching the Mr. Bigs who have not been caught by the criminal justice system, but who may be caught by the provisions of the Bill.

We all live in the real world, however, and, as constituency Members, we have seen good intentions go down the wrong hole. Perhaps I am mixing my metaphors. What I mean is that, having set out to catch the Mr. Bigs—those who really deserve to be treated to measures such as this because all else has failed—we sometimes catch people whom we did not intend to be subject to such draconian measures.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset mentioned the Child Support Agency, and the circumstances are, indeed, potentially comparable. When we launched the CSA, we all thought that it would catch absent parents who paid nothing towards their children's support. One of the reasons why it became so controversial was that it did not, and still does not, catch those parents; it catches parents who pay something, who then object to what they consider to be the CSA's exorbitant demands for extra payment.

We want the Bill to catch Mr. Big, but whether it will catch Mr. Big we do not know. What we do not want it to do is catch those who in this sense are innocent: those who, having committed a tachograph offence, are suddenly brought into a system which, although civil, is backed by serious instruments of the law and find themselves in a position they never thought possible.

As I know from many of my constituents—I am glad to say that I do not know it from personal experience—those involved in civil proceedings end up paying the legal bills. The Minister shakes his head; I hope that that means that all costs will be paid if people are found not guilty. That would certainly be welcome, because, owing to the powers that have been conferred, people might otherwise be affected because their affairs had precipitated an investigation later found to be unreasonable.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I can confirm that we intend to allow civil legal aid for people to defend themselves, rather than allowing them to use the proceeds of crime.

Miss Kirkbride: I am glad to hear it. I assume that if such people are found not guilty of using the proceeds of crime to support their lifestyles, compensation will be provided. If that is the case, I am glad to learn that innocent people brought into the system—for reasons that I endorse, in terms of what the Minister seeks to do—will not be caught up in litigation that could literally bankrupt them.

Mr. Grieve: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Does she agree that if the system is such that those who are not eligible for legal aid, and who succeed in resisting civil proceedings, are left with a substantial bill—many litigants are in such circumstances, even when their costs are paid by the other side—that constitutes a rather strange and arbitrary punishment, given that the proceedings will have been initiated by the state?

Miss Kirkbride: That, too, is an important point, which may be pursued in Committee.

I think we are encouraged by what the Minister has said, but I know from my postbag that the Inland Revenue—which, as we know, has fairly draconian powers—has on occasion become involved in circumstances in which no case is proved at the end of the day, but the person concerned has spent a great deal on ensuring that he or she is found innocent. Although those costs may be paid, an opportunity cost will be involved in the fighting of an action that may turn out to have been conducted in an entirely unfair way.

Mr. Ainsworth: We are perhaps in danger of a genuine misunderstanding. In cases of civil recovery under part 5 where property is being pursued, compensation will be available if the case proves to be ill founded and falls. That is not exactly the same as the confiscation provisions in part 2, so those issues will be dealt with. That will act as a deterrent to the agency pursuing ill-founded cases.

Miss Kirkbride: I confess to being a little unsure now exactly what the Minister has in mind. I think I remember his saying in his previous intervention that there will be civil legal aid, so that all litigation will be paid for, but in addition I think he is saying that if the litigation is vexatious, there will be compensation for the time and effort involved in the case, so there will be no material cost for people who are innocent of the charges.

Mr. Ainsworth: Under part 5 on civil recovery, where people are eligible for legal aid, civil legal aid will be made available. Where they are not, litigation will not have to be shown to be vexatious. If they are incorrectly pursued by the agency in civil litigation, they will be entitled to compensation for that pursuance.

Miss Kirkbride: I am grateful to the Minister for seeking to clarify the matter. I think that the implication is that, if those people are very wealthy, they will have to pay for their own litigation because they will not be eligible for legal aid, but they will be compensated afterwards if the action is deemed to have been inappropriate. Clearly, these are important matters and will be pursued further in Committee. Nevertheless, the Minister's clarification is welcome. This is a very technical Bill and it is important that we all fully understand the nature of what is being considered.

I recognise that other hon. Members wish to speak, so I do not wish to continue my remarks any further. The only thing that it would be fair to say is that I have been somewhat offended by some of the remarks from Labour Members, who have suggested that, in seeking to raise questions about what the Government propose to do, we are trying to help or to protect people who are criminals, or to protect rich friends. Those remarks were wholly inappropriate.

It is our duty to raise questions about the Government's actions. I should have thought that the Government, in the particular circumstances in which they now find themselves, would be self-confident enough to respond to our concerns—as the Minister has—in the spirit in which they have been raised, and not, as some Labour Back Benchers have done, wrongly impugning our motives.

8.53 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I remind the House exactly what the debate is about. It is not about civil liberties. It is not about legal manoeuvring or nit-picking. It is about saving our communities—it is that important.

The scale of the problem cannot be overestimated. There cannot be a single hon. Member whose constituency has not been affected by the drugs menace. In Castlemilk and other parts of my constituency, drug dealers, drug users, money launderers and protection racketeers have tried to make life a misery for the vast majority of my constituents. Let us remember that when crime hits, it hits the poorest areas worst. The wealthier people are, the easier it is to insulate themselves against the effects of crime.

The tentacles of organised crime reach into every part of every community. The Mr. Bigs, as we tend to call them, are the worst kind of leeches imaginable. I hesitate to call them Mr. Bigs—that label is far too positive. They feed on the weakest and most vulnerable in society and are directly responsible for the misery of ordinary, good, hard-working people.

Those creatures can be identified in two ways. One is through their criminal lifestyle, to which the Bill refers. I take as an example the town in which I grew up in

[Mr. Tom Harris]

Ayrshire. It has been turned upside down by the activities of drug dealers over the past 20 years. I have to confess that some of the culprits are contemporaries of mine. They park their flashy, sophisticated and expensive cars outside the Department of Social Security while they sign on. I say that not out of envy, but to make a serious point. The culture of envy can take hold, particularly among younger men who see such people as some sort of role model or something to which to aspire. The Bill aims to fight that.

The other way of identifying these people is simply to ask someone. There are many people in Castlemilk who, off the top of their heads, could name two or three drug dealers who live locally. They could identify the firms that have been set up to act as cover for such activities and to launder the money. It is worrying that those people have the confidence and arrogance to know that they are largely immune from the powers of the enforcing authorities. They make no effort to cover their activities.

One reason why they are so secure in the belief that they will hold on to their fortunes can be seen on the Home Office internet site, which has been set up specifically to announce this Bill. It says:

"Current legislation is inadequate. We need to remove criminals' assets if we are to dismantle and disrupt their organisations."

Quite right too. Two lines later it says:

"In the last five years confiscation orders have been raised in an average of only 20 per cent. of drugs cases and just 0.3 per cent. of other crime cases."

That statistic alone would justify the setting up of the Assets Recovery Agency, but it raises concerns in my mind. If existing laws are not used to their limit, can we be confident that the new law will be used to its full extent? I hope that the Minister will refer to that in his winding-up speech.

I understand that, as the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) said earlier, the agency's remit does not extend to Scotland. There will be a dedicated unit in the Scottish Executive, and it is not for the House to speculate on how that will be funded or organised. As an elected Member from Scotland, I would expect it to be just as determined to provide an effective service to the people of Scotland as its counterpart in England and Wales.

It is fair to say that the public are at best unconvinced and at worst cynical when Governments of any colour say that a Bill will change the face of society or stop criminals benefiting from crime. It has been a long time since the first such measures were introduced, and their results have not met expectations. That is why I strongly welcome the Bill. For the first time it provides a level playing field, which has previously been tilted in favour of the criminal fraternity.

I said that there can be a problem with people looking for role models, particularly in deprived areas, where second and sometimes third generation unemployment has meant that the traditional male role model of the hard-working father has been replaced by wide boys and villains. The Bill recognises that.

If we are to combat the seductive image of the successful criminal, successful action against them must be accompanied by publicity. That sounds like a trite point, but I hope that when the Bill is enacted there will be high-profile confiscations. In that way, whenever some jumped-up young thug gets his Ferrari, his yacht or even his home confiscated, it will be obvious to the local community that has paid for those benefits that he has got his come-uppance. Even if he is not sent to jail, people will see that he will not be able to live in the style that he has been used to.

The most contentious part of the Bill is that dealing with civil recovery. The Government have certainly established, and I agree, that the civil recovery provision does not seem to conflict with the European convention on human rights. I hope that that view will be borne out if the provision is challenged in court. The civil recovery clause is the one clause in the Bill that I wholeheartedly welcome. My plea to Ministers is to ensure that when the Bill is enacted we use the civil recovery clause frequently and enthusiastically. If we do not do so, those who are expecting great things from the Bill will be very disappointed in both the legislation and the Government.

Every hon. Member understands the difficulties that the authorities face in prosecuting those who are so powerful and wealthy that they do not even have to dirty their hands by doing their own dirty work. The drugs barons are sometimes three or four times removed from the dealer on the street, pulling the dealer's strings; so rarely do we see those evil people behind bars.

I accept that we have to be careful with civil liberties. The priority of the House and of the Government, however, should be to protect not the civil liberties of drugs barons but the civil right of young people to live free from the threat of drugs, of older people to be able to walk along the street without threat and of us all to feel secure in our home. Currently, we are all being denied those rights.

I have previously raised the issue of money laundering in Northern Ireland, and, earlier this year, the Government introduced the Financial Investigations (Northern Ireland) Order 2001. In our debate on that order, the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), expressed neither support for nor opposition to the order. I had hoped to hear today that Conservative Members had come off the fence and now support the order. I do not want to make party political capital out of the issue but, bearing in mind what we have heard in this debate, I am disappointed that the Bill will not have cross-party support, as it would have benefited the legislation.

Mr. Grieve: I shall reiterate the position. The official Opposition have indicated that we support the intentions behind the legislation. Consequently, we shall not vote against it today. We have also highlighted issues about which we have very substantial concerns that we want to be addressed in Committee. We shall do that in a spirit of complete co-operation. Indeed, I very much hope that the Committee will serve as a model for how such Committees should operate in that regard.

Mr. Harris: I accept the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but earlier in the debate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) said that Labour Members might eventually regret the speeches that we made in this debate. Although I accept that not one Conservative Member would consider himself to be soft on crime, any drug lord who read this debate would find no small comfort from the tone and content of some of the speeches made today by Conservative Members.

In the Committee's debate on the statutory instrument, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik)—who is not in the Chamber—mentioned George Orwell and "Nineteen Eighty-Four". I often find that comparisons with Orwell's dystopia are at best inappropriate and at worst over the top. Any Government who are determined to crack down on crime are accused of introducing a police state. When closed circuit television is extended, some people believe that we are in a police state. When people talk about identity cards, which I support, other people say that we are heading towards a police state.

Undoubtedly there are those who will read the Bill and see not a new means of combating crime but a threat to civil liberties. I do not believe that, 50 years ago, when "Nineteen Eighty-Four" was written, Orwell could have foreseen the state of society today or the type of champions league criminals who are comprehensively crippling our society. It is a sad day when such severe action is necessary, but necessary it is, and I think that that is justification enough for it.

The Bill will apply to Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. As a Scottish Member I welcome the opportunity to speak in a debate on such legislation, and I pay tribute to the Scottish Parliament for moving a motion last week to allow us to do so. I am glad that the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) is in the Chamber because I understand that, although they supported the civil motion, Scottish National party Members of the Scottish Parliament were unhappy that such a motion had been moved as it denied the Scottish Parliament itself an opportunity to legislate. I do not want to make a party political point about this, but it is more important to enact the Bill than to worry about where it is debated. I do not believe that an Act of Parliament needs a tartan cover to be effective.

My constituents and people throughout the country want nothing less than the total dismantling of organised crime networks. They want those responsible for money laundering, protection racketeering and drug trafficking behind bars and deprived of the trappings of wealth.

The Bill continues the good work done by previous Governments and it deserves the support of the whole House.

9.5 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I, too, welcome the proposals in the Bill. They will be welcomed by the public, who want tough action to prevent drug dealers and others who prey on human weakness and misery from profiting from their nefarious activities. The measures also hit at the right target: those who make vast profits from drug dealing, rather than the user. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's announcement last week on the reclassification of cannabis. That announcement and today's proceedings represent a sensible focusing of drugs policy on what should be our real targets.

Mr. Grieve: I accept that there may be arguments on both sides, but one of the consequences of reclassification is that the maximum sentence that can be imposed on the Mr. Bigs who engage in substantial dealing in and importation of cannabis will be reduced to five years. Does the hon. Gentleman consider that compatible with the aims of the Bill?

Mr. Lazarowicz: The Bill rightly hits at the financial gains made by such individuals.

Some concerns have been raised about the impact of the Bill on human rights. Such concerns should not be set aside lightly. I believe that most of them can be resolved satisfactorily in Committee. They must be resolved, not least to ensure that the legislation is watertight, as the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) so rightly said.

There are admittedly some significant new powers in the Bill: in particular, the powers of civil recovery of proceeds arising from unlawful conduct set out in part 5, but it is debatable whether even those represent such a fundamental innovation as some of the Bill's detractors suggest. There are, after all, some circumstances at present in which there can be forfeiture of criminal assets outside criminal proceedings. As the hon. Members who raised the point are no doubt aware, it has always been the case that property that someone has acquired from another by unlawful conduct can be recovered in the civil courts by its rightful owner satisfying the civil standard of proof.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) rightly said that there is a difference between a dispute between two individuals and an isolated individual facing the full rigour of the state in the shape of a powerful Assets Recovery Agency or, in Scotland, the even more frightening shape of that awesome body of men and women, the Scottish Ministers. Of course the situation is not the same, but the picture of the weak individual against the strong state that some Opposition Members have tried to portray is not an accurate reflection of the real world.

The real issue is the neighbourhood drug dealer, the international criminal, the trafficker in illegal immigrants and the international terrorist network that can reach more than 60 countries, as we now know to our cost. Under existing legislation, it is our state, defending our public interest, that all too often faces an unequal fight against those organisations. I want our law enforcement agencies to have the ability to fight them on equal terms, which is what the Bill is about.

Of course, the possible effect of any measures on an individual's rights has to be considered against the benefit to society as a whole. In the real world, it is difficult to imagine a case in which a person with a genuine, lawful right to property would not be able to establish that right if challenged under the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) pointed out, legislation of this nature has existed for some time in the United States. It has also existed in countries such as Ireland and Italy. I would have thought that Opposition Members could highlight some actual examples of where such legislation has caused real difficulties.

Two hypothetical examples were given. The hon. Member for West Dorset referred to the example of a discount store. I am not sure whether he had in mind that the entire weight of the Assets Recovery Agency would seek to recover an electric kettle that someone had bought from a Sunday market. That is an example of a point that has no sensible validity in terms of opposing the Bill. I understand that the Bill's provisions to recover property

[Mr. Lazarowicz]

would apply only above a threshold of £10,000. I do not know in which store the hon. Gentleman does his discount shopping, but £10,000 is some list for a day's shopping.

The second such example came from the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), who referred to a secret admirer leaving a legacy to a lucky individual. Such admirers may regularly benefit members of the Conservative party, but that one theoretical and rare example should not be set against a measure that will make the business of drug dealers, money launderers and the rest much more difficult.

What concerns me most is that the provisions of the Bill should be used. As the performance and innovation unit report that predated the Bill pointed out, even the existing powers have not been used to their full extent. That is why I welcome the proposals on the Assets Recovery Agency, which will operate in England and Wales. I also welcome the extra resources that are proposed to enable similar powers to be enforceable in Scotland. It is important that there is the closest possible co-operation between the Scottish unit and the Assets Recovery Agency to make sure that the big-time operators that the Bill wants to hit do not slip between the two jurisdictions. The Scottish unit may have some 10 staff. That seems to be a small resource for the work that it will have to undertake. I would welcome clarification from Ministers of how that co-operation can be made effective.

A second area of concern is the way in which, under current proposals, a court in Scotland will have only the discretionary power to make a confiscation order under part 3, whereas in England and Wales, under part 2, the court will, if the necessary conditions are met, be required to make the necessary order to seize assets.

The Law Society of Scotland welcomes that distinction. For my part, I do not see the justification for a regime in Scotland different from that in England and Wales. If there is evidence of gains from criminal conduct, I do not see why the courts should do other than deprive the person concerned of their ill-gotten gains. I urge the Government to consider making such action by the court mandatory, if the right circumstances are met, for Scotland as well as for England and Wales.

Mr. Carmichael: Should not the courts in England be given the discretion, rather than the courts in Scotland having it removed? Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that there could be severe cases where injustice will be done if courts are not given any discretion at all?

Mr. Lazarowicz: It is possible, but that would be wrong. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West made the valuable point that part of the problem is the culture of the courts and prosecution services in making use of the measures. I am concerned that without such mandatory provisions, when the relevant conditions are met the culture may not result in the change in approach that is needed to tackle the problem.

Finally, I turn to the way in which the Bill has been introduced as a UK measure, even though it includes matters over which competence has been transferred to the Scottish Parliament. That is an excellent indication of how the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament can work together well in the interests of both Scotland and the rest of the UK. It is an excellent example of the new, devolved system of government working at its best.

9.15 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): I can say with confidence that I am the last lawyer to speak in this debate and, perforce, I shall do so in headlines.

I welcome the Bill, as will the people of Redcar. As many hon. Members have said, it will give them protection from the predatory behaviour of drug dealers. However, I have huge reservations about the blunderbuss risk attached to the civil recovery procedure. I hope to be able to express some of those reservations at a more appropriate time in Standing Committee. The Bill is excellent, but it is rather heavy artillery.

I shall concentrate on a matter raised by a Conservative Member earlier in the debate. Clause 324(2)(b) would make it an offence if people in the regulated financial sector who had reasonable grounds to know or suspect that a person had been involved in money laundering did not report it. The problem is that the individual involved does not need to have known or suspected that another person was laundering money. He or she can be oblivious of the activity, but will, as the Bill is drafted, still be guilty of an offence by negligence. Such a person will be considered to be guilty of conduct that falls below the standard of a reasonable person.

That is almost unknown in the criminal law. Only in offences of manslaughter or public nuisance is it central to the liability that a person can negligently not notice that others are committing crimes. In this case, the crime is money laundering, and the penalty for negligently not noticing it or not reporting it is a maximum of five years. That is one of the most far-reaching and worrying aspects of what is otherwise a hugely well-intentioned Bill.

Finally, I, like other hon. Members who have contributed to the debate, am a member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. We look forward to being able to deliberate more fully on this measure. We should be grateful to receive the rationale behind the advice that buttresses my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's conviction that all the provisions in the Bill are compatible with the European convention on human rights. I suspect that the Joint Committee will have some concerns in that regard. I hope that those concerns, and the matters that I have raised this evening, will be received kindly by the Government.

9.18 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) made it clear at the outset that the Opposition support the aims of the Bill. We all want there to be in place a regime that ensures that criminals cannot enjoy the fruit of their criminality.

However, we would not be doing our job properly as the Opposition if we did not flag up the matters that concern us. It was suggested at one point in the debate that those matters should be left for the Standing Committee that will scrutinise the Bill. That is certainly the stage when matters will be considered in detail, but the seriousness of some of our anxieties is such that to omit to go into detail about them on Second Reading would be to fail to do them justice.

The debate has been thoughtful. Many hon. Members have contributed, and I apologise to those whom I neglect to mention, as I recognise that all who have spoken have made an individual contribution. It may be that, as the

House considers the details with which it must grapple, there is more common ground between the parties than some of the more intemperate remarks suggested. The hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) encapsulated many of the points that we have been trying to make while, like us, welcoming the legislation.

I thank those of my hon. Friends who made important contributions to the debate. Some rightly concentrated on their areas of expertise, and it was pleasant to hear from the hon. Member for Redcar. She recognised that the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) about money laundering and its effect on financial services, and the potentially draconian penalties that will be visited upon those who are seen to have been negligent, described a very unusual state of affairs. Any right-thinking person wishing to see justice done would wish subjective and objective tests to be approached carefully.

Similarly, my hon. Friends the Members for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride), for Witney (Mr. Cameron) and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) raised concerns about wider civil liberties issues to which I will return. Each one also indicated that there were aspects of the legislation that we can support.

Let me turn to the powerful contributions of Labour Back-Bench Members. The extent to which many represented communities that had been devastated by organised criminality was apparent. Conservative Members are not oblivious of the facts. It is sometimes suggested that we live in ivory towers of wealthy constituencies. However, in my constituency and the one adjoining it, represented by the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), I believe that the street price of heroin is at its lowest. That affects my constituents in exactly the same way as it affects hers. It is apparent that the profits are colossal. That is why I am bound to flag up the fact, as I did earlier in response to a comment, that we are sending out mixed messages. We slash the penalties for dealing and importing cannabis, although there may be a reason for reducing them for possession, while seeking to confiscate the assets of the individuals involved. The House may wish to ponder on that point.

The hon. Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) made his maiden speech this evening. It was unusual in that, unlike so many others, the hon. Gentleman succeeded in bringing his maiden speech to bear upon the topic that we were considering. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will make many more useful contributions in times to come.

Some of the contributions, such as that of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), who is no longer in his place, highlighted the dangers that we run when populist demagoguery and emotion allow us to get carried away on serious issues. Of course, dealing with organised crime is of concern to all of us but we should not deal with it at the expense of throwing away safeguards for the civil liberties of individuals.

I want to address some questions to the Ministers. I shall start on the point that was flagged up—although the hon. Members for Glasgow, Pollok and for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) thought it was useless—to the effect that the regime that the Government are seeking to introduce under the confiscatory mechanisms for Scotland is different to that for England and Wales, in that greater discretion is given to the court on the making of assumptions in Scotland than is given here. We shall want to explore that matter carefully, because if the extra safeguard provided in Scotland, which in my judgment is very sensible, can properly be provided north of the border, I cannot see a good reason why it cannot be provided down here also, particularly as the contribution of Scottish MPs claiming what the benefits would be for their constituents was predominant in tonight's debate. I therefore very much hope that, as a starting point, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), will address that issue when he winds up the debate. It will certainly be addressed in Committee.

I can only say that I despaired when I discovered that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok felt that the regime for Scotland was far too lax and that, in the phrase that I used to him but which he was really endorsing in return, he did not feel that it was possible to make omelettes without breaking eggs. I am sure that, if we turn ourselves into a tyrannical Government and regime, many criminals can be dealt with more expeditiously, but that does not turn us into a civil society, which is one of the things that differentiates us from tyrannies abroad.

While we are on the subject of tyrannies abroad, it may be worth turning to the issues in part 5. Conservative Members were seeking examples of ways in which individuals might find themselves prejudiced by the civil recovery procedures. I will turn to those procedures first because they are one of the areas that cause us most concern.

There is an underlying assumption in the civil recovery procedures. Under those procedures, individuals will be taken through a civil process intended to lead to the confiscation of their assets because, on the balance of probabilities, it has been deemed by the state agency that it thinks—"thinks" is the word—that those assets have been wrongly acquired.

In my experience as a barrister I have more than once come across individuals, particularly, interestingly enough, from ethnic minorities, who have been obliged to remove themselves from their country of origin, together with—I take this as an assumption, if I may use that word—their legitimately acquired assets, in circumstances that might well appear to be akin to those of an individual who might be engaged in crime. Indeed, in some cases, because of the tyrannical and confiscatory nature of the regimes that they were leaving, they had to engage in complex legal and financial shenanigans to achieve that, but it did not mean that those assets were wrongly acquired.

I shall put two points to the Minister. First, such individuals may, despite the fact that their assets were wholly legitimately acquired, have difficulty in showing their origin. Secondly—this may be the more important point, which we shall wish to revisit in Committee—we cannot get away from the fact that the system that we are devising will involve public hearings, as though it was ordinary civil litigation.

Doubtless those hearings will appeal to the prurient. A bit of schadenfreude always creeps in in these circumstances. It is always quite nice to see other people's finances being trotted out in the media, and I dare say that if it turns out that the person is a Mr. Big of the drug importation world, the revelations of the financial

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

transactions in which they engaged may be highly entertaining, and quite reassuring when finally they are potted and their money is taken away.

However, it is worth considering that in the process that we are trying to set up, one of the things that we must do is cater for those cases where the agency gets it wrong. We can guarantee to the Under-Secretary—I suspect that he will not even gainsay us—that in some circumstances the agency will get it wrong and only the court will rule against it.

In those circumstances, what will happen to people whose business and family finances have been trotted out in public, especially as the revelations may jeopardise other members of their family in foreign countries? What system will be devised then? If those circumstances occur, should we consider—we shall do so in Committee—whether to allow those subjected to it to elect for the confidentiality of chambers, even if the final judgment is given in open court? I simply flag up that practical issue, which the Government should consider.

I see that a certain amount of gossip is taking place. If any of the three eminent members of the Treasury Bench wishes to intervene, I should be happy to give way; otherwise I shall continue.

I turn now to some of the other issues that have been raised. Cash seizures were not greatly commented on during the debate, but the provisions on cash seizure are doubtless particularly useful because they will allow the immediate seizure of cash. Equally, they are particularly draconian because they will be used to remove assets from individuals, virtually on the knock on the front door. Under the Bill, that can be done on the administrative say-so of a police officer, although it will also be possible for a justice of the peace to do so. Again, I simply flag up to the Minister this issue of detail and principle: why will the judicial authorities be semi-excluded from the process? If they will be allowed to take part, why not simply delete from the legislation the power of a police officer in those circumstances?

We have also heard much about prejudice, which I touched on in referring to the mechanism in relation to the part 5 procedure. However, an issue that was touched on by several hon. Members will require some careful consideration—namely, to what extent will those administrative procedures prevent criminal trials from taking place subsequently? The Minister of State, Scotland Office shakes his head, but that is rather a good question. Information about such people may be exposed all over the pages of *The Sun* and the *News of the World*, so how can they subsequently be charged with a criminal offence, given that they have effectively been trawled through the courts and the information has been put into the public domain about activities that would not have emerged during their criminal trials? That important issue needs to be addressed, given that we do not wish, as one or two hon. Members have said, to create a system that reduces the effectiveness of being able to send people to prison under the criminal justice system.

We also need to consider the fact that previous efforts to seize assets of one kind or another have not worked. That fundamental issue should really be debated on Second Reading, rather than in Committee. The Child Support Agency was mentioned, but equally we have to draw attention to the manner in which the total number of seizures under the existing rules has consistently declined ever since they were introduced. I do not welcome that, but it suggests at least that there may be a problem with how such confiscatory mechanisms work in practice.

Before we all start running down the road, waving our flags and banners and saying that we are pleased that the new system will lead to such wonderful results, I have to tell the Minister that he will have to satisfy the House and the Committee that, in practice, the provisions—especially those on the confiscatory rules, which, as Ministers have said several times, represent a consolidation measure—will be much more effective than the provisions that previously existed. If the Minister cannot satisfy us on that, the whole thrust of the legislation will be called into question.

It is easy for us in this House to be long on rhetoric, but we want to see the angels in the detail and not the devil. It would therefore be helpful if the Minister at least provided some indication in his winding-up speech of why he believes that the confiscatory mechanisms will work so much better than the present system.

I deal now with the confiscatory mechanisms that constitute the earlier parts of the Bill but which have been to an extent supplanted in the debate by anxieties over issues such as money laundering and part 5. There are some very odd things in the confiscatory provisions. Above all, they appear to centre on whether justice will be done either to people who are put through the process and exonerated or, most important, to third parties who are affected by the process and subsequently find that they are exonerated.

If somebody absconds and assumptions are made which are subsequently varied or rescinded, the court has power to award compensation if it thinks it just. However, if the full, normal procedure has taken place—notwithstanding the fact that subsequently the whole case may cave in—one is allowed to obtain compensation only in circumstances of serious default. I find the juxtaposition of those two things odd.

In such circumstances, the explanatory notes to the Bill strike me—frankly—as weird. They seem to say, "Oh well, as one was a very quick procedure, we feel that we should allow the just principle to apply, but as the other follows the normal criminal procedure, it should apply only in cases of serious default." I do not see why serious default should be the only ground for compensating people who suffer the adverse consequences of draconian legislation.

If the Government are confident that the people who are targeted will be found—if I may use that word; it is not the proper word in the circumstances—guilty or at least to be in default, why are they so concerned about paying full compensation in those circumstances? There is no justification for that. In so far as the provision may be a carry-over from earlier procedure, I strongly suggest to the Government that, given how much further and more extensively the net is being cast upon the waters, now is the time to change it. That is another example of an aspect that is fundamental to whether the Bill is acceptable. It will be considered in Committee, although it is right that we should flag it up at this stage.

I do not wish to take up more of the House's time. I hear one or two Members saying, "Hear, hear." We shall certainly seriously and as rapidly as possible consider

such matters in Committee, but let us not forget that we are dealing with a 444-clause Bill. It is longer than the Law of Property Act 1925. It is one of the largest pieces of legislation ever presented to the House in such a form. For a piece of semi-criminal legislation, that is in itself quite worrisome. It deserves close scrutiny. I repeat to the Minister what we have said before: we support the aims of the Bill, but that should not be an excuse for throwing away common sense and, above all, that should not be a reason for throwing away civil liberties.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): It has been a good debate, as the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said. Some contributions were well informed. They showed great knowledge of the law, financial institutions and the consequences of criminality and drug trafficking. The maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) was one such speech, and several hon. Members congratulated him on his performance. The quality of those contributions was not surprising. However, the almost complete and astonishing role reversal by the Conservatives was surprising. I have rarely seen their Front-Bench spokesmen so agitated. I was especially surprised that they were so agitated about human rights and civil liberties.

Labour and Liberal Democrat Back Benchers usually raise and get concerned about such matters. To hear the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman so worried about them was surprising. Either there has been a Pauline conversion, or something else is going on. Their concerns ran through the opening speech of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and the closing remarks of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield. They reached a crescendo with the speech on inner cities by the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field).

It is the tone that is interesting, not what is said. Conservative Members are trying to tell us that they support the measures, yet they describe them as draconian and an affront to civil liberties. The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster got to the point of calling them evil and illiberal. With that support, we are entitled to ask exactly where Her Majesty's Opposition stand on this. Some of my hon. Friends on the Back Benches are right to ask about their motives.

Mr. Letwin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: In a moment.

The measures include establishing an agency. There is legislation to recover the proceeds of crime, but it is piecemeal. This is the first time that an agency will be dedicated to such work. By comparison with the relative size of our economies, we recover a quarter of the proceeds of crime that the authorities in the United States recover and a 10th of that recovered in Ireland. The Bill consolidates legislation and creates the agency that is needed if we are to have an impact.

Some of my hon. Friends said that there is cynicism about the effectiveness of such measures. Unless legislation is coupled with a strategy that all agencies sign up to, in which they agree to work together, and with investment in the necessary expertise, we will not be able to deliver on many people's expectations that we are as effective as other countries at recovering the proceeds of crime.

Confiscation is underused. Where it is used, it is underenforced. Existing legislation is disjointed and inaccessible. Confiscation is not new. I am surprised by Conservative concerns about it. Assumption is not a new concept. There is no reversal of the burden of proof. Confiscations will apply to people who have been convicted. In those circumstances, the defence against confiscation will be to prove that there are no proceeds of crime to confiscate, but only after conviction. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield is upset about the way serious default is used in the Bill, but we are talking about confiscation after criminal conviction, so I really do not understand why he is so exercised about that issue.

Mr. Grieve: I suggest that the Minister recalls the words of his hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford), who asked for clarification of the definition of "criminal lifestyle". That is where novelty arises. The issue is not being convicted of a crime, but being found to have a criminal lifestyle based on a series of what are potentially extremely minor offences that are statutorily determined via statutory instrument by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Ainsworth: I will not try to suggest that there are no important issues to be addressed. We will have to discuss them in Committee. I hope that, despite the rhetoric and the overall tone of today's debate, the hon. Gentleman will respond reasonably during the Committee's examination of the Bill. All we are trying to do in part 2 is streamline and consolidate the legislation. For reasons that have been adequately explored by my hon. Friends during the debate, we are insisting that, in appropriate circumstances, confiscation is considered and that assumptions are used so that we can end the underuse of the provisions.

On civil recovery, where there are substantial assets that are being used and enjoyed and where criminal conviction is not possible—the individual who committed a particular crime may be abroad, untraceable, or even dead—why should we not, on behalf of the citizens of this country, have the power and ability to sue for the forfeiture of that property? Why is that principle so wrong?

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) said that the agency would have the ability both to prosecute and to investigate, but that is not so. The agency will not be a prosecuting authority. These are civil matters; the agency will sue people in the courts. Yes, of course it needs the ability to investigate: in normal civil procedures, people have a case that they take to the court, and the agency will need to be able to discover the property and proceeds of crime involved if it is to be able to make its case; however, it will not be a prosecuting agency.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield suggests that the agency will ride roughshod over people's civil liberties and that it will be able to take all sorts of action simply because it thinks that the action is appropriate. In fact, the agency will have to go to court and show a good, arguable case in the first instance. It will have to prove—yes, to the civil standard—that the property involved is the proceeds of crime. The individuals involved will not be

[Mr. Ainsworth]

subject to the necessity of proving that their property is not the proceeds of crime—it will be the other way around. If the agency gets it wrong, it will be liable for costs and compensation. I do not know why he is getting so upset. I repeat, of course there are issues that need to be properly explored. We will do that in Committee.

The people who elect us expect our powers to investigate and tackle money laundering to be equal to the tasks in hand. As everyone knows, this country has some very large financial institutions, but in 1999 there were only 140 prosecutions in the UK for money laundering, whereas in Italy there were 538 and in the United States of America there were 2,034. Surely that shows that there is a need to increase our ability to take action against money laundering.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) expressed concerns about the level of proof that would be needed for the reporting of money laundering. Guidance will be issued in consultation with the industry, and that will apply only to the regulated sector. If that guidance is adhered to, that will be a defence. That may be some reassurance to her.

Some Members are worried about what they see as inadequacies in the strategy and in previous legislation. Legislation alone will not measure the need to take action. We need an entire strategy, and we have one. We need all the agencies to sign up to it, and they have. We need also investment in the expertise that is necessary to put the strategy into place. Some measures have already been implemented. Money has been allocated. There have been announcements of the initial bids against that money. We shall be able to announce the strategy in detail at the end of the month.

Scottish Members and the hon. Member for Beaconsfield referred to the differences between Scottish and English legislation. Many of my hon. Friends said that they might desire the measures that are available in England and Wales to be available also in Scotland. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scotland Office has talked to his colleagues on the Scottish Executive and others about the matter, and he will continue to do so. There is a different tradition in Scotland, and the Bill reflects that.

Mr. Carmichael: I wish to stiffen the Minister's resolve on that point. Does he agree that it is nonsensical to say that the proposed legislation is necessary to reinforce the credibility of the criminal justice system, and then to say, like the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), that the courts are not to be trusted to execute the proposals?

Mr. Ainsworth: As I have said, the current measures have been under-used. It is appropriate to take action to ensure that they are not under-used in England and Wales. There is a different tradition in Scotland. There are different and devolved issues. The Scottish Executive have been fully involved in the development of policy, and their views are reflected in the Bill. If people want to make representations, we must provide the mechanism for them to do so. We are not opposed to that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) talked about the Abacha case. We are introducing the capacity of restraint to the start of the investigation. There was a potential problem. We are also introducing regulations that will affect bureaux de change, which will come into effect next month.

My hon. Friend complained about the performance of the Home Office in responding to foreign jurisdictions. New resources have been made available, which has led to a considerable improvement.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) raised many of the issues that were taken up by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe), which included questions that go to the heart of concerns that people should have. There will be, as a necessity, a hierarchy of use for the measures and the way in which they are used in conjunction with criminal prosecution. We intend to set that out in guidance which will be available for the courts. Confiscation will be the normal route when a criminal prosecution is pursued, so civil recovery and cash forfeiture will not be an issue. When a case is pursued through the criminal courts, the confiscation route will be the first option for the forfeiture of the proceeds of crime. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Member for Lewes and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green. Only when prosecution is ruled out will other routes be pursued; the reasons for ruling it out will be part of the normal decisions taken by the prosecution agencies.

Norman Baker: Does that mean that there are no circumstances at all in which criminal proceedings will be parallel to civil proceedings to seize assets?

Mr. Ainsworth: Civil proceedings will not run parallel to confiscation proceedings or criminal proceedings. If there are criminal proceedings, confiscation proceedings could well be part of that. Civil proceedings will only be instituted when criminal proceedings are not felt to be available or appropriate.

The hon. Member for Lewes was anxious about innocent third parties; there were also concerns about whether legislative measures would be effective against tainted gifts. We think that we have got it right, but the matter will need to be examined in Committee. We need to be able to take effective measures so that the proceeds of crime cannot be hidden or salted away by an accomplice or relative, and can be pursued. Yet we also need to protect associated property, innocent third parties and people who have bought at value. We intend to do precisely that. As Members get into the detail of the Bill, they will see that we have managed to give protection to innocent third parties while, at the same time, introducing an effective measure to pursue the proceeds of crime and pretty clever individuals who attempt to hide them and put them beyond the reach of the authorities.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife who, in his maiden speech, supported the Bill, as did several other hon. Members. As a Home Office Minister, I became responsible for the legislation in June this year. Since then, we have examined all the measures in detail, and listened and responded to all those—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There may only be a few minutes left, but the Minister should be heard.

Mr. Ainsworth: We made some changes in response to the consultation, but declined to make others.

We incorporated the extension of cash seizure promised during the general election. I am completely confident that the measures in the Bill are necessary and the safeguards adequate. To those in the House and elsewhere who disagree, and to people who doubt the justification of our proposals, I say quite simply that there is no justification for continuing with a legislative framework that allows people to retain the proceeds of crime to corrupt our financial institutions, compete unfairly with legitimate business and finance further crime. I therefore commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

PROCEEDS OF CRIME BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Proceeds of Crime Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

2. All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further message from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

3. (1) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 5 February 2002.

(2) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. (1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed in two allotted days.

(2) An allotted day is one on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

The House divided: Ayes 353, Noes 152.

Division No. 46] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malliaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John

Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

PROCEEDS OF CRIME BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Proceeds of Crime Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by any Minister of the Crown under the Act;

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

PROCEEDS OF CRIME BILL [*WAYS AND MEANS*]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Proceeds of Crime Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the imposition of charges by provisions relating to financial investigators and to training;

(b) the imposition of charges to tax (including charges with retrospective effect) by provisions allowing a source of income not to be identified or specified;

(c) the imposition of charges to tax by provisions relating to the vesting of property by recovery order;

(d) payments into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

DESIGNS

That the draft Registered Designs Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 19th July, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 16th October, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INVESTIGATORY POWERS

That the draft Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Technical Advisory Board) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 17th October, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

AGRICULTURE

That the draft Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce (Abolition) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 16th October, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 16th October, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Fireworks

10.13 pm

Mr. Bob Laxton (Derby, North): I wish to present a petition sent to me by one of my constituents, Sue Williams, on behalf of AFFA—All Fireworks Frighten Animals. It is from the residents of Derby, Harrow, Wembley and other places and declares that

"animals face unnecessary terror for weeks surrounding 5 November due to the indiscriminate use of fireworks.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons pass legislation to place further restricts on the sale of fireworks to the general public.

And the petitioners remain, etc."

To lie upon the Table.

Flooding (Braintree)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

10.20 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to raise the important issue of the recent flooding in Braintree. I am pleased also to see the hon. Members for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) and for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and other hon. Members in the Chamber. I am particularly pleased that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are presiding over our proceedings, as I know that you will appreciate the difficulties that have occurred in the Braintree and Saffron Walden districts. I know that you have been very active in your own part of that district on behalf of those who have suffered from the flooding. I presume to hope that you will agree with some of what I say and what I urge upon the Minister in this debate.

I pay tribute particularly to Braintree district council and its work force for the way they responded to the flooding in the towns and villages of Braintree district, for the devotion that they showed to the task in hand, and for their complete commitment to those who were suffering from probably the worst floods in 100 years in some of the villages along the rivers in Braintree district.

Braintree district is entirely inland, although at one time we had a sea coast; the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford now has that sea coast and we do not. However, the tidal part of the river comes as far as Langford and is a few miles from some of the villages that were affected. I shall not presume to give a scientific opinion specifically on the effect of a high tide coinciding with the heaviest rains that have been seen in probably a very long time—we had a month's worth of rain in 24 hours—but various factors came together, and I hope that we shall receive some explanation in the near future, particularly from the Environment Agency.

As you will know well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the rivers concerned are the River Blackwater, with its tributaries the Pant and the Brain; the River Chelmer and its tributary the Ter, both of which eventually run into the Blackwater; and the River Colne, which exits into the sea at Colchester. There was flooding on both those river systems, which of course do not stand alone, as each has running into it ditches, dykes and streams. It is a mosaic of causation, producing the near disaster that we had barely a week ago.

In my own parliamentary constituency there are the principal towns of Braintree, Bocking and Witham and innumerable villages, but those that suffered most were the old market town of Coggeshall, Kelvedon, Feering, Silver End, White Colne, Bardfield and Finchingfield. Each of those villages in varying ways suffered flooding more extreme than most of those who have lived there most of their lives have ever known.

Last week, immediately after the floods, I visited the affected areas. My first point of call was Coggeshall, which is right on the River Blackwater. Directly next to it is the tributary Robins brook. As it was described to me by those who were present at the height of the downpour, the water seemed to come first off the fields. However, I think that that was the overflowing of Robins brook, which was flooding West street in Coggeshall.

Members of the parish council were out there with local residents doing what they could to protect the houses on West street. By Sunday evening, they believed that the situation was under control and that the water was going down. But in the night there was a second onslaught when the "back-ditch overflow" of waters coming down from the fields and Robins brook joined the River Blackwater itself, and the Blackwater overflowed. I went to Foundry house, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Norris, soon afterwards. I had been in their kitchen only a few weeks before, but I would have needed waders to get into it this time. The whole ground floor was uninhabitable, as was the case in many properties on the Blackwater.

There has been a long-running problem in Coggeshall that highlights the difficulties with co-ordinating and separating responsibilities. There is a road called The Gravel, with a drainage ditch. The Environment Agency, the county council and the district council all deny responsibility for the ditch, and eventually everyone says that it must lie with the neighbouring owners, but it is difficult to see those owners' deeds unless they specifically volunteer to show them. As many of the properties will pre-date compulsory land registration, it is not easy to ascertain the legal position. That was not the cause of last weekend's flooding, but it exacerbated it, because the water is not running down to the Blackwater at the speed it should. That is a small example of the difficulties of tracing who is responsible for what.

I pay tribute again to the co-operation among the villagers, who tried to help one another. In Coggeshall, Kelvedon and White Colne, I saw people asking each other what they could do to help. To have one's belongings ruined and to be forced upstairs in the middle of the night is completely devastating. People living close to the river had no way of knowing how high it would eventually go.

I have worked hard at trying to understand who is responsible for what. The main river courses are the responsibility of the Environment Agency, and the rivers that I have described are the responsibility of the Environment Agency, save for Robin's brook. It may not be at the forefront of everyone's minds as one of our national rivers, but I note that only the first part of it is the responsibility of the Highways Agency. Beyond West street, presumably the riparian owner is responsible.

The phrase "riparian owner" is flipped out with comparative ease by those who are familiar with these questions. I pay tribute to my old Latin master for the fact that—I hope—I have been able to work out what it means: those who own the land by the side of the river. Of course, there are many owners by the side of the river. There may be 10 good owners who act entirely responsibly, but if there are two less responsible owners, the whole course of the water flowing in that stream can be severely interfered with, with considerable consequences downstream or upstream.

We need greater clarification of responsibilities. The Environment Agency, as the overall body responsible for the flow of water in our rivers and streams, needs to have greater powers and duties beyond the main watercourses themselves. To leave it at the main watercourses is almost like considering a lake in isolation and ignoring the fact that it is fed by a stream.

The name "Environment Agency" is in some ways unfortunate, as residents often think that it is a department of the county council—because we have an environment

committee or an environment department—which has created a confusion in the public mind about who is responsible.

Let us consider the forecasting of the coming flood. In earlier times, our forebears would have studied the bird movements, the changing leaves and other signs of approaching heavy and wet weather. Now we have satellites, which show on our television screens banks of cloud and rain moving across the continent of Europe. One would have hoped that predictability was much more accurate than it once was and that we could say when the heavy rain was coming, where it was going, and how severe it was likely to be. We have made advances in that direction and we rely on automatic telephoning to those properties at risk.

I am concerned, however, that properties further back from the high-risk areas may not have the necessary degree of warning. I was formerly attracted to the idea of the siren, and there is still a case for that in certain places. But I was speaking to Councillor Arthur Mascall from Earls Colne, who formerly worked in matters of flooding and water control. He advised me that, in former times, they had what were effectively street runners or wardens who would advise all the neighbours of the imminent danger; rather like when, in the political times before telephoning canvassing, we had street wardens and knockers-up. Probably we need the same sort of approach in smaller communities to alert people at an earlier stage than happens now.

The Environment Agency should now instigate an immediate appraisal of why the water came so fast and went so high so quickly. There are various speculations upon which I cannot comment because I do not have the knowledge. However, it is conceded that the A12 was pumped off at some point during the rain and that the water was pumped off into the Domsey brook, which runs into the River Blackwater adjacent to Kelvedon, which was badly hit by flooding. I am assured that the amount of water going into the Blackwater from the brook would not have substantially affected what occurred, but I am not in a position to say whether that is or is not so. We need clear answers, because these questions are being put to me.

It has also been put to me that we might assess the situation if we were to create flood parks: a phrase I have not heard before. These are flood plains artificially created to drain off water when it is coming in at a particular speed. I am told that when Harlow and Basildon were built as new towns, they were constructed with such flood parks in place to control the flow on the rivers adjacent to them.

We need to look at as many measures as possible, and we need a clear plan for dealing with future flooding of the kind that we have had in Braintree. This needs to be costed; at this point, it would be appropriate to ask the Minister to intercede with the Chancellor and to ask for more funds to be made available for flood control.

A matter on which the Government have made considerable progress is planning guidance, and the recommendation in PPG 25 that local authorities should not grant planning consents on the flood plain. My district authority tells me that it has not granted such consents within the last decade or so, but all of us will know of situations—certainly within memory—where properties clearly have been built on the flood plain. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to go further: where such a consent is now granted, there should be an automatic call-in to the Secretary of State to consider that decision before it becomes effective. We can do little about properties that have been in the flood plain for hundreds of years, other than to do what we can to protect them by way of flood defence. We would be foolish to grant consents for more properties to be built in such hazardous positions.

An interlocking issue is the sewer system which, in many areas, is decades old—sometimes 100 years old. In rural areas and small towns, the sewage system was built when the population and the volume of water used in households were much smaller. When the rains are heavy, the water will find its way into the sewers and out again, thus creating the health hazard of sewage splattered across and inside people's properties.

Moreover, citizens—and motorists in particular—should exercise some common sense when flooding occurs. I have been given two or three examples of high vehicles and four-wheel drive vehicles creating waves in flooded roads and streets powerful enough to blow open cottage doors and let the water rush in. I hope that the people responsible for dealing with flooding can devise systems that mean there are wardens available to control traffic and minimise the risks that I have described. The damage to some of the cottages was certainly caused by irresponsible action of the type I have described.

To conclude, I recently met representatives of one of the major insurance companies. For the moment they are holding the line, so to speak, and my constituents tell me that claims are being dealt with expeditiously. However, the problem put to me is that flooding, if it happens every year, ceases to be a risk and becomes a certainty. Such a certainty cannot be insured against, and thus cannot be mortgaged. A property that cannot be mortgaged cannot be sold. Action therefore needs to be taken to identify those properties most at risk, in order to ensure that the difficulty that I have described does not come about.

Flood control is a relatively modest expenditure, compared with the whole of Government spending, although it is large in personal terms. My constituents feel that a good winter will put the matter fairly well down the list of priorities, but that a bad winter will put it high up the list. We want a good winter, but we want the question to be high on the list of priorities.

Since last Sunday, my constituents have listened to weather forecasts and studied the skies with greater concentration than before. I hope that their foreboding is not fulfilled, and that we are spared further flooding for the rest of the winter. I know however that my hon. Friend the Minister will look at these matters with attention, so that the worst may be avoided in future.

10.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) on securing this Adjournment debate. He has made some important points on behalf of his constituents, and raised some important matters. I wish to put on record my sympathy for all his constituents who have suffered in the recent flooding. In addition, Mr.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

Deputy Speaker, I understand that your constituency of Saffron Walden was affected, as were areas in the constituencies of the hon. Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), who are also present for the debate.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, there was exceptional rainfall in the catchment area on Sunday 21 October. Up to 109 mm—well over 4 inches—of rain were recorded in the one day. That resulted in the recorded river levels in the area being the highest ever, and caused the known flood plain to be extended by a considerable amount, with the result that the flood risk maps and flood plain maps will have to be redrawn. To put it simply, as my hon. Friend rightly did, a month's rain fell in 24 hours.

That was a rare and dramatic event, and one that we would expect to happen only once every 120 to 300 years. The Environment Agency reported that 72 premises were flooded in Braintree and Bocking, and that most were outside the known flood plain. The River Blackwater at Bradwell and Coggeshall reached levels that would be expected only once every 200 or 250 years.

After such an event, the Environment Agency will undertake a study of what happened and decide whether there are options that can be applied in a sustainable way. I was interested in my hon. Friend's remarks about flood parks and the use of flood plains. In some cases, there may be no easy, technical, engineered solutions to flood defence. I am very interested in some of the work being carried out. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is funding studies of whole catchment areas to examine whether we can use flood plains or reinstate them to take some of the pressure off the peaks of water going down rivers and how we can appiy them to flood defence.

My hon. Friend is right about non-main watercourses. They are generally the responsibility of riparian owners. Local authorities have permissive powers to do work on non-main river courses but there is the issue of funding. I recognise that there is a problem with regard to the responsibility for non-main river courses. I give an undertaking to look at who has responsibility for main and non-main river courses. We are proposing to publish a report in the very near future that reviews the funding mechanisms for flood and coastal defence and looks at some of the institutional arrangements. It will not be unreasonable to look at my hon. Friend's points in that review.

After the exceptional floods last winter, the Government immediately made an extra £51 million available over the next three years. In the current financial year, we have made £16.5 million immediately available to pay for the repair and reinstatement of flood defences that were damaged as a result of those floods. I accept that there is an issue of funding. We have commissioned independent studies to give the Government an idea of what kind of financial commitment will be required over the coming years, taking into account the implications of global warming and climate change. We will consider the results very carefully; they will influence the bids that we make in the 2002 spending review.

I accept my hon. Friend's point about PPG 25. It has given local authority planners clear guidance about tighter planning control in relation to flood plains. My hon. Friend is right that although it does not say that there should in no circumstances be development in flood plains—in some cases developers may have to contribute to defences—it also makes it clear that in other cases applications should be turned down because they are not sustainable in respect of the risks that go with them. That has been made clear to the planners.

My hon. Friend referred to sewers and drains. It is worth remembering that in last year's floods, about 40 per cent. of the flooding was caused not by river courses but by sewers and drains backing up and overflowing. There is a need for the sewerage and drainage companies, local authorities and highways authorities to look at the maintenance of drains and consider whether their design is satisfactory. We are talking with them to ensure that we take an holistic approach to flood and coastal defence.

I was very interested in my hon. Friend's point about people driving through floods. I have visited many flood-hit areas, and the point has been made that sometimes, even where the flood water is not that deep and people think that they can get their vehicle through it, they do not understand why roads have been closed off. They forget that driving a vehicle through a flood creates a bow wave which can cause a great deal of damage to people who live alongside the area.

I accept my hon. Friend's point about insurance. We meet regularly with the Association of British Insurers, and are talking to the association about the provision of insurance cover. The Government's job is to reduce risk, and we are doing that, but we also expect the insurance companies to ensure that people have insurance cover. That is an important issue for my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey), as areas of his constituency were severely hit by last winter's floods. We take the issue seriously and are addressing it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree also raised a point about warnings, and I acknowledge that because some people were outside the previous indicative flood plain, a number of premises did not receive a proper warning. That was because warnings are provided only to properties that lie within the known flood plain, and the floods exceeded that level so properties were flooded that were at much less risk of flooding. I know that that is of little comfort to the people who were affected, and obviously we must review the situation in relation to flood warnings for those people.

I listened carefully to my hon. Friend's comments about sirens and other flood warning methods. I am sure that the Environment Agency will consider those perfectly legitimate points; I will certainly discuss them with the agency.

It has been pointed out that the flooding affected areas beyond Braintree. I recognise that the severe rain caused flooding elsewhere in Essex and Cambridgeshire, particularly in and around Cambridge and Saffron Walden. The Government's sympathies are with everyone affected by the flooding and I am aware that in your own constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker, areas such as Halstead, the Hedinghams, Great Yeldham, Sturmer and Steeple Bumpstead were affected by the floods. I know that although your duties make it difficult for you to raise these issues in the House, you will certainly raise them with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affa. We take them very seriously and we shall certain. look into all these issues.

I very much regret it when anyone has been affected by floods. No Government can guarantee that floods will not happen. We constantly seek to reduce the risk of flooding and we shall continue to do so. Where there have been these extreme events we shall ask the agency to review the situation and consider ways, if at all possible, to reduce the risk of flooding which hon. Members' constituents have experienced. We shall continue to give our commitment to that task, financially and politically.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 31 October 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL

Motion made,

That the promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill which originated in this House in the last Parliament but had not received the Royal Assent may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the bill in the present session of Parliament; and the petition for the bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable to it shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office no later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the bill presented in this House in the last Parliament;

That on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the bill on the Table of the House;

That in the present session of Parliament the bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it has passed in the last Parliament, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages;

That no further fees shall be charged to such stages.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Deputy Prime Minister was asked—

Civil Service Recruitment

1. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What steps he is taking to ensure equality of opportunity in recruitment to the civil service. [9279]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government are strongly committed to equality of opportunity and to creating an open and modern civil service that fully reflects the United Kingdom. Departments have set themselves challenging diversity targets for their staff at all levels, nationally and regionally. Each year heads of department account personally to Ministers on their progress and on future plans.

Helen Jackson: I thank the Minister for that answer. May I offer my congratulations? I was glad to see that in October last year nearly half the civil service were women and nearly 7 per cent. were from ethnic minorities, but what goes wrong after that, because fewer than one in five, or 20 per cent. of those female civil servants reach the senior grades? What happens under the internal promotion procedures? I am sure that he will be aware that the Labour party has taken action. Will he ensure that the Government do the same?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend has the statistics down pat. It is true that half of the civil service are women but that only just over 20 per cent. of the senior ranks are female. There is a lot of work to do and we have set challenging targets—35 per cent. of senior grades to be held by women in 2005. A lot of work can be done not only at the stage of encouraging applications, but when we shortlist and assess people for promotion. There is, however, a lot more work to be done, but I take my hon. Friend's comments to heart.

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I applaud the steps that the Government have taken to encourage and develop the careers of women and of people from black and ethnic minorities. Does the Minister appreciate that people joining the civil service are joining a public not a political service? Will he personally take steps to ensure that fellow Ministers appreciate that the independence and integrity of the civil service are fundamental? Whenever his colleagues develop a blame culture or respond to adverse headlines with "Shoot the manager", they do a disservice to equality in the service as well as to the service at large.

Mr. Leslie: The civil service is a fine institution and long may it continue to be so and to be independent and impartial. There are a number of ways in which we ensure that. The code of conduct for the civil service is scrupulously observed. It is also important that we get new talent and blood into the civil service to ensure that we have diversity not just for the sake of it but to enrich the talent that can serve and improve public services at large.

Policy Objectives

2. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): If he will make a statement on his role in ensuring more effective delivery of policy objectives. [9280]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The Deputy Prime Minister's main role is to support and deputise as necessary for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and to help oversee the delivery of key Government priorities.

Mr. Blizzard: I welcome that new delivery role. I will give my hon. Friend an example of why it is necessary. Earlier this year, because of the crisis in the fishing industry, the Government allocated £5.5 million for

fishing communities, which was wonderful news. Six months later, however, we realised that the way in which the money had been distributed throughout the country was bizarre. Some of the things that it has been spent on bear no relation to the reason why the fund was set up.

Although Ministers issued guidelines, which stated that they did not want to be prescriptive, my local council maintains that the rules on spending are prohibitive. When we end up with Lowestoft, which is the country's third largest fishing port and accounts for 10 per cent. of the nation's catch, being offered only £65,000 out of £5.5 million, something is wrong. Will my hon. Friend consider that matter and the accountability of the regional development agencies, which were asked to deliver the initiative?

Mrs. Roche: Of course I understand my hon. Friend's concern. He has raised this issue in the House before. The delivery unit's remit is to deal with key priorities on health, education, transport and reducing crime. I will undertake, however, to bring my hon. Friend's concerns to the attention of the Department.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): Can the Minister explain how the Cabinet Office can have any real influence on the delivery of policy when the Treasury sets Government and policy targets and controls the budgets that Departments have to deliver those policies?

Mrs. Roche: Of course the Treasury has a key role to play, through the usual arrangements, to ensure that all Departments keep to their priorities and deliver. The Prime Minister's delivery unit, which is working successfully alongside the Treasury, in its role of co-ordinator, is ensuring that these matters are dealt with.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Does the Minister recognise that to meet the need to deliver locally we must have excellent public servants? There are many of those throughout the country; however, they are constrained by the level of initiatives that the Government are introducing. Will the delivery unit try to reduce the number of initiatives and the number of forms and applications that have to be completed to implement the excellent policies that need to be delivered to local constituents? Will she ensure greater co-ordination across the board to offer them more realistic opportunities?

Mrs. Roche: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Part of my job is to go and talk to local councillors and to people in Government offices. We need to ensure that some of our public funding programmes are much more accessible to local communities and local groups. We need to simplify those programmes, and that is exactly the sort of work on which we are engaged.

Emergency Planning

3. **Sandra Gidley** (Romsey): If he will make a statement on his Department's recent activity regarding emergency planning. [9282]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The civil contingencies secretariat at the Cabinet Office is co-ordinating the work of the Civil Contingencies Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Home Secretary, and is comprehensively reviewing the nation's ability to deal with emergencies. The secretariat is also taking forward the review of emergency planning in England and Wales announced by the Cabinet Office in August.

Sandra Gidley: Is the Minister aware that the emergency planning officers who are responsible for delivering those plans on the ground have received only two communications from central Government since 11 September, one of which was to ask for the confirmation of a fax number? When the Minister's Department was asked whether it had responsibility for emergency planning, the response was, "Kind of." Is that acceptable and does the Minister agree that a Minister of Cabinet rank should be appointed to take charge of civil contingencies until further notice? The current situation is unacceptable. I would like to feel that somebody is taking overall responsibility; I am sure the House would and I am convinced the public would.

Mr. Leslie: There is a Minister of Cabinet rank in charge of civil contingencies: the Home Secretary, who chairs the Civil Contingencies Committee of the Cabinet. The Cabinet Office helps, through its secretariat, to co-ordinate the activities of all Departments; well worked plans are in place across all the critical elements of the national infrastructure to make sure that Britain stands ready to cope with whatever emergency situations may arise.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My hon. Friend is aware of my interest and that of my constituents in the whole issue of emergency planning and of the work that has recently been done locally. I am sure that he will join me in congratulating the officers of the local authority and the public servants who have delivered their functions so well. Can he explain why the role of emergency planning is not firmly established on a statutory basis?

Mr. Leslie: The review announced by the Cabinet Office in August is indeed examining the question of statutory footing for emergency planning. In fact, the consultation period for that document ends today. The Government will be considering the legislative background to emergency planning. In general, having worked closely on such matters, I believe that the arrangements and structures that are in place are adequate and capable of dealing with a whole series of eventualities.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am genuinely seeking information and help from the Minister. *[Interruption.]* Does he accept that foot and mouth was an emergency, and will he therefore give some consideration, through his office, to re-establishing the regional committees of the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? Those committees could have done an amazingly helpful job in reducing the terrible and horrific impact of foot and mouth. The committees were phased out, but if they had been in operation they could have played a valuable role.

Mr. Leslie: As with flooding, there are lessons for all Departments to learn from foot and mouth. A number of

those lessons have been incorporated in the contingencies that are now in place to deal with events post-11 September. With specific reference to foot and mouth, I understand that the Government offices in the regions were significant contributors to regional operations centres during the whole crisis. That is certainly an area in which more work can be done and it will be developed in the future.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I press my right hon. Friend further on the role of the civil contingencies secretariat? I greatly welcome the recent consultation on emergency planning, but it is vital that we place it on a statutory basis. Given that the Home Secretary has taken some of that work forward, and although we do not wish to be alarmist about events after 11 September, I still believe that it is important that we give the Cabinet Office all possible support to ensure that organisations such as the Chartered Institution of Environmental Health have an active role in influencing what is placed on the statute book. Such legislation should be properly implemented and properly monitored.

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend makes several useful points, particularly about the expertise that is available from outside Government on emergency planning; it is not the preserve of Government Departments alone. I believe that it is our duty to ensure that we have plans to detect and prepare against any eventuality as well as respond and recover, and the Cabinet Office will help to co-ordinate that under the leadership of the Home Secretary.

Special Advisers

4. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will publish new guidelines regarding the conduct of special advisers. [9284]

5. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): If he will make a statement on the guidance his Department gives on the ethical standards that should be applied by ministerial special advisers. [9285]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): Since the general election, we have published a revised model contract, setting out the duties, responsibilities and terms and conditions that will apply to all special advisers. The model contract incorporates a new code of conduct consolidating the guidance for special advisers, the civil service code and the principles of public life taken from the first Nolan report.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his answer. Ignoring for a moment the question of Jo Moore and ignoring for a moment the question of civil servants who have resigned from the press offices of various Departments, can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that there are now 81 special advisers? Is he aware that when the Labour Government came to office there were only 38? Does he accept that people would be more satisfied with the Government's performance if they were to reduce the number of special advisers to that which they inherited?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I can confirm that there are 81 special advisers in comparison to 3,500 senior civil servants. Indeed, I can confirm that the number of special advisers has increased from 38—the number in post when we first came to office. That means that the number of advisers has almost doubled—[HON. MEMBERS: "More than doubled."] Well, more than doubled if they like, but it more than doubled under the Tory Administration, when it reached 38. If the hon. Gentleman believes that, in those 18 years, the Tories' record in office was advantaged by doubling the advisers, I leave him to make a judgment about the current number of advisers.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Here is a straightforward question for the Deputy Prime Minister. If a special adviser in the Cabinet Office had put out an e-mail saying that the occasion of an international terrorist disaster was a very good day to bury bad news, would the Deputy Prime Minister have sacked that person or kept him or her in his or her job?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: It has been made clear both by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and by the Prime Minister, and it is my view, that it was a stupid judgment and should not have happened. The woman has apologised for it. She has been dealt with under the disciplinary procedures. Under those circumstances, I think that the matter is now shut.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): May I put it to my right hon. Friend that a lot of nonsense is talked about special advisers? The last thing that we want or need is new guidelines on special advisers. What we really do need is a civil service Act, giving constitutional protection to the civil service. We have long promised it, so surely now we can deliver it.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: We have made it absolutely clear that a civil service Act will be considered. My hon. Friend and the Select Committee on Public Administration, which he chairs, have made several recommendations to which we will reply soon. In fact, the Cabinet Secretary is to appear before the Committee tomorrow, when the members of the Committee will be able to hear some of our responses to its recommendations.

On special advisers, the House may be interested to know that I happened to look at the membership of the shadow Cabinet. Five of its members are former special advisers, and there are four more on the Tory Front Bench. I do not know whether that adds to the better judgment of the shadow Cabinet; we wait to see.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Whose advice do the Government value the most—that of their special advisers, or that of all the Back Benchers?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: We value the advice of both. The special advisers play a special, useful role in ensuring that Back Benchers on both sides of the House communicate their views to Ministers.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): May I say first that I much look forward to crossing swords with the Deputy Prime Minister? I dare say that we will have some clashes, but I freely acknowledge that he is one of the most honest and honourable members of the Government? May I remind him that on 12 January last year, the then Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, Lord Neill, said:

"There is great advantage from the special adviser system. But the numbers have been burgeoning. There should now be consideration given to introducing an overall number."

So, nearly two years ago, Lord Neill recommended a limit on numbers. What is the Deputy Prime Minister's reaction to that?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks and also welcome him to the Front Bench. I think that he should have recorded a special interest, as he was a special adviser himself before taking up his job, nevertheless, I make no criticism, and I look forward to the exchanges across the Dispatch Box in future. The question that he asks has been posed to us by the Select Committee, and we shall give a proper response to that matter shortly.

Mr. Collins: I am grateful to the Deputy Prime Minister for that answer. It is, of course, very nearly two years since the Neill committee made its recommendation on this issue. The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, has said that he wants a civil service Bill to be introduced rapidly. If such a Bill is introduced, will it include such a numeric limit on special advisers?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Again, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that it would be right for us to respond first to the Select Committee, as it has asked us that question. I have made it clear that a civil service Bill will be presented, and the House will then have a chance to debate the issues that he has raised, but it is right and proper for me to give the first response to the Select Committee. I do not know whether it will also deal with what has happened to the Short money—the amount of money given to the Opposition has increased from £1 million to £3 million a year.

Mr. Collins: As the Deputy Prime Minister is being so honest and forthright in his responses to the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, does he agree with the said hon. Gentleman that Jo Moore's remarks were

"incompatible with any idea of public service"?

Why is that woman still in office?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: When I appeared before the Select Committee on the occasion of those remarks I told the Chairman that I did not agree with his judgment. It was his opinion, but I have to give a proper response from the Government, and that is yet to come. Was there any time when the hon. Gentleman, as a special adviser, gave a bad judgment?

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): This round of questions was started by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), whose questions I have always found fascinating—mind, I have never really thought of him as a Tory; I have always thought of him as more of a Whig.

Is it not the case that advisers should advise and Ministers should make decisions? Following the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on advisers, Back Benchers can give good and solid advice on occasion, and is not it a great pity that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions did not take my advice on Biwaters when he was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry? Had he done so, that plant might still be open. Presumably, he acted on internal advice.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: My hon. Friend has raised that issue several times in the House, and I cannot really say any more than my right hon. Friend told him, but it is our job to take advice from advisers and from Back Benchers as well. I might say that we would give more importance to the Back-Bencher's view, but at the end of the day, it is the responsibility of Ministers to make a decision and then be accountable to the House.

PIU Energy Review

6. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): If he will make a statement on the scope and timetable of the performance and innovation unit's energy review. [9286]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The scope of the PIU energy review is to look at strategic issues surrounding energy policy for Great Britain to 2050. The PIU will report to the Prime Minister by the end of the year.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the Minister for that reply. Can I draw her attention to the increasing concerns regarding the new electricity trading arrangements, as outlined in the Ofgem report that all Members have received? Will she confirm that the energy review currently being undertaken will consider those concerns and will bring forward proposals regarding those arrangements? If the report comes to Government by the end of the year, what timetable does she have to ensure that they bring forward their response to it in the next 12 months?

Mrs. Roche: I know that the hon. Gentleman has had a long-standing interest in energy matters. The review will take account of the longer-term potential contribution from all renewable sources of energy and it will also consider how energy investments of all kinds can be reconciled with the concerns of local communities. I certainly undertake to draw his remarks to the attention of the review.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I should like to reinforce the comments of the hon. Member for

Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas). Will my hon. Friend assure me that, in any review, special consideration will be given to older coal-fired power stations, such as Aberthaw? They are strategically important in guaranteeing the security of the supply of electricity to areas such as south Wales and in their ability to burn low volatile coal from the south Wales valleys.

Mrs. Roche: Any review of energy needs must consider coal. I inform my hon. Friend and the House that a separate review of the potential of cleaner coal technology was announced in parallel with the PIU review.

Foot and Mouth

7. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the regional co-ordination of policy relating to the foot and mouth outbreak. [9287]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The Government offices in the regions have supplied staff at all levels to regional operations centres responding to foot and mouth disease. Policy matters continue to be the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with whom my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has had a number of informal discussions.

Miss McIntosh: I thank the Minister for that reply. Her Department is responsible for regional co-ordination, so has it assessed how policy was handled in the worst affected areas of Devon, North Yorkshire and, especially, Cumbria? Will the House have an opportunity to debate Devon county council's report on the mishandling of the situation by the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and will she agree to a full public inquiry into the handling of foot and mouth?

Mrs. Roche: The Government have already announced the setting up of two national inquiries and they will begin straight away. She is right to say that lessons have to be learned, and the inquiry that took place in Devon will feed through into the two national inquiries.

I am sure that the hon. Lady will agree that the Government offices made an enormous contribution, with staff working very hard and long hours to deal with the outbreak. As part of the inquiries and more generally, we will examine how those offices operated. I pay tribute to the Government offices in her region that worked so hard and diligently.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Will my hon. Friend accept that not just farming, but the whole rural economy, has been hit by foot and mouth? In particular, the leisure and tourism industries have been hit, so when the Government co-ordinate their response to regenerate the economy of rural areas, will they pay adequate attention to tourism?

Mrs. Roche: We certainly will. It is right to focus on tourism, and that is why I was delighted to spend part of last Easter in my hon. Friend's wonderful constituency.

Disabled Employees

8. **Mr. Tom Clarke** (Coatbridge and Chryston): What steps are being taken to increase the numbers of people with disabilities in employment in each Department of Government. [9288]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government are committed to employing disabled people, and all Departments have targets to increase the number of disabled people they employ. Good progress is being made, but a lot more work needs to be done.

Mr. Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that all the evidence shows that people with disabilities have an outstanding record once they are given an opportunity to work? Will the Government therefore redouble their efforts to make sure that opportunities are available at every level in the civil service and that those opportunities extend to people with learning difficulties?

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend touches on the precise point: diversity is not simply about reflecting the nation for its own sake, but about enriching the skills base and experiences across the civil service. Disabled people have a great deal to offer to improving public services throughout the nation. A variety of different tasks are under way in the Cabinet Office to increase the proportion of disabled people in the civil service, but more work needs to be done.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [9309] **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 31 October.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): I have been asked to reply.

The House will know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in the middle east. He was in Syria earlier today and is now in Saudi Arabia. His visit to the middle east emphasises the enormous importance that the Government attach to building the widest possible coalition against the scourge of international terrorism. It also re-emphasises the Government's total determination to do all that we can to reinvigorate the middle east peace process. My right hon. Friend has been tireless in his efforts on both those matters, and I am sure that the House will wish him well.

Mr. Brazier: In the light of the rather complacent reply on emergency planning for terrorism given a moment ago by the Parliamentary Secretary, when will the Government sort out some radios so that the police, fire brigade and ambulance service can talk to each other, and to the military, on the same frequency during a crisis?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: It is undoubtedly true that a number of lessons have been learned from the problems of foot and mouth and, in particular, flooding, when increased communication between the military, the police service and the fire brigade was necessary. Some work has been done on that. It is now being handled by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the contingency committee. We will do everything possible to improve communication.

Q2. [9310] **Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): The Government recognise that even in these troubled times problems at home remain important. My right hon. Friend visited Burnley recently and met the taskforce investigating the aftermath of the disturbances in Burnley in June. He also saw some of the 3,500 empty houses in my constituency and will be aware of the redundancies at Michelin as a result of the factory closure and job losses in the aerospace industry. Is it not a fact that the Government believe that the problems can be resolved only by a Labour Government working with local councils? Will he undertake to visit Burnley at an early date to show that the Government give their full support to Burnley borough council in its efforts to resolve those problems?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: How could I possibly disagree with such a conclusion? Indeed, how could I resist an invitation to visit Burnley? I shall certainly take that into account when I am in the area.

My hon. Friend made his point about the housing problem clear to me when I visited Burnley some time ago. The council has, I think, received £2 million for housing investment. He also mentions job losses at Michelin. That is a concern. Although there have been some job gains in his area, Burnley is worried about job losses, the need to do more about housing and the recent disturbances. Lord Clarke's report is considering those matters and one of my ministerial colleagues is also investigating them, with a view, we hope, to reporting in December. However, I will visit my hon. Friend's constituency if I get the opportunity in the near future.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the first objective of the current campaign in Afghanistan is now the removal of the Taliban?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new position as deputy Leader in the House. He has held that job for two different Prime Ministers, which shows he has pretty shifty footwork.

Our objectives are clear. Yesterday's *Hansard* shows that the right hon. Gentleman asked about those objectives and that they were confirmed by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. They remain the same. In a speech yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that our objectives are clear. Achieving the removal of the Taliban is not a clear objective, but it is a possible consequence of the Taliban giving protection to bin Laden, because the United Nations resolution made it absolutely clear that anyone in that position declares themselves to be an enemy. That is clearly relevant to our objectives.

Mr. Ancram: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his initial comments. He shows himself to be highly prescient in predicting the future of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. He will indeed shortly become Prime Minister and I shall be pleased to serve him in that position.

Returning to the current crisis, will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that the greatest obstacle to humanitarian aid in Afghanistan is the Taliban regime, that the best way to avert humanitarian disaster is to replace the Taliban with a broad-based Administration, and that the military policy is in a very real sense the humanitarian policy?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Yes, the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that we have humanitarian objectives. In addition, we have always said that the diplomatic action was of equal importance to the military action in restoring to Afghanistan a Government who are acceptable to the people. As he knows, discussions about possible alternatives are continuing in the UN. In the meantime, we have rightly taken military action to get rid of the bases where terrorists are trained.

Mr. Ancram: Will the right hon. Gentleman also confirm that, contrary to some recent comment, the purpose of the air campaign has been to degrade the Taliban's military capability, to undermine their ability to promote or shelter terrorism and to curtail their ability to oppress their own people? Does he agree that the air campaign has been an appropriate first phase in achieving the agreed overall objectives in the war against terrorism, but that the time has now come to set out clearly the specific objectives of the next phase, which will presumably involve the use of ground forces?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I certainly agree with everything the right hon. Gentleman has said about the military action and what it has achieved so far in terms of degrading the capacity for terrorist activity in Afghanistan and the surrounding region. The whole House agrees on the need to consider long-term objectives for the long haul. The statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday answered some of the questions. He said that we will now begin "a steady process" that will continue over the winter, building up to spring next year,

"of fragmenting, undermining and eventually destroying the Taliban regime as a serious threat capable of inflicting any more damage on their country and the outside world."

That answers all three questions to which we have so far addressed ourselves.

Q3. [9311] **Jim Knight** (South Dorset): Is my right hon. Friend aware that recent improvements in school standards in Dorset, while welcome, have been achieved in spite of unfair funding through the standard spending assessment? A child in Dorset currently attracts £132 less than a child in neighbouring Hampshire. Is that fair,

and are the Government still committed to reforming local government finance and ensuring that all our children in all our schools receive fair funding?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: It is quite nice to answer a question from a Labour Member for South Dorset, where we launched our campaign and gained a considerable victory at the general election. I have no doubt that Labour's record on education finance and the improvements that we were able to make played a major role in that victory.

A lot has been done, but a lot more remains to do. Reforming our education funding system is an important priority and we must get the new formula right. When I was Secretary of State at the relevant Department, I asked local authorities for their recommendations on SSA formulas. They came up with 24 different formulas. The task is not easy, but at least we can say that since 1997–98 education spending in my hon. Friend's constituency has increased in real terms by 20 per cent. That is a considerable improvement. In addition, Dorset's SSA for 2001–02 has risen by £7 million to more than £151 million. None the less, changes must be made to that form of financing, and we are committed to making them.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): We wish the Prime Minister well in his diplomatic mission, not least because bin Laden poses a threat to just about every Muslim country and every Muslim community in the world, as well as to the west.

May I turn to domestic issues? Bearing in mind the fact that, over the last few weeks, the Government have reversed their policies on Railtrack, cannabis, vouchers for asylum seekers and possibly even student fees, which are the subject of a review, is their second term going to be devoted to undoing the more misguided policies of their first?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I must say, as someone who was involved with Railtrack, but without going into individual policies, that rail privatisation was quite disastrous; to be fair, that was admitted by Conservative Front Benchers at the time. Railtrack went into administration because it had insufficient resources, not because the Government were not giving it any more—*[Interruption.]* The Government gave billions more to that organisation, which was constantly asking for more; every year meant £1 billion more in demand. That showed incompetence in handling the matter, which was flawed by privatisation, and we will not take any blame for that. That is the reality. If we change some things, is that so wrong? If we implement a new policy in those areas—on cannabis or on things to do with student financing—we look to see whether it is working, take proper advice and act on the advice. That is what I would call good government.

Mr. Beith: In thanking the Deputy Prime Minister for that rather refreshing response, I invite him to pay attention to the privatisation of London Underground and of air traffic services and the denial of free personal care to the elderly as three more policies that it would be a good idea to review and change.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: That is so typical of the Tories—I mean the Liberal party. I do not see much difference between Liberals and Tories anyway, so forgive me for that mistake; they are all opposition of one form or another.

There is no privatisation of London Underground; the assets are to be owned by the people and there will be public accountability. Yes, we are using the resources of private industry to reinvest the assets and rebuild the underground. We think that that is right so, by any stretch of the imagination, the right hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that it is privatisation.

Of course, a different formula was used for NATS; I think that that decision was right, although I know that Members can tell me to look at those who are lobbying outside. However, we will wait to see whether that produces the investment and modernisation needed by NATS and the underground; we are not ideological about that, but we will make sure that we will more than double the public investment to deal with the massive disinvestment under the 18 years of Tory rule.

Q4. [9312] **Mr. Jonathan Shaw** (Chatham and Aylesford): Last week's announcement by the IRA and the subsequent response from the Ulster Unionist party has reinvigorated the Good Friday agreement. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are extreme minorities that have never supported the agreement and have taken every opportunity in the last year or so to undermine progress? Does he further agree that the next step in finding long-lasting peace in Northern Ireland is for all paramilitaries to decommission their weapons, every last one of them?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Indeed, that is a very important objective. The House will recognise that there was a significant, ground-breaking achievement and pay tribute to the leadership not only of the Government but of the Opposition when they were in government. The process started some time ago, and we congratulate all those who were involved in bringing this and the Good Friday agreement about. It shows that politics is working, which is an important lesson to be taken into account, perhaps no more so than in the middle east itself.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the crucial importance of the sustainability of decommissioning, as was required. Of course, we hope that the loyalist paramilitaries will respond by decommissioning arms themselves. Indeed, they were the first to contact the decommissioning commission, and it is vital to the success of the peace process that they continue and complete that process.

Q5. [9313] **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware of the crisis affecting care for the elderly, which has brought about the closure of 48 care homes in my constituency in the past five years, and of the fact that the Isle of Wight council predicts the loss of another 450 beds—15 per cent. of the total—in the next two years because homes cannot afford to implement the Government's Care Standards Act 2000? Does the

right hon. Gentleman accept that he cannot stop bed blocking in hospitals if there are no residential home beds into which elderly people can move?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point. I congratulate him on his victory in the Isle of Wight at the expense of the Liberals, about which I shed few tears. The question of how we deal with care of the elderly is a serious one. It may be possible for some of the people in hospitals to be treated in homes. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has made available £300 million to improve expenditure in this area. The difficulties that we are encountering have come about partly as a result of the privatisation of care homes by the previous Administration. Many have closed because they find it much more profitable to sell at high property prices than to continue to operate as homes.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): What financial, political and military role does my right hon. Friend see the Islamic nations playing in post-conflict Afghanistan?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: We have made it clear that we want consensus on these matters, particularly among the countries that border Afghanistan, which will have an important part to play in a post-war situation. The United Nations has brought the parties together to discuss that. We all want to see agreement and the end of the military conflict. That is why the emphasis is not only on military but on diplomatic and financial aspects, which will all form part of the final settlement.

Q6. [9314] **Mr. Richard Spring** (West Suffolk): Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that 11 per cent. of beds in Suffolk hospitals are being blocked by delayed transfers, causing many cancelled operations, trauma for patients and their families and terrible strains on NHS staff? Our hospitals are at maximum capacity or routinely on critical alert. Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge the disappointment and concern of my constituents about the current state of the NHS, recall that grotesquely misleading campaign slogan, "24 hours to save the NHS", and apologise for it?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I will certainly not apologise for the fact that the Government have put more resources into the health service than any previous Administration, not only in absolute terms but as a proportion of gross domestic product. Often, the failure to achieve the objectives that we have set is due not to lack of money but to inadequate management. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about the beds situation. It is a matter that he has pursued in the past, and under the Tory Administration there was a reduction in beds. For a short period under our Administration, hospitals continued to reduce bed numbers, but for the first time in a long time my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has been able to increase the number of beds in our hospitals. We know what we need to do, we have provided the resources and we will make it a decent health service, after it was run down by the Conservatives.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I welcome the consultation document launched today on action to tackle abandoned cars, which pollute and blight our environment and attract crime. Will my right hon. Friend give me a guarantee that as soon as the consultation is closed he will make sure that rapid action is taken to give local authorities the powers to deal effectively with this blight on our local environment?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The whole House will agree with what my hon. Friend says. Many of us are receiving complaints about the many empty cars that are left in the streets. It is, indeed, a considerable problem. The statement made today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions gives local authorities powers to remove vehicles more quickly. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The measures that have been announced today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State give local authorities more powers to remove vehicles more quickly. They will be able to remove some vehicles in as little as 24 hours. The House should recognise the problem in places such as Lewisham, which previously had about 600 abandoned cars per year but now has about 6,000. That is a problem of considerable difficulty. The House will recognise that our extra powers and consultation, which include toughening up the DVLA licensing requirements, will deal with these problems. I have made inquiries: of the 6,000 cars in Lewisham, none was a Jaguar.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I am sure that the House was highly enlightened by that answer from an expert. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell me why he finally decided not to publish an annual report this year?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: It was called the general election, and we had a majority of 167.

Mr. Ancram: Is not the real reason that there was no annual report the fact that a truthful report would have made extremely uncomfortable reading for the Government? We now know that 50,000 care beds have been closed in the past four years, half of all people wait more than an hour to see a doctor in casualty, class sizes in secondary schools are their largest for a generation, almost half of all teachers leave within three years of joining the profession and police numbers are the lowest for more than a decade. By failing to publicise the report, are not the Government seeking to avoid democratic accountability for all these public service failures?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I recall most of those arguments being put during the election campaign. We put the alternatives and delivered on those promises—and the majority was 167.

Mr. Ancram: Does the right hon. Gentleman remember what he told the House on 30 July 1998? He said:

"All we have done is put our achievements in a proper annual report, record what we have done and be accountable for it. I call that democratic accountability."—[*Official Report*, 30 July 1998; Vol. 317, c. 542.]

What I want to know is, whatever has happened to democratic accountability since then? Is it not yet another victim of the Government's obsession with news management and spin? Has not the annual report become another political piece of bad news that they have decided without ceremony to bury?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: There comes a time when one thinks of the phrase, "Stop digging." We put our record in our manifesto, while the criticism was made by the Tory manifesto. The result was overwhelming. It was the same sort of result that we had in our first election, and I am sure that we are heading for a third one that will go the same way.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Has my right hon. Friend, like me and many others, read the newspaper stories about Muslims leaving this country to fight for the Taliban? Will he ask my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to ensure that, if those reports are true and any British citizens are leaving for that purpose, they never set foot in this country again?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: My hon. Friend will recall that we took action last year in the Terrorism Act 2000 to deal with some of these problems. When there has been a breach of law in this country—one can think of a number of areas where that may be possible if such activities can be proven to have occurred—action will be taken by the appropriate authorities.

Q7. [9315] **Andrew George** (St. Ives): Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that, despite the fact that Cornwall is the poorest region in the United Kingdom, the Government, according to this month's *BusinessAge* magazine, still take £300 million a year more in taxes than they put back in services? Local community regeneration efforts are being frustrated by meddlesome Government quangos and mountains of bureaucracy. Is he aware that Cornwall wants not to get even, but to get on? When will we be given the tools and money to do exactly that?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman will know that I visited Cornwall and St. Ives, where I spent a holiday recently, and I know full well how people there feel about these matters. He will know also that they are very appreciative of the negotiation of objective 1 funding brought about by this Government. He will know also that they are very grateful for the regional development agency, which the Opposition would abolish if they ever came to power. The agency has played an important part in redeveloping the Cornish economy. The hon. Gentleman may be able to show some differences in public spending figures, but I am not sure whether they are true. Inevitably, the future of Cornwall is a lot more rosy now than it was before, and that is because we have a Labour Government with a few Liberal Democrats elected down there.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the problems caused by heroin in this country are born in Afghanistan? Does he further agree that, once new arrangements are in place in Afghanistan and the current phase in the conflict ends, it will be important that the source of 90 per cent. of the heroin that comes into this country is cut off as much as possible, if not completely?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The whole House will agree with my hon. Friend. Some 90 per cent. of the cannabis in this country comes from that part of the world. The first condition is that we have a Government there who are sympathetic to dealing with the problem. Clearly, the Taliban are not, which is another reason why we should be taking the kind of action that we are.

Q8. [9316] **Angus Robertson** (Moray): I am sure that the Deputy Prime Minister is aware that the key issue of regional air services was debated this morning in Westminster Hall. Does he agree with the majority of people in the highlands and the north of Scotland that air links to Gatwick from Inverness—and to Heathrow, soon—are of key importance? Will he give a commitment that the Government will more than consider a public service obligation order to help secure the vital Inverness to Gatwick air link?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: These are essential questions about airports and aviation policy. The hon. Gentleman may know that the Department is considering and developing a White Paper for production within a short period. These matters have been affected by the debate on terminal 5, and anyone who knows about that subject knows that it has made the production of a White Paper difficult. He makes an important point, but he will know that I cannot say whether we will make a public service obligation order. However, I will pass on his comment to the relevant Secretary of State and I will see that he gets a proper reply.

Q9. [9317] **Mr. David Lammy** (Tottenham): Can the Deputy Prime Minister explain the Government's strategy for ensuring that local authorities are encouraged, equipped or sometimes kicked into dealing with quality of life issues such as dumped rubbish, abandoned cars, dog fouling and dirty public spaces? Young people in my constituency who are growing up amid such neglect are given little incentive to care for their surroundings.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Since coming to the House, my hon. Friend has made it clear that he finds the issues of the quality of life in his constituency very important and has pursued them with some vigour. My earlier announcement was on the removal of cars, on which he and my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) have been campaigning. What we have announced will

lead to a vast improvement in the quality of life in those areas where people have been bitterly complaining about these matters. Many things affect the quality of life in local authority areas. One is the numbers of police and wardens, which are being increased, and that should help. Also, the reforms that we have been making to local government will make it much more accountable. The best value principle, which we brought in, is a good way of improving and taking into account quality of life issues in a way that compulsory competitive tendering did not.

Q10. [9318] **Mr. Paul Keetch** (Hereford): Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that today is the deadline for the Government to apply for £57 million of agrimonetary compensation from the European Union for Britain's hard-pressed arable farmers, which would help farmers throughout the United Kingdom, and not least in my constituency? Given that a recent report suggested that farmers were happier to have the Army than DEFRA officials on their land, would not applying for that compensation go some way towards restoring the countryside's faith in the Government's agriculture policy?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I have no doubt that the farmers did not mind DEFRA officials bringing them the money and support that we give to the rural industry. That did not come with the Army. Both the Army and DEFRA have contributed to dealing with the difficulties in rural areas. The White Paper that we produced on rural communities is also a major contribution to improving the quality of life there.

To be frank, I am not sure whether this is the last day. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is."] I will accept that. A lot of brilliant Opposition Members know that, but I do not. I will make it my business to get on to the Department and see whether we can get a response today.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating my constituent, Audrey Anderson, who last night won the community nurse of the year award? Will he also reaffirm the Government's commitment to ensuring that our nurses and doctors continue to get the extra investment that they need if they are to make the national health service once again the best in the world?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Yes, I certainly think that everyone in the House would want to congratulate Audrey on the presentation that was made in recognition of the work that she has done. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made the presentation. This serves to remind us of the scale of the increase in nurses and doctors that not only occurred in the first four years of this Administration but continues now. They are all making an important contribution to improving the quality of our health services. Quite frankly, there will not be an improvement in quality unless we get the extra doctors and nurses, because they really make the difference.

Health (Air Travellers)

3.32 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for research and development, and dissemination of information and advice, relating to flight-related deep vein thrombosis and other medical considerations affecting air travellers; and for connected purposes.

The cartoon by Blower in the *Evening Standard* on 11 January shows a British bomber plane in the second world war under attack from flak from the ground and fighters in the air. The tail gunner is saying to a crew mate:

"Of course what really scares me is the deep vein thrombosis."

In that amusing way, the point is made that the risk of deep vein thrombosis is less than some other dangers, and in a very serious way I acknowledge that it is currently overshadowed by the aftermath of the events of 11 September, but as airlines struggle to persuade passengers to fly again, they could well restore confidence all the more quickly if they adopted the measures proposed in the Bill.

I am grateful to Air Commodore Charles Clarke, retired, for providing me with a splendid copy of the cartoon. I am grateful, too, for the support that I have received for the Bill from hon. Members of all parties, including the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) from the official Opposition, and the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) from the Liberal Democrats.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) raised the issue of deep vein thrombosis in a powerful and persuasive speech in an Adjournment debate on 16 January 2001. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) deserves more credit than me for his persistence and skill in raising the issue in many and varied ways, including in his speech in support of his own ten-minute Bill on 12 March 2001, and early-day motion 581 of the Session 2000–01.

My two hon. Friends both made reference to incidents of deep vein thrombosis that had come to their personal attention. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North spoke about his own wife's experience; mercifully, medical treatment was effective and she did not die. Regrettably, my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan told the House of the death of his constituent, John Anthony Thomas, at just 30 years of age.

My attention, too, has been attracted to this subject by a constituent's experience. Nick Balmforth nearly died after returning on a flight from Goa to Manchester. Over the weekend he fell ill, and when his GP saw him he was taken to hospital by ambulance. Tests showed multiple blood clots on his lungs, and the diagnosis was pulmonary embolism caused by deep vein thrombosis brought on by the long flight in cramped conditions.

My constituent was an in-patient for two and a half weeks, and relied on anti-coagulant treatment for the next six months. He has had a frightening time—and costly too, bearing in mind his prolonged absence from work. It is small wonder that he wrote to me:

"My overriding concern is to help prevent others suffering what I have been through and I am so very mindful of the many who tragically have failed to survive this illness."

What is the scale of the problem of deep vein thrombosis? In a written question, I asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the statistics on deaths caused by deep vein thrombosis, including how many were related to air travel. The National Statistician replied that about 6,900 people die each year in England and Wales as a result of deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism, but that figures were not available for how many of those deaths are related to air travel. The Aviation Health Institute, a medical research charity, estimates that worldwide 30,000 air travellers each year suffer deep vein thrombosis. Of those, dozens die.

What can be done to ensure that airlines have regard for the well-being of their passengers? Parliament has the benefit of the fifth report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, published last November, which sets out a number of helpful recommendations. It also reminds us that there is not yet a scientifically proven link between air travel and an increased incidence of deep vein thrombosis, and strongly recommends that more research should be done.

I give credit to the Government for their response to that report, because since then there has been Government-sponsored research. That has led in turn to a willingness to collaborate with the World Health Organisation's recently announced global study of deep vein thrombosis.

It is important to refer to the differences of opinion between scientists, because my Bill does not go as far as some would wish.

At this stage I am not willing to put on to airlines the burden of costly adaptations to their fleets of planes. Issues of design such as space around seats, aisle widths and so on should, in my view, await more definitive research findings. Of course airlines should not, however, be able to impede or delay that research. My Bill would require them to co-operate with research, and in particular to keep records of incidents of deep vein thrombosis, which is not done now.

Other steps can and should be taken already. I say that with confidence, because the best airlines are taking those steps now. In their pre-flight communications with potential passengers—websites, leaflets, and when sending out tickets, for example—airlines can alert the public to health considerations. They can also ensure that their staff are trained in flight-related deep vein thrombosis symptoms, preventive measures and treatment. They can give advice to passengers through staff announcements, their video and the health safety card.

What advice should the airlines be giving? That question is all the more pressing in view of the news this week about mass legal action against some airlines in the High Court that will make allegations about flight-related deep vein thrombosis. The Civil Aviation Authority has already produced information approved by the relevant Departments, setting out what is meant by deep vein thrombosis and pointing out that some are more at risk than others—for example, those with a history of thrombosis, those taking oral contraceptive pills, those who are pregnant, those who have recently been hospitalised, smokers, the obese, and some patients with congestive heart failure and malignant disease.

The advice sets out what can be done to reduce risk, such as periodic exercise of the feet and legs, and walking around, where feasible. Elastic stockings may be helpful,

[Mr. David Kidney]

and people should drink water, not alcohol. Those who are particularly prone are advised to obtain expert medical advice before their journey.

My Bill would aim to make those measures compulsory for all airlines, bringing all airlines up to the standard of the best and, assuredly, saving many people from a frightening health incident and some of them from death. I assure the House that the seriousness of the problem merits legislation. More research is needed before some steps should be required by law to be taken, but the Bill represents a proportionate response to the risk in question. It is for those reasons that I ask the House for leave to bring in the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Kidney, Mrs. Janet Dean, Ms Julia Drown, Dr. Ian Gibson, Dr. Evan Harris, Dr. Brian Iddon, Lynne Jones, Mr. John Smith and Bob Spink.

HEALTH (AIR TRAVELLERS)

Mr. David Kidney accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for research and development, and dissemination of information and advice, relating to flight-related deep vein thrombosis and other medical considerations affecting air travellers; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November, and to be printed [Bill 42].

Personal Statement

3.41 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a personal statement. I wish to start by apologising to the House for a failure to register in 1990 a conditional contract entered into, under which I expected a company I owned to be paid, and to apologise also for my failure to recall the existence of that contract and therefore, inadvertently, misleading the Standards and Privileges Committee when asked about a matter that might be considered to be related in 1998, some eight years later. I apologise to the House for those oversights and I accept absolutely the Committee's recommendations.

I want the House to know that I sincerely mean that apology, and I apologise for the non-registration of that contract in 1990. However, I did not receive—nor did any company associated with me receive—the payment as alleged. It is because that payment was not paid to me, despite allegations to the contrary, that I have continued to search the company files, archives and records to prove my case. That I plan to continue to do. I am grateful that the Committee did not accept that there was sufficient evidence to find that I received the money.

On the issue of registration, hon. Members will be aware that in 1990 no Member of Parliament was asked in the rules on registration to register conditional or other contracts between one company and another, far less contracts when payment was not guaranteed but merely anticipated, and no hon. Member recorded any contract in that year or any other year. All of us regarded a statement of our connection with a company as being sufficient. I repeat that I have never attempted to mislead the Committee and have fully—perhaps over fully—co-operated with it. At no point did I represent, lobby for or speak in debates associated with the company involved and I am pleased that the Committee has accepted my position in that respect.

I thank my constituents and my local party, which have given me their consistent and unstinted support throughout this affair. I also wish to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to make this apology. In accordance with precedent, and with your permission, I will now withdraw from the Chamber.

Standards and Privileges

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House—

(i) approves the First Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (House of Commons Paper No. 297); and

(ii) accordingly suspends Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, Member for Coventry North West, from the service of the House for three weeks.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

[The Seventh Report from the Committee on Standards and Privileges, Session 2000–01, HC 465, on the Complaint against Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, is relevant.]

3.44 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I rise to support the motion but, for obvious reasons, I take no pleasure in so doing. I am sure that the House is grateful to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) for his apology and acceptance of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges.

This is not the first occasion on which I have taken part in one of these debates, but it is the first time that I have done so as Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee. The present Committee has done no more than write the last sentence of the report produced on the eve of the general election by the Committee chaired by Lord Sheldon. I wish to pay Lord Sheldon a warm tribute: he was a good House of Commons man and a doughty fighter in the campaign to raise the esteem in which the House is held by the public at large. I believe that good progress was made in the course of the previous Parliament in restoring the House's reputation, and I hope that we will make further progress in the same direction during the current Parliament.

I should also like to express my thanks to the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), who held the previous Standards and Privileges Committee together with great skill when Lord Sheldon was absent through illness at a very difficult time, and who remains on the Committee as a powerful voice for good sense.

The Committee's findings are based on the investigation carried out by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Elizabeth Filkin. The report that she has produced on this highly complex and difficult complaint is of a very high standard, for which the whole House should be grateful. Whether we always agree with her conclusions or not, we should recognise the diligence, thoroughness and scrupulous fairness and objectivity she brings to the cases that she has to investigate.

The Standards and Privileges Committee has dealt with this case, as I am sure that it will deal with every other that comes before it, without any concern for the party affiliation of the Member concerned. We will do our best to be fair both to the House, which has asked us to safeguard its reputation, and to the Members who appear before us, to whom we will give a fair hearing. However, my ambition as Chairman of the Committee is not to have to take part in too many of these debates.

The main purpose of the system that we have created should not be the investigation of past offences but the prevention of future offences. We should all seek to ensure that our conduct does not give rise to well-founded complaints. We should be scrupulous in our adherence to the rules. Where there is any doubt in our minds, we should seek advice and give a full explanation of the circumstances in good faith, and then act on the advice that we are given. We cannot control what use other people may make of our complaints system, but we in this House should not use it to do down political opponents by making trivial or politically motivated complaints. Therefore, I ask for the support of the entire House in my attempt to work myself out of a job.

I shall outline the facts of the present case as concisely as I can.

Between 1988 and 1990, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West was chairman of a company in the Maxwell group called Hollis Industries. According to the company's published accounts, the chairman was paid £200,000. In 1998, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) made a complaint to the then Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Sir Gordon Downey, that the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West had failed to register this as a remunerated directorship. The hon. Gentleman told Sir Gordon that his chairmanship of Hollis had been unpaid, that he had never received this money, that he had never expected to receive it, and that the published accounts of the company were in error. Evidence from two firms of accountants supported his assertion that no such payment had been made to him personally. Sir Gordon did not uphold the complaint, and the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges agreed with his conclusion.

Earlier this year, my right hon. Friend made a fresh complaint to the present Standards Commissioner on the basis of new evidence which had come to light. Her inquiries revealed that in 1990, while the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West was chairman of Hollis, he had negotiated an agreement with the Maxwell interests for his own company, TransTec, to provide management services to a Hollis subsidiary called Lock, in return for a payment to TransTec. The agreement included the provision of the hon. Gentleman's own services as executive chairman of Lock. In October 1990, the hon. Gentleman sent Hollis an invoice from his home address requesting payment of a

"fee for management service provided to Hollis Industries plc as agreed"

in the sum of £200,000. Hollis's finance director wrote "Approved" on the invoice, which also carried a further note saying:

"Paid by PAGB: Recharge H Industries".

"PAGB" is Pergamon AGB, another Maxwell company; "H Industries" is Hollis.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West subsequently made several further attempts to secure the agreed payment from the Maxwell interests. Early in December, the finance director's secretary attached a note to the invoice, recording a telephone call from the hon Gentleman. It stated:

"Geoffrey is not registered for VAT. Proposes make cheque payable to him personally."

At about that time, a payment of £200,000 was made to someone by Pergamon AGB, which then sent Hollis an invoice for the amount. Exactly what happened to that payment is still hotly disputed; the House will have heard the hon. Gentleman's statement. The commissioner established that £200,000 went out of Pergamon's bank account, £200,000 went into the account of the

[Sir George Young]

hon. Gentleman's company, TransTec, and the debt owed to TransTec by another of the hon. Gentleman's companies was reduced by £200,000.

The commissioner concluded that the hon. Gentleman or his beneficial interests had received the payment. The hon. Gentleman has consistently and strenuously denied that he received the money. The Committee gave him three months to see whether he could find the Pergamon cheque, which would tell us who actually got the money, but unfortunately the cheque has not been found. Although this is a matter of the greatest importance to the hon. Gentleman, it was less important to the previous Committee. The present Committee takes no view on this one way or the other. Indeed, our report says:

"We do not assume that payment was made to, or benefited, Mr. Robinson or one of his companies."

That does not mean, of course, that the Committee cleared him of receiving the payment. In the Committee's view, the payment was agreed, and the submission of the invoice indicated that the payment was expected. The interest was registrable whether the payment was received or not, and the hon. Gentleman failed to register it.

Much more serious than the failure to register the interest was the hon. Gentleman's failure to volunteer information to the 1998 inquiry. He was asked at that time whether he had received or had expected to receive any benefit in respect of his chairmanship of Hollis. He said no, but the reality is that Hollis and its subsidiary company, Lock, were the same thing, and TransTec and the hon. Gentleman were the same thing. However, the hon. Gentleman supplied no information to Sir Gordon Downey about the negotiations involving TransTec and Lock and no information about his efforts to secure the payment which had been agreed. He made available none of the documents, least of all the invoice he submitted. He said that he had forgotten about the arrangement when he was questioned about Hollis in 1998. If the Standards and Privileges Committee had been given the full story at that time, it might well have come to a very different conclusion.

We consider that our predecessors and the former commissioner were misled as a result of what the hon. Gentleman failed to tell them in 1998. Misleading the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges is a very serious matter. It is often far more serious than the offence on which the Committee is being misled.

The House is a forgiving place if a Member owns up and openly admits that he has made a mistake. I made that point in the last debate of this kind on 1 March last year. A Member who is not frank and open with the commissioner, the Committee and the House must expect a more serious penalty as a result.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does anybody on this Committee have any inkling of what it was like to deal with the byzantine affairs of the late Bob Maxwell? Just trying to deal with Bob Maxwell leads to difficulties.

Sir George Young: The previous Committee examined this matter at length and took all the circumstances into account, including the byzantine nature of the Maxwell empire.

The House will be aware that in the last Parliament the Committee upheld complaints that the hon. Gentleman had failed to register interests in July 1998, November 1998 and March 1999. In November 1998, the hon. Gentleman was required to apologise to the House by means of a personal statement.

The period of suspension that the Committee has recommended reflects, on the one hand, the seriousness of the offence and, on the other, the fact that the hon. Gentleman and his solicitor co-operated fully with the commissioner and the Committee in allowing the matter to be resolved without delay. I ask the House to approve the Committee's recommendation.

3.54 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) is now Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. I very much hope that all right hon. and hon. Members will support his view that it is important to reduce the number of occasions when such matters come before the House.

I have read both the original and supplementary reports. Within the terms of reference of our inquiry and investigative system, they are undoubtedly persuasive, and I hope that the House will endorse them. However, it is fair to say that the anxiety about this case does not simply relate to the individual and his circumstances.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire rightly referred to the way in which the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges approaches its business. There are concerns in all parts of the House about the operation of our investigative system and, indeed, the practice of the Select Committee and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

I draw the attention of the House and, in particular, that of the right hon. Gentleman, to the report produced by the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege on which I think the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), who has just left the Chamber, and certainly the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) served with me during the previous Parliament. In that document, we considered carefully a number of issues that related to the discipline of Members and the occasions when non-Members confront or affront the way in which the House operates. Those are matters of considerable importance, and not only in the context of privilege.

Now that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire has taken command of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, I ask him to look at that report, in particular the section—chapter 6—that deals with disciplinary and penal powers and the part that deals with natural justice, whether that relates to our fellow citizens or to hon. Members. The section on procedural fairness contains matters of concern that have not been dealt with by the Select Committee or any other House authorities as far as I am aware. It is certainly raised in the annexe to the present report by the hon. Gentleman whose conduct is under examination. The procedures that have been followed are at least open to some question. I hope that referring to the work of the Joint Committee will mean that those issues of fairness can be dealt with properly.

I should have mentioned that the right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), who was then Leader of the House, was also involved in the exercise. I think that she

shares the experience of 18 months of studying these issues with great care and with the assistance of a number of legal authorities in the other place and much other legal expertise surrounding us.

I do not object to the conclusion or the recommendation of the present report, but it would be remiss of the House if we did not take this opportunity to record that there is some anxiety in the House and outside it about the way we discipline ourselves in these matters. I share the aspiration of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire, the Chairman of the Committee, that progress should be made in restoring the reputation of the House. In that respect, I too share his ambition that we should at least reduce if not remove the need to come back to the House with reports of this sort.

3.58 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I had not intended to speak, but I have been scribbling as I have been listening. I thank the Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), for his overgenerous remarks to me, which are much appreciated.

I must point out that throughout the previous Parliament every report that the Select Committee produced was unanimous. That is important as it demonstrates the way in which the House is determined to resolve any internal problems, in spite of what the press said about the Labour majority—under the rules of the House every Committee must reflect the numbers on the Floor of the House.

The present shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), was one member of the Select Committee, as was Martin Bell, our former colleague. The present Chairman, when he was shadow Leader of the House, said that if the Conservative Whips could not keep his right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst under control, he found it hard to imagine how the Committee could do so. It was a great achievement to get through those four years without a single non-consensual report. I hope that that trend will continue under the present Chairman.

What triggered my speech was the comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the Father of the House. He referred to the byzantine Maxwell empire. That is an irrelevance. However byzantine the empire was, the invoice did not come from Maxwell: it was to Maxwell, and with it was a declaration of expectation. Where there is expectation, there is the danger of a conflict of interest. If there is an expectation of a benefit, it must be declared; that is clearly stated in the rules. As the Chairman of the Select Committee rightly said, the situation was exacerbated by the fact that, as far back as 1998, the hon. Member for Coventry, North–West (Mr. Robinson), sadly, denied to Sir Gordon Downey that there was any expectation.

May I put a point to the Leader of the House? He knows well that during the last Parliament the Committee on Standards and Privileges tried to address some of the nonsense in the code of conduct. The code had been drawn up in a hurry; it was too detailed and extremely difficult for Members to understand. It is certainly difficult for Members to remember all the facets of the code, so we urgently need a debate so that Members have a clear idea early in this Parliament what is expected of them. May we have a debate on the report proposing changes to the current system issued by the former Committee?

Like the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), I also draw attention to the report of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, chaired so well by Lord Nicholls and of which I and many colleagues were members. Although Ministers have accepted that report, it has never been debated; apart from its initial reception, it has not been significantly addressed. The report contains important issues that need to be addressed in the context of the new human rights entitlement for everyone, including Members of Parliament.

4.2 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): These debates on disciplinary matters and the misdemeanours of hon. Members are somewhat doleful occasions—they are certainly not a time for celebration or glee. I bear no animosity towards the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), although I was the complainant who launched not only this inquiry but several previous ones. This is the fourth time that the hon. Gentleman has been reprimanded by the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

My aim throughout has been to try to uphold and enforce the rules of the House—rules that the Labour party, especially in opposition, was anxious to strengthen and make stricter. During the past four years, the Labour Government have themselves become entangled in a number of disciplinary matters. I agree with the observations of right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) about possible reforms and improvements to the disciplinary process. The rules on registration have become unnecessarily and even unworkably tight in several respects; they invite many trivial, vexatious and technical complaints that do little to raise the status or reputation of the House. That is perhaps a matter for debate on another occasion.

The matters covered in the Select Committee's report are certainly not technical or trivial; they are serious allegations and I am sure that the House was pleased to accept the apology of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West. Personally, I should also like an apology from the Labour and Government media manipulation units, which constantly rubbished my early efforts to get to the bottom of this complex matter, and in particular to expose the relationship between the late Robert Maxwell and the Labour party.

I am glad to say that the first report of the Standards and Privileges Committee of 2001–02, particularly when read in conjunction with the seventh report of the previous Session, published on 3 May, sheds considerable light on one aspect of that very complex web of undeclared payments between the Robert Maxwell empire and new Labour. To that extent, I feel vindicated.

As we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), the report is based on an investigation by Mrs. Filkin, the present Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. It is a comprehensive and a fair report. The standard of proof required, at least by the Committee, goes some way beyond what has been required in the past. If I compare

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

the way in which Neil Hamilton was treated by Sir Gordon Downey, who was really satisfied with a balance of probabilities rule of evidence, with the standards required by the present Committee, I find that the rules of evidence have been tightened, and rightly so.

In addition, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West was given an additional three months to try to find an innocent explanation for the £200,000 payment. I actually believe that that had more to do with the impending election, and the Government's desire to get the matter pushed beyond the election date, than anything else. That was a mistake; if we had dealt with the matter in the summer, we could now be entering a new Parliament with a clean slate. As it is, this whole matter of what the public media call sleaze is already contaminating this Parliament, and that will do nothing for our reputation in the House—although that has never been much of a concern to the Government.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire outlined, this is the second investigation into the subject. The first was conducted by Sir Gordon Downey, the previous commissioner, in 1998. We can now see that that earlier investigation was somewhat superficial, and certainly incomplete. As regards the disputed £300,000 payment from the Maxwell companies to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West, that was in the audited accounts of the company concerned, and Sir Gordon found some additional evidence by way of inter-company invoices for the same amount.

However, at that time the hon. Gentleman was given the benefit of the doubt by the commissioner and by the Standards and Privileges Committee because no invoice was discovered. There was no piece of paper on which the hon. Gentleman had sought or demanded the £300,000, nor were the cash books recording the payment found. That was because the companies concerned—the Maxwell companies—had collapsed and were in administration and the books of records were held by Arthur Andersen, the administrators. The Committee at that time, for reasons that I do not fully understand, decided not to investigate those records, and when I made a request to do the work I was actually barred from looking at those records, also for reasons that I do not fully understand.

The crucial fact, which really should worry the House, is that those documents and that invoice were found the following year in an investigation by the Department of Trade and Industry, conducting its own inquiry. The real scandal of this whole episode is that that information has been covered up; I use that phrase accurately and in the knowledge of what I am alleging.

At the time, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. That DTI inquiry, which was started early in 1999, was undertaken in response to four letters that I had written the year before about the business affairs of that part of the Robert Maxwell empire. I pointed out glaring breaches of company law, pension fund irregularities, undeclared payments to directors and so on.

I specifically and in writing asked the DTI to undertake an inquiry under section 432 of the Companies Acts and to do so by means of an external, independent inquiry, with full publication of the results, precisely because there would otherwise be a clear conflict of interest—one Department would investigate the affairs of a serving Labour Minister. The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West was then the Paymaster General at the Treasury and therefore intimately involved in taxation and expenditure matters, as I was when I was Paymaster General some time before.

To avoid any suspicion that the Labour party was investigating its own affairs and might be tempted to cover up the matter, I asked for an investigation under a specific section of the Companies Acts, but the Secretary of State replied saying, among other things, that he

"would wish to be as open as possible on these matters."

There is a certain irony in those words in the light of what happened afterwards, but I took that phrase to mean that he acceded to my request. I was wrong, as I shall shortly describe, but the important thing is that that inquiry found everything—in other words, it found all the evidence and documents that the Committee had not found.

The invoice was discovered by the investigators in the DTI, as well as the cashbook entries and so on, but no action was taken. Instead, on the day that the House rose for the Christmas recess at the end of 1999, the Secretary of State answered a planted parliamentary question, asked by a Labour Member, saying that no action would be taken. I was not even given the courtesy of being sent a copy of that reply; I discovered it during the Christmas recess. In other words, the DTI knew that that was the missing evidence, and it sat on it. Of course, the evidence was very embarrassing because it showed the Maxwell links to the Labour party and the misdemeanours of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West, who had just resigned as a Minister.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): The right hon. Gentleman has attempted to associate Robert Maxwell with new Labour or, recently, the Labour party, three times during his speech. Has he any evidence of Robert Maxwell's link in financial terms with new Labour or the Labour party, as opposed to Robert Maxwell's link to individual people in a private capacity?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am using the term "Labour party" in a rather general sense. Certainly, many serving Labour Ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, received money for their private offices from the hon. Gentleman, whose wealth derives from the links and business relationships that are the subject of the report. I suggest that the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) reads the two reports and all the appendices, and then he would discover what I am talking about.

The point that I am making is that the information in full is contained in that DTI inquiry report, which today sits in a safe at the DTI. That inquiry was launched in response to the points that I made in 1998. The information exists—and if there is an innocent explanation for the relationship and the flow of payments, let us hear it. Let the Government publish the inquiry or, at least, let us know what conclusion it reached.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would not want to mislead the House, but I am not aware of any evidence that the leader

of the Labour party or the then shadow Chancellor ever received money from Robert Maxwell. [HON. MEMBERS: "He did not say that."] Well, I understood him to say that. However, does he accept that when a similar allegation was made in *Private Eye* about Neil Kinnock, a former leader of the Opposition, it was not only denied but Maxwell received damages?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is precisely to get to the bottom of the matter that I want the Government to publish the information that they have. We know that they carried out an inquiry, because that was confirmed to me, eventually. It is a modest request from me that the information be published.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): It would be of benefit to the House if Members remembered that the Prime Minister's press secretary, Mr. Alastair Campbell, was employed as political editor of *The Mirror* directly by Robert Maxwell and was clearly a very close associate of him. A member of the present Cabinet was also employed directly by Robert Maxwell and, if I remember rightly, a Member in the other place—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We drifting away from the report. We should confine our remarks to it.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The late Robert Maxwell was the great Labour tycoon. That much is known. We need information to get to the bottom of the relationship.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): As my right hon. Friend knows, I was involved in the investigation with him and I made a complaint to the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I also made a complaint to the chairman of the Inland Revenue, asking him to investigate where the payment of £200,000 had gone. Does my right hon. Friend know whether the Committee on Standards and Privileges asked the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) to produce his tax return, which would show whether he had returned the £200,000 payment? If the hon. Gentleman did not receive the payment, would my right hon. Friend expect the Inland Revenue to investigate where it had gone?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. Issues of taxation are rather wider than the responsibilities of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, but I will touch on tax law before I conclude.

The only reason that the second inquiry took place and the cover-up failed was that an investigative journalist, Mr. Tom Bower, obtained the invoice in question. I do not know from whom he obtained it or how he obtained it, but he did and the invoice was published in a national newspaper. The newspaper and Mr. Bower were both threatened with a libel action by the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, although that was quite quickly dropped. It was clearly just bluff and bluster to try to silence the press, but the Secretary of State's libel action was undertaken at public expense. When I recently asked how much taxpayers had paid to help the Secretary of State to launch his abortive libel action, I was told that that information was not available. Perhaps another cover-up is in the making there.

After further letters from me, the disclosure of the invoice enabled Mrs. Filkin to reopen her inquiry. The invoice showed beyond any question that, even if one accepts that the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West did not receive the money into his bank account, he certainly requested or solicited it. I have a copy of the invoice with me. It appears on his writing paper, is for management services worth £200,000 and is marked "paid". Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire alluded to that in his speech. There is solid evidence that some rules of the House have been broken.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does my right hon. Friend think it worth remarking on the fact that when the journalist, Tom Bower, published the story that he had discovered the invoice and rang up the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), who had prepared it, to tell him that, the response was not one of surprise? Instead—if I remember the words correctly that have been repeatedly quoted in the press—he said something along the lines of, "You're not supposed to have that."

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: That is how it is recorded in the book about this event. I am reluctant to go beyond what I have witnessed or found in documents. That must remain someone else's version of events, but it does fit into a pattern.

The crucial factor was the discovery and publication of the additional facts, because that allowed the inquiry to be reopened. It became clear that the 1998 inquiry, which had effectively exonerated the hon. Gentleman, was incomplete. The reports by the Committee on Standards and Privileges constantly refer to the Department of Trade and Industry report. They confirm my suspicions about the Maxwell group and show that I was not simply trawling through a host of unsubstantiated allegations about Mr. Maxwell.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) mentioned taxation. No one disputes that the £300,000 payment was made, but the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West said that it was not paid into his bank account. However, if the payment was made for management services without tax or national insurance contributions being deducted, that contravened section 311 of the Companies Acts. If the payment was designed to go into a personal service company, value added tax should have been included, and it was not. The DTI did nothing about that. The Government say that they are against tax evasion. Why then, when one of their Departments had evidence that tax was being evaded, did they not pass the matter on to the tax authorities as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold?

Stock exchange regulations are another example. It is serious to breach them, but there is evidence in the voluminous appendices to the 3 May report that the prospectus issued to the shareholders of another Maxwell company, Central and Sheerwood plc, was misleading in a number of material respects.

I pointed that out in a letter to the DTI and asked what action it proposed to take, but it has done nothing. The Government are considering making it criminal for directors to be involved in anti-competitive behaviour, yet when they have evidence in their own report that a shareholders circular was misleading, they sit on it and do nothing. Indeed, a few days before Christmas they used a planted question to issue the statement that they did not propose to take further action. That is why I have no

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

hesitation in calling this a scandal and a cover-up. They do not deny that the report contains that information. I have corresponded with the previous and present Secretaries of State and there has been no denial that the report covered that subject and that the information exists.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): To get the record straight, and as the right hon. Gentleman is hanging out this so-called dirty washing, can he clarify his entry in the register? Some of his hon. Friends who are engaged in moonlighting jobs and directorships include the amounts that they receive. As he is hounding almost everyone in the Labour party, how much has he received? Why has he not put that in the register?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order.

Mr. Skinner: How much—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat when I am speaking. That intervention is wholly outside the scope of the report that we are debating. To the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), I have to say that, as Mr. Speaker ruled earlier, we are in danger of straying too far into the general from the particular matter that is before the House.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I would love to respond to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), but you have a solemn and strict expression on your face, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall return to the matter being debated.

The latest ploy by the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is to say that the whole affair is none of his responsibility—claiming that despite the fact that the Department of which he was Secretary of State was involved, everything was done by civil servants. Why, then, did he answer my letters on the subject? Why did he correspond with me? Why did he answer written parliamentary questions on the subject? It was his Department and he is constitutionally accountable to the House for what went on in his Department. Moreover, it was he—or, to be charitable, someone who reported to him—who decided to instigate an in-house inquiry, rather than the independent external one that I had requested precisely to avoid allegations of cover-up or conflict of interest.

Those are the clear facts. The House has got the report despite the Government's best efforts to suppress the information. To this day, all that information remains secret in the Department of Trade and Industry, which could quite easily launch a new investigation under another section of the Companies Act, with publication guaranteed if it so wished, to get to the bottom of the many issues connected with company law, taxation, pension funds and stock exchange regulations that I have highlighted and to which the reports before the House allude.

We have not got to the bottom of the links between the Maxwell empire and new Labour. That is why we need a full inquiry, a proper inquiry, an independent inquiry, with the results published. If we do not get that, the House will be in the unhappy position of being able to discipline individual Members of Parliament, but not the Government. That has to change.

4.27 pm

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I rise as a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), I am a reluctant contributor to the debate, but, given the work that the Committee has been carrying out for the past few months, some of the comments made by the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) need to be either put into context or contradicted.

The Chairman of the Committee, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), expressed the hope that in future politically motivated and trivial complaints would not be brought to the Committee. I do not suggest that that is true of the complaint that is the subject of our debate, but I find it a bit rich, as well as in poor taste, that the complainant should gloat about the outcome of a report for half an hour. Furthermore, in his speech today the right hon. Member for Wells went far beyond not only the Committee's report, but his original complaint.

Let me give an example. The right hon. Gentleman criticised the Committee for having given the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) a further three months to produce evidence about the cheque and whether he had received it. As has already been pointed out by two hon. Members, whether the hon. Gentleman received the cheque was not an issue for the Committee: the issuing of an invoice and the expectation of being paid was sufficient to warrant a declaration. Although the question of whether he had received the cheque was of great interest to the hon. Gentleman, the Committee did not consider it an issue and it agreed unanimously—with the support of the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Independent members of the Committee—to allow the extra time for the hon. Gentleman to try to determine to his own satisfaction what had happened to that cheque.

The right hon. Member for Wells went on to draw parallels with the Hamilton case. Of course, in that case a large number of allegations were dismissed. Once again, the conclusion that the Committee reached four years ago—I was a Committee member then—did not depend on the receipt of the money. The expectation of receiving it was sufficient to merit a declaration.

My next point is brief and I make it for the sake of accuracy. Several times, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned a £300,000 cheque—*[Interruption.]* He has acknowledged his mistake; a £200,000 cheque was under discussion. However, that repeated exaggeration did not help his case.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) asked about the Inland Revenue. The Committee did not raise the matter with the Inland Revenue to try to establish whether the cheque had been cashed and dealt with in the usual way. Again, that was for exactly the same reason; what happened to the cheque did not matter to us. There was an issue about the invoice and expectation of receipt, so a declaration was needed. Where the cheque ended up was not the most important thing for the Committee to investigate.

I am offended by the suggestion of the right hon. Member for Wells that somehow there was a cover-up to which the Committee was party. That is certainly not—

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have never alleged that the Committee is in any way implicated in a cover-up; it is

the Government who are in the dock. I was making the point that the Committee was denied information by the Government—specifically the DTI—which it could have used to come to a much earlier conclusion.

Mr. Levitt: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his clarification. The commissioner looked into his allegation, followed by the Committee. We felt that we had all the information that we needed to make a judgment on the allegation which, to use a word employed earlier, did not go into the byzantine connections that may, or may not, have existed between the Maxwell empire and politicians, whether individually or in general. That was not the allegation that the right hon. Gentleman submitted to the Committee; we did not carry out an investigation into it, and it was not part of our conclusion. Whatever the issues around Maxwell's pro quo for the quid, they were certainly not on our agenda for discussion.

I shall take my Committee hat off for a moment. Towards the end of his speech, the right hon. Gentleman talked about the Government's best efforts to suppress the issues. That has not been tested; it remains his allegation. The Committee had no brief to look into the matter, whether it involved arrangements between individuals or influence that anyone may have tried to exert on a political party. Indeed, throughout our investigations, we found no evidence of any suggestion of political manipulation alongside any financial transaction whatsoever.

The right hon. Gentleman has used our debate to raise an issue that goes well beyond the scope of the Committee's report which, I hope, will be accepted for what it is. I hope that people will look at the allegations that we received and the investigation that we carried out. Under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire, who has already established himself and taken to his new role like a duck to water, I hope that we will be able to continue our deliberations in future. I trust that we will be able look at issues objectively when there are reasonable grounds for investigation, and that our offices and those of the commissioner will not be used for pursuing party political issues.

4.34 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): That was a most unfortunate contribution from the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt), which well illustrates why a member of the Government payroll should not be sitting on the Standards and Privileges Committee. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be aware that the hon. Gentleman is a Parliamentary Private Secretary. That was clear from the tone of his speech. It is most unfortunate that a member of the payroll, clearly speaking for the Government as a PPS, should serve on that Committee.

The House owes a great debt of gratitude to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). If it were not for him, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) would not have been in the House today, accepting the conclusions of the report and agreeing that he should be suspended for three weeks. That should be clearly recognised.

Mr. Alan Williams: In fairness, the right hon. Gentleman does my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) a grave injustice by saying that he is on the payroll. He is a Parliamentary Private Secretary. PPSs are not paid. He is an ordinary Back Bencher, like any other Back Bencher—*[Interruption.]* That is a matter of importance when we are discussing interests and the Standards and Privileges Committee. My hon. Friend is not on the payroll.

Mr. MacKay: The right hon. Gentleman was first elected to the House in 1964. That is 27 years ago. He is a distinguished and experienced Member of the House, and he knows that anyone who was a PPS in any of those years was said to be on the payroll when it came to votes and speaking in the House. The right hon. Gentleman knows that full well. He is trying to muddy the water, which is a pity. I should have thought more of him. *[Interruption.]*

The Leader of the House says that I am muddying the water. I will tell him who was muddying the water a moment ago. He was colluding with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to try to muddy the water by questioning the integrity of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells—*[Interruption.]* The Leader of the House knows full well why there was no answer. The question was out of order, as the Deputy Speaker ruled, and my right hon. Friend would not have been able to give the answer. It is rather sad that the Leader of the House, who is supposed to defend the interests of the House, seems to be colluding in a partisan way in an extremely serious case.

Make no mistake, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is one of the most serious cases of its type that the House has had to debate. We all know that the late Robert Maxwell was one of the biggest crooks and fraudsters who ever entered the House as a Member of Parliament. We also know that the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West has a bit of form. This is the fourth time that he has been reported to the Committee, and the fourth time that he has been reprimanded. On this occasion, the recommendation is that he be suspended for three weeks, so this is no trivial matter.

Whereas I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Bolsover is treating the matter frivolously and checking my entry in the Register of Members' Interests—he will find nothing of significance—I should have thought that the Leader of the House would know better and would remember what his position is.

Mr. Skinner: All that happened between me and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was that I asked him for the register, as I do not have one here. I got the register from the Front Bench, read it and found out that the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) had entered his remunerated directorships, but had not put the money in. I thought that as we had agreed that the money should be entered in bands, and as the right hon. Gentleman was engaged in the business of hounding, he himself should be lily-white. It turned out that he was not. I wanted to know how much money he had made as a Back Bencher moonlighting. I ask the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), too, how much he has made.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman seems to have got in through the back door, when I thought that I had bolted the front door. However, he had some encouragement from the right hon. Member for

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

Bracknell (Mr. MacKay). This is a serious occasion for the House, and it is better for us to stick tightly to the report.

Mr. MacKay: I am happy to stick to the report, Mr. Deputy Speaker and I shall, naturally, abide by what you say.

Let us consider the key point in the report: did the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West receive a cheque or not? I think that it is beyond any reasonable doubt that he did so. We have seen the invoice on his own private notepaper. We have seen clearly that it was receipted and paid. In those circumstances, it is a little surprising that the Committee did not follow Elizabeth Filkin's recommendations. If it had done so, we would be talking about a suspension not of three weeks, but a lot longer.

You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, unfortunately and regrettably, we have had debates similar to this one in recent years. Previously, hon. Members who have erred have rightly been punished, often by suspension. However, the mere three weeks' suspension in this case is in no way proportionate to the hon. Gentleman's misdemeanour, which has been confirmed by Elizabeth Filkin, Tom Bower and, most important, Mr. Aldous, the completely independent inspector whom the then Department of Trade and Industry asked to look into the affairs of Hollis Industries, the then Paymaster General and the companies of the late Robert Maxwell.

There are serious lessons to be learned. In future, the Committee must take a tougher stance when it is dealing with serious offences. I entirely endorse what has been said by the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) about the need to throw out frivolous cases. I also support what the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said about the need for the guidelines to be reviewed. We are, however, considering an immensely serious case. My constituents and most people outside the House will think that our procedures are something of a closed shop and that we have joined together, patted the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West on the head, said "Dear, dear, you made a modest, rather rambling apology; at least it was a little longer than the statement that you made at the Dispatch Box last time" and then suspended him for a mere three weeks. That approach brings the House into disrepute and we will live to regret this day.

What has been said by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire about the report and the role of the Department of Trade and Industry and its then Secretary of State needs to be explained with greater clarity. I should like the Leader of the House to pay a little attention to these remarks, as what happens on the Floor of the House is his responsibility. We need a statement and then a debate. It is intolerable that the independent inspector's report has not been published. It raises questions about the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that can be properly resolved, in his interests, only when we see the report and have confirmation from officials about why they did not let him know about its seriousness in respect of the tax allegations and related matters. I accepted his assurance that he knew absolutely nothing about the detail of the report, even up to the time of the planted written question that appeared when the House adjourned for the Christmas recess in 1999.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the report should be made public, not least because, until the matter of the £200,000 payment is cleared up, the pensioners and minority shareholders in the companies that were involved—A. M. Lock Ltd. and Hollis Industries plc—cannot be certain of their true position?

Mr. MacKay: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Indeed, I commend him for the role that he has played in bringing some of this information to light.

I am very cross because, like my hon. Friend, I can remember entering my constituency office and finding Maxwell pensioners in tears. Many had never met or worked for the crook Maxwell, but their companies had been taken over by him after they retired, and they suddenly found that they had no pension to live on. That was a disgraceful state of affairs. That is the sort of man we are talking about; never forget that he was the most evil crook and it is a great pity that he was ever elected to this House for one Parliament.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Chairman of the Committee and the Committee members to reflect further on whether they genuinely think that this sentence is long enough. The Committee should reflect on what the hon. Member for North Cornwall said about a debate on and a review of the guidelines, because I entirely agree. In the interests of his Cabinet colleague, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, I ask the Leader of the House to ensure that there is a proper debate on the DTI report and that that report is published so that it clears the air.

Mr. Levitt: To put some of the right hon. Gentleman's earlier comments into context, will he acknowledge that the sentence is the second heaviest that the Committee has recommended since it was set up in 1997?

Mr. MacKay: I would respond by saying that we have seen nothing like this before. In my 20 years of experience, this is the most serious case that I have seen.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. MacKay: No, I will not give way. I shall conclude now, as others want to speak.

I do not believe for one moment that we have seen the end of the matter. The fact that the sentence is only the second most serious that the Committee has recommended confirms to me that it is totally inadequate.

4.46 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I rise to support the findings of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and the able speech of its Chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young). We have also heard a fulsome apology from the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) for the two findings of the Committee against him. That would normally be an end of the matter. This House has a certain dignity in handling such problems. Where an hon. Member has been found

wanting, accepts the findings of the House and apologises, we move on and trust that all of us have learned and are wiser as a result.

Today we are faced with a rather bigger conundrum, which is deeply unsatisfactory for the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West and for the rest of the House. We heard the hon. Gentleman state categorically, as he did when he appeared before the Committee on several occasions, that he did not receive the payment. We read in the Committee report that it cannot rule out the fact that he might have received the payment, but that it did not have the overwhelming weight of evidence that it would have liked to be able to determine the matter one way or the other.

That means, unfortunately, that this debate today, and whatever may ensue, does not draw a line under all of the issues that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends have been voicing. For the sake of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West and the rest of us, the Government owe us a fuller statement on all the circumstances surrounding the Hollis company and the Maxwell group of companies with which it had a working relationship so that we can get to the bottom of the issue.

It is possible that the answer is already known to the Department of Trade and Industry. It would be normal, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) said with considerable force and eloquence, for the DTI to sanction a full inquiry under section 432 of the Companies Acts. I remember when I was a Minister responsible for such matters in the DTI, when I had to make difficult judgments, and advise the Secretary of State accordingly, as to whether we should go for a full public inquiry into a set of problems or one of the private inquiries available under another section of the legislation. The overwhelming case against section 432 was always and only that it could damage a live trading company which might not be guilty of the charges that were being investigated, but could suffer severe commercial damage if it were widely known publicly that it was being investigated.

Clearly that does not apply in this case. We are talking about investigating companies and events from some time ago and things have moved on, so that these companies' reputations or trading could not be damaged further by knowledge of a full public inquiry.

I urge Ministers, for the sake of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West and of the rest of us, to publish what they know already, especially if it answers the $100,000 or £200,000 question at the heart of this debate, or to order a full public inquiry, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells has urged more than once, with the express intention of getting to the bottom of this issue and the many others that remain on the table in relation to the pensioners, the other trading companies in the Maxwell group and the various rights and wrongs.

Many people think that wrongs were committed, but there are no wrongdoers. That is very unsatisfactory. A proper Government inquiry could establish with acceptable certainty whether wrongs were done, and then go on to say who was responsible, so that other action could be taken if necessary. It is certainly important for the hon. Member at the heart of this debate that the DTI should assist us in answering the £200,000 question: whether the money was receipted into an account operated by him or one of his companies.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells said, the case would be much more serious were it to be established that the hon. Gentleman had misled the House over a payment, in addition to the two charges that he has accepted today. I am prepared to accept his word, in the spirit adopted by the Committee, but I understand that the Committee was unclear about the exact nature of the payment and where it went. We need to clear that up to lift a shadow from someone or some company and attribute the blame where it belongs.

It would not be wise, following this problem, for the Government to ask Elizabeth Filkin to step aside and to find someone else to take on her role. She has established a reputation in—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is outside the scope of the debate.

Mr. Redwood: I stand suitably chastened, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The House needs to establish its reputation for probity by the way in which it handles such issues, which it must do with continuity, fairness and firmness. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells was right to warn us of the danger of too much trivia, with too many unimportant cases cluttering up the system and giving the impression that many Members are not as honourable as they should be, which is untrue. With a serious case such as this, we need the help of the DTI to crack it, so that the public can see that we really have got to the bottom of the issue.

Sleaze was a weapon fashioned by Labour in opposition. It is in danger of becoming a boomerang, causing them endless problems as allegations surround Ministers and former Ministers. I urge the Government to clear up those allegations through a full inquiry into the former Maxwell operations, because many of them stem from that awful web of connections between the late Robert Maxwell, his business empire and Ministers past and present.

4.53 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who made a very seductive and persuasive argument for further inquiries into the Maxwell empire and how it might be linked to the Government or to Ministers. While he did not want to speak too dishonourably of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), he said that the question of the cheque and the proceeds had not been cleared up.

To my recollection, the Department of Trade and Industry spent 10 years investigating the Maxwell empire, and published a report. I cannot see how more reports could possibly be helpful. I have read Tom Bower's books. I declare an interest, because Mr. Maxwell went to his grave owing me £500. I will not detain the House on how that came about. I may have been luckier than many.

From personal knowledge of Maxwell, I know that if ever someone was capable of writing a cheque on the Friday and letting it bounce on the Monday, it was he. He reputedly funded the Commonwealth games in

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

Edinburgh, but the cheques were never paid. He also did a deal in the City of London on the Friday, when the law firm—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should address himself to the report, not the history.

Mr. Bell: I was aware of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I took my eye off you for a minute, and then realised that I was wandering somewhat.

To go back to the point that is relevant to the debate, the fact that a cheque was written out is no proof that it was ever endorsed or cashed. I ask the House to take my hon. Friend's apology in good faith, and to accept in good faith that he did not receive the money. As for the report before the House, I accept that such debates are important for the House and its reputation, but I would not advise the Government to order more investigation by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Redwood: I was drawing attention to the fact that the Committee could not wholeheartedly resolve the issue; that is why it needs clearing up. If things are as the hon. Gentleman suggests, we have to explain why the accounts seem to imply otherwise—and we need to know what other items in those accounts are misleading.

Mr. Bell: Again, questions about the accounts go wider, because we are talking about the activities of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West, and the particular question before the Committee on Standards and Privileges. How the auditors did their work is something different. All that I am telling the House is that Mr. Maxwell had a reputation for issuing cheques on a Friday that bounced on a Monday. Therefore the House should accept my hon. Friend's apology and statement in good faith, accept the Select Committee's report, and leave the matter where it is.

4.56 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I should declare an interest at the outset, in that I was at one time Parliamentary Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), the distinguished Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. I salute him for the work that he has done, and I am delighted that he has taken over that role. I was not paid by him—or by anybody else, sadly—when I was his PPS, but I must tell the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) that a very strong convention applied when we were in government, that a PPS was part of the payroll, even if not actually on it, and did not participate in House of Commons matters except formally. I am surprised to see that the hon. Gentleman is still serving on the Committee.

I shall now take up a point first made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire and then taken up by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). We run a risk of allowing trivial cases, however defined, to gain currency outside the House and give the impression that this House is made up of a great number of people who are venal and do not take their parliamentary responsibilities seriously.

Rightly or wrongly, there has emerged the idea—and in some people's view the debate may reflect it—that we are engaged in party political point-scoring over reports from the Committee on Standards and Privileges. I have said to Labour Members, some of whom hold high office in this Government and some of whom are no longer in the House, that in my view the Committee has in the past been partisan in favour of the Labour party, and that if we are to have a Committee that works, and does not merely feed stories to the newspapers with which to undermine public confidence in this place, they will have to act responsibly and resist the opportunity to make partisan accusations.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye) *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I will give way in a moment.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) is not now in his place, but I merely wish to say that, as he knows, in the last Parliament I complained that he had complained to Mrs. Filkin about John Major and said that the former Prime Minister had received remuneration for undertaking speaking tours in the United States. I make that point because the report raises issues of comparative treatment. My right hon. Friend the Member for North–West Hampshire mentioned general points that arise from the report, and I hope therefore that what I am saying bears on those remarks.

The House must resist the temptation to be partisan in these matters, because the only institution that will be damaged is Parliament and the only beneficiary will be the media, which like to write salacious stories about our activities. They write no salacious stories about their activities and their private lives would not stand the scrutiny of a candle, let alone a searchlight.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going way outside the scope of this debate by making those remarks. I hope that he will come back to the point after the intervention.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: Members of the Committee may be offended by the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that they are partisan in their quasi-judicial role, especially those who are members of the legal profession. They would be most offended if it were suggested that they were not capable of fairness in their decision-making. How can the decisions be partisan when they are unanimous? Or does the hon. Gentleman wish to suggest that Conservative Members on the Committee are so timid that they cannot stand up for themselves?

Mr. Howarth: The idea that lawyers are uniquely virginal in such matters will strike the public as somewhat curious. Any of us who have had any experience of lawyers will know that they are very much part of this world, although some of us may wish that they were part of the next world.

You have rightly suggested, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I should address my remarks specifically to the report and I happily do so. I have a great deal of time for the hon.

Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and I share his religious convictions as a Christian gentleman. He suggested that we should in good faith accept the word of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), in so far as he did not receive the £200,000. The hon. Gentleman, in his personal statement today, made it clear that he still protests his innocence of the charge of receiving those funds. My problem with that is that—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) has just pointed out—the Hollis accounts, which were signed by the hon. Gentleman himself as chairman of Hollis, showed the payment of £200,000 to him. Taken together with the invoice that Mr. Tom Bower has uncovered, the evidence appears to be overwhelming, and certainly more than the balance of probabilities, that the hon. Gentleman received the money or that TransTec received the money on his behalf. That is the difficulty.

I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will permit me to contrast and compare the treatment of one hon. Member against that of another, because I believe that that is a legitimate approach in a debate on such a report. The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) is indignant at my suggestion that the Committee is partisan, but I hope that he will accept the following points. In the last Parliament, the Committee did not show the good faith and indulgence that the hon. Gentleman thinks should be shown to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West to my former hon. Friend, Mr. Neil Hamilton. Few hon. Members will be surprised that I mention that name, because the House knows that he is one of my very closest friends. He was served a grave injustice by the Committee, on which several current hon. Members served in the last Parliament.

Evidence was provided for the payment of £200,000 to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West—the company accounts and the invoice—but the Committee failed to find any such evidence relating to Mr. Hamilton. The Committee could not determine how much he had received, or how or when he had received it. It effectively convicted that man on the basis of no empirical evidence whatsoever.

Such was the overwhelming case that Neil Hamilton made that the Inland Revenue has accepted entirely his accountants' claim for signing off on his accounts. In other words, there was no money from Fayed. Everyone knows that Fayed had an axe to grind because Hamilton would not do his bidding. That is why he went after Hamilton. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: No, because I do not want to stretch your courtesy to me too far, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is astonishing that the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West has been given a rap over the knuckles and three weeks gardening leave from the House, when Mr. Hamilton and others—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) was about to say—have suffered a disparity of treatment that is acutely evident to the House.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: Not to the hon. Lady, on any account.

It is unfortunate that the Committee has not accepted Mrs. Filkin's findings in total. The House will know that I hold no brief for the lady, but she was painstaking in this investigation. It is not a good omen for the future, and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire, the Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee, must prove his Committee's robust independence in these matters. He must ensure that hon. Members brought before the Committee receive parity of treatment.

However, I want to end on a note of agreement. I hope that under the stewardship of my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire the Committee will be much more robust in sweeping aside complaints that are of a partisan nature and which do not involve serious misdemeanours with regard to the House. Such complaints merely serve to undermine the House's status in public confidence.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House—

(i) approves the First Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (House of Commons Paper No. 297); and

(ii) accordingly suspends Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, Member for Coventry North West, from the service of the House for three weeks.

Orders of the Day

Election Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

VOTERS: SPECIFIED DOCUMENTS

'(1) From 1st April 2003, paragraph (1E) of rule 37 of the parliamentary election rules applicable to elections in Northern Ireland, imported into Schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 by section 1(2) of the Elections (Northern Ireland) Act 1985 (c. 2), is amended in accordance with subsection (2).

(2) Sub-paragraphs (a) to (g) are omitted and the following are inserted:

"(a) the plastic photographic card which is, or forms the counterpart of, a current licence to drive a motor vehicle;

(b) a current passport issued by the Government of the United Kingdom or by the Government of the Republic of Ireland;

(c) a senior citizen's concessionary fare pass issued by the Northern Ireland Department for Regional Development;

(d) a current electoral identity card issued under section 13C of this Act.".'.—*[Mr. Blunt.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.7 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 19, in clause 4, page 5, line 6, after "may", insert "be obliged to".

No. 18, in page 5, line 28, leave out from "documents)" to "a" in line 29 and insert—

'for sub-paragraphs (a) to (g) there is substituted'.

No. 10, in page 5, line 29, at end insert—

'(4) In Schedule 1 (parliamentary election rules), in rule 37(1E) (specified documents), sub-paragraphs (c) to (g) are omitted.

(5) Subsection 4 shall come into force on 30th April 2003, or 15 months after the coming into force of the rest of this section, whichever is the latter.'.

No. 17, in clause 7, page 6, line 37, leave out from "appoint" to end of line 39.

Mr. Blunt: In rising to speak to new clause 1, I wish to make it clear that I do so in the spirit that has accompanied the Bill in its progress to date. Hon. Members of all parties support the Bill's objectives. Like all other amendments tabled for debate today, the new clause is designed to help the Bill.

I shall begin by recounting to the House a statement made in Cabinet by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He is reported by the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), to have said that the aim in Northern Ireland is to achieve the politics and the practice of politics that are normal in a liberal democracy. If that remark has been slightly mistranslated in its passage from what was originally said in Cabinet, I am sure that the House will forgive me. I am sure, however, that all hon. Members can sign up to that objective.

The new clause deals with the identity of voters in polling stations and the timetable for the introduction of the legislation. As the Under-Secretary of State said in Committee:

"The aim of the legislation is to make only secure photographic identification, such as a driving licence, passport, voluntary ID card and probably the Translink card acceptable as proof of identity at the polling station. There will therefore be four acceptable forms of identification."

The new clause would give effect to the Minister's aims. It would also reinforce the removal of non-photographic forms of identification by putting a timetable on the process that is in line with the Minister's intentions. As he explained in Committee:

"The target of the May 2003 elections has been at the forefront of my mind since I took responsibility . . . I am doing everything in my power, as are my officials, to meet that target".—*[Official Report, Standing Committee D,* 18 October 2001; c. 93-96.]

This first group of amendments is important in the historic context of bringing trust into the process of democracy in Northern Ireland, but it is perhaps not the most important in addressing head on the worst causes of electoral fraud there. Historically, the stories and accounts of personation in Northern Ireland have been legion. When the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs took evidence in 1998, it heard about people changing clothes and putting on wigs outside polling stations so that they could go in and pretend to be someone else. We heard such stories in Committee as well. It is essential that we support the Government and that voter identity in the polling station be as far as possible beyond reproach.

There is evidence of counterfeit medical cards being used as forms of identification. That is why these provisions are required and the Minister's objectives must be supported. The Committee was told of the Royal Ulster Constabulary raiding the offices of a political party and identifying a production line of counterfeit medical cards.

The new clause would assist the electorate if they were confused about the form of identity required in the polling station. The Northern Ireland Office commissioned research on the general election; it took into account the experiences of members of the public and polling clerks as well as considering polling station precedents. The evidence showed that a number of people were turned away from the polling stations because they had brought the wrong form of identification. Many had come with some form of photographic identification that was not listed; some had come with the wrong part of their driving licence, as the Northern Ireland driving licence is in two parts.

New clause 1 would give effect to the Minister's objectives by listing four types of photographic identification. The hon. Gentleman told us in Committee that the measures could be introduced by regulation. However, if the House supports the Minister in his objectives, it will be appropriate to put this measure into primary legislation now. That is what is behind new clause 1(2). There was no dispute in Committee that having voters produce these forms of photographic identification was a desirable objective.

The timetable that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have suggested in new clause 1 is the Minister's own. He has told us that his objective is to get this system up and running for the Northern Ireland Assembly elections due in May 2000, and we have taken him at his word.

The transfer from non-photographic forms of identification to a completely photographic system offers great advantages in terms of certainty. The public information campaign in Northern Ireland can be undertaken by the Northern Ireland Office and also by the political parties there. It will be in their interests to ensure that all their supporters can take part in the election and that they obtain some acceptable form of photographic identification.

5.15 pm

The inclusion of concessionary fare passes for senior citizens as an acceptable form of identification after 2002, when I understand that the new photographic passes are to be introduced in Northern Ireland, will deal with the larger part of the population who do not have a driving licence or passport and who would otherwise need one of the new electoral identity cards. It would reduce the burden on the Northern Ireland Office and the chief electoral officer of producing electoral identity cards. Only a small proportion of the population would not have one of those three forms of identification.

On the timetable in the legislation, the Minister may find that part of the electorate or a political party that wants to retain non-photographic forms of identification—so that they could continue to produce counterfeit medical cards, for example—organises to resist the introduction of an electoral identity card. The Minister made it clear in Committee that he would be influenced if there were such a body of opinion in Northern Ireland and if people did not take up the necessary electoral identity cards or have other acceptable forms of identification. If the legislation contains a date, as it would if new clause 1 were accepted, the Minister's hands would be tied, as would be the hands of the Department and the chief electoral officer, and they would have to ensure that the scheme was a success.

I would be grateful if the Minister dealt with this matter in his reply. Did he say that it was impractical to introduce these measures for the May 2003 Assembly elections? He said that he was concerned that some of the electorate might resist taking up the identity card. If there are practical objections and it is difficult to meet the timetable for administrative or bureaucratic reasons, it would of course be appropriate to reconsider the deadline set in the legislation. If the Minister makes that point, I would not want to press the new clause in its present form. The date in the new clause is not immutable. It is meant to reinforce the Minister's position.

I thoroughly respect amendments Nos. 18 and 19 tabled by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), who has stuck to the view that he and the other members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee took in 1998 when they recommended a new, universally issued electoral card. In Committee, the Minister raised an issue of principle, saying that the people of Northern Ireland should not be subject to impositions that were materially different from those imposed on the rest of the United Kingdom. The electoral identity card that the chief electoral officer will introduce under this legislation is to be voluntary—one could also use a driving licence, a passport or, hopefully, a Translink card.

The proposals of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire would impose an identity card on the whole population of Northern Ireland. The debate about identity cards and their compulsory imposition on the electorate in a particular part of the United Kingdom should not be held in isolation, however. I thus tend to support what I assume is the view of the Minister: in these circumstances such an imposition would be wrong.

Furthermore, to issue identity cards to the whole population of Northern Ireland would create a significant administrative burden. However, if one was dealing only with that small percentage of the electorate who do not have some suitable form of photographic identification, the proposals would be achievable, and at much less cost to the taxpayer—although we have been assured, throughout the Bill's proceedings, that resources are not an issue.

Amendment No. 10, tabled by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), gives a timetable, but one that remains in the gift of the Secretary of State. Under the Bill's current provisions, the Secretary of State can choose when individual sections of the measure will come into force. The amendment thus does nothing to reinforce the Secretary of State's position; it merely imposes on him a 15-month waiting period once he has decided that he is ready to implement the provisions—unless, of course, that date happens to be before 30 April 2003.

That is not necessarily the best way to proceed. If things slide to the right, as they tend to do in the course of time, we should find, if we accepted the amendment, that the Minister was stuck with a 15-month notice period when he had decided he was reasonably ready to implement the legislation. It would be preferable to work to a fixed date.

If measures to combat electoral fraud are to be subject to acceptance by the electorate, as they would be if new clause 1 is not accepted, the Minister would be left open to undesirable pressures and persuasion from those parts of the electorate and political parties who want to continue to cheat the system. It would be better if the Minister's declared aims were reinforced by the acceptance of new clause 1.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I speak to amendments Nos. 19 and 18. The amendments are linked so as to produce the result I want. Amendment No. 19 provides that people would be "obliged" to obtain a photo-identity card. Amendment No. 18 would ensure that the card was universal for the electorate of Northern Ireland, so that it was the only form of photo-identification used at the polling station. Under the amendments, the card would be compulsory and universal.

The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) argued that new clause 1 would prevent confusion, because it would restrict the forms of identity to four. That is a good argument. My amendment would prevent further confusion because there would be only one method available—only one method would be publicised.

In the United Kingdom, voter registration—apart from overseas voters—is not voluntary; people are obliged to register and can be fined £1,000 if they fail to do so.

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

Although far too many people are missing from the electoral registers, people are none the less legally obliged to register. I am in favour of improving electoral registration so that we achieve electoral registration of 100 per cent., or as near it as possible, so that everybody has the opportunity to exercise the rights to which they are entitled.

In Northern Ireland, however, because of the special circumstances there, identification is required, correctly, at the polling station in order to exercise the franchise. To exercise the franchise in Northern Ireland, one needs to be on a register and one needs a form of photo-identification. I am arguing that one form of photo-identity card should be issued to everyone.

Universality is a fundamental aspect of the operation of a democracy. Registration is voluntary in some countries, but that system is by no means as good as the system that we have in the United Kingdom. It is possible for overseas voters who qualify to register voluntarily, but that is mainly because we cannot impose compulsory registration on overseas residents. I do not believe that overseas residents should have voting rights in this country, but that may be a matter for another debate. However, I believe that it is particularly important that the photo-identity card should be provided universally, and that people should be obliged to apply for one.

Amendment No. 18 applies particularly to the universal requirement. In 1997–98, the second report of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland was on electoral fraud. Many aspects of the report have been adopted in the Bill, which is generally to be welcomed as being in line with its provisions. Paragraph 64 of the report records:

"The Secretary of State"—

at the time, it was Mo Mowlam—

"rightly expressed dislike for a system which provided for different types of documentation according to whether a voter drove a car or had travelled abroad. She felt that this was divisive and we agree . . . Any new system of identification should be common to all voters in Northern Ireland . . . We, therefore, recommend that the present list of documents which prove identity should be replaced by a new, universally issued electoral card".

I believe that the Select Committee was correct in making that recommendation. It is divisive to call on some people to seek to obtain a card while others may make use of passports, driving licences or other forms of identification that may be added to the list, such as cards for travel purposes. Many people would be missed, and the others would have to respond to the efforts of the Northern Ireland Office in order to register. It is much more likely that those people would apply for photo-identity cards if the requirement to obtain one were universal. In those circumstances, there would be a greater response from the public, the publicity would have much greater force and the social pressure to register would be considerable. So I believe in compulsory application for cards and the universal provision.

5.30 pm

I agree that the proposals represent a form of identity card for electoral purposes in Northern Ireland, and I support the notion of having identity cards in the United Kingdom. In fact, I believe that those identity cards should be linked with electoral registration, and a change in the law may be necessary to ensure that everyone is covered by such arrangements. For example, residents from overseas, who do not come from Commonwealth countries or the Republic of Ireland, are not entitled to register for elections, but it would be valuable if they had identity cards. As residents of the United Kingdom, they should be entitled to vote, but the Bill does not affect the whole United Kingdom.

A special problem exists in Northern Ireland, so separate identification arrangements already exist there, and they will be developed and extended, or clarified, under the Bill. I simply want to clarify the arrangements on a better and more substantial basis than will be done under the Bill. The Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs knew what it was doing when it produced the report—it realised that those principles were important and should be responded to.

I appreciate that amendments Nos. 18 and 19 may not reach the statute book and that I am pressing the Minister on them, but I should like to know whether the Government are thinking along these lines. That might have an affect on cards in Northern Ireland and then have some knock-on consequences for United Kingdom electoral arrangements.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I rise primarily to speak to amendments Nos. 10 and 17, both of which were tabled by myself, the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) and the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble).

As the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) correctly said, amendment No. 10 relates to the creation of a deadline by which time all this needs to be done. We suggest that that deadline should be 31 April 2003, or 15 months after the provisions are implemented, whichever comes later. Although the hon. Gentleman touched on part of this issue, let me explain why I feel that that is a more satisfactory arrangement than that proposed in new clause 1.

The first powerful argument is that that arrangement would take account of the concerns that the Minister expressed in Committee, and we are seeking to help him and to provide flexibility, by ensuring that the target is achievable. In simple terms, the Government said in Committee that they envisage removing the non-photographic identity cards by the time that the next Assembly elections take place at the beginning of May 2003. That is why we have chosen the end of April, instead of the beginning of April, as is suggested in new clause 1.

The 15-month leeway represents an insurance policy or backstop to ensure that, if something unforeseen occurs, the Government will not be held to have failed in their commitment to achieve something that we all wish to achieve. Unless the Government have very clear targets in the Bill, as was said in Committee, they will rob themselves of an opportunity to ensure that the changes that we have described come into force.

Let us be realistic—some individuals will not be happy with the legislation, exactly because it prevents them from conducting electoral fraud, which, as we know, has taken place so often in Northern Ireland until now. Those people will do everything in their power to give the Government strong reasons why it would not be fair to introduce the legislation by any particular date. If we include such

targets in the Bill, we will make it clear to those people that it is outside the Minister's or the Government's discretion to renegotiate those deadlines. In so doing, we would significantly strengthen the hand of the Northern Ireland Office in ensuring that the provisions in the Bill are brought into force.

Amendment No. 17 would ensure that the Bill is brought into force as speedily as possible and that it is not cherry-picked in the process. There is no reason why the Government cannot implement the whole Bill at the same time. There is provision for the Bill to be introduced at different stages and at different times, but the amendment would remove the words

"and different days may be appointed for different provisions and for different purposes"

from page 6, line 37. The reason for that is simple. The enemies of an honest electoral system will seek to prevent the Government from implementing the provisions that are most disadvantageous to the fraudsters. They will provide all sorts of reasons for that and dress up their arguments by claiming that citizens will be disfranchised by the Bill.

If the Bill is explicit and it is clear that it is a package that will be implemented as a whole, it is much less likely that individuals will be able to prevent the Northern Ireland Office and the executors of the Bill's provisions from carrying out their work. Executors will be able to say that it is not in their power to delay some parts of the Bill while implementing others. We hope that the Minister will consider our amendments sympathetically, because they are designed to strengthen the Government's ability to implement the Bill.

I have concerns about amendment No. 18 because, as the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) rightly pointed out, it would result in the compulsory use of an electoral identity card. It is a judgment call, but it appears to me that such a provision would be a little too prescriptive.

In effect, the amendment would introduce an identity card that is likely, over time, to become a smart card that carries a great deal of information about individuals. I have an innate concern about identity cards, and such a proposal would be a bridge too far. I am determined that we should replace non-photographic identity with photographic identity for elections in Northern Ireland, but we should not go as far as the hon. Gentleman has suggested.

I look forward to the Minister's remarks, and I hope that he will think seriously about amendments Nos. 10 and 17. Their sole intent is to strengthen the Government's ability to ensure that the Bill has teeth.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): It was evident from the contributions made in Committee that both sides supported the concept that identification for electoral purposes should be restricted as soon as possible to photo-identity. I and others tabled amendments to ensure that people could no longer use the non-photo identity documents that are most used for electoral fraud. For example, the medical card has been replicated in its thousands in Northern Ireland in an orchestrated way. Although social security benefit books are less easy to obtain, they are also used to perpetrate electoral fraud.

I have great sympathy for the intention behind new clause 1. I hope that the Minister will tell us whether he has considered the remarks made in Committee about aged persons' ability to use the Translink photo-identity as an electoral document. He gave the proposal fair wind in Committee, but I would like him to reaffirm that such a proposal will appear in amending rules and regulations.

My problem with new clause 1 arises from something that the Minister said in Committee. Indeed, it is why I withdrew my amendments. In the second sitting, he clearly said that it was his intention by 2003

"that the new cards will be issued to those who do not have a passport or driving licence."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 16 October 2001; c. 51.]

Anyone who has not got a passport or a driving licence—or a Translink card, if the Minister accepts that suggestion—will be issued with the new electoral photo-identity card. That will enable all non-photographic forms of identification to be withdrawn or designated invalid for electoral purposes.

I was happy and content with that assurance until unfortunately, in the third sitting, the Minister stated:

"It is the Government's intention not to remove non-photographic forms of identification that are presently permitted until everyone has a passport or a driving licence with a photograph, or has had a reasonable opportunity to obtain a photographic identification card for election purposes".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 18 October 2001; c. 84.]

I quote that carefully because I want the Minister to respond to it. In the same paragraph, he said that the Government intend to remove all non-photographic forms of identification as soon as possible, hopefully before the anticipated Northern Ireland Assembly elections in 2003—if not before then, of course.

I want complete clarification of that. Does the Minister think that the electoral officer has sufficient resources and that it is practical to impose the withdrawal of non-photographic identification by, say, spring 2003? That is germane to the debate. I sympathise with the thrust of the new clause and would want that reflected in the rules and regulations that are imposed.

If the Minister is able to reassure me on that, I will take on board his other caveat about the danger in the process. The lack of time, resources, technology or techniques could mean that a significant number of people will not have photo-identity cards by April 2003 and will be disfranchised if new clause 1 comes into effect. That is a subjective judgment. I need assurances about the resources and the technicalities as they relate to implementing the Government's intent, rather than worrying that the Bill's measures are not capable of being implemented by spring 2003.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): It seems that there is a broad consensus on this issue. New clause 1 and amendments Nos. 10 and 17 would achieve the same objective—to ensure that the identification for voting includes photographs. The second objective is to have the arrangements in place by 2003 in time for what we expect will be the next Assembly election. The Minister says that they are also his objectives. On that basis, I expect him to say that he is prepared to accept the new clause and amendments.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Trimble: The Minister may want to consider the exact form in which the amendments are drafted, but it is

[Mr. Trimble]

very much in his interests to accept them. I am rather disappointed to see the Minister shake his head when I say that. I advise him that it is greatly in his interests to adopt that course of action.

5.45 pm

In Northern Ireland, it has for a long time been clear that there is substantial abuse in respect of identification documents. They were introduced with the wholly laudable objective of preventing personation, and they succeeded in eliminating personation by all parties bar one. Personation in Northern Ireland is now committed by only one party, because only one party has the resources necessary to contravene the current system. Those resources should not be underestimated. The Minister knows that in financial terms, if not in manpower terms, that party's resources far exceed his party's. The Minister's party would have great difficulty matching it in terms of effective political organisation, because his party cannot match the resources of a party that runs rackets on a huge scale in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

There is a serious problem because that one party has the resources needed to contravene the current arrangements and it does so through non-photographic forms of identification, especially the medical card. The abuse has been known about for ages, and for ages Members of Parliament and members of the Northern Ireland parties have urged successive Governments to deal with that abuse. I remember six or seven years ago speaking to Northern Ireland Office Ministers and being assured by them that they would tackle the problem and do so promptly. I was told that legislation would be in place in time for the next general election—the one held in 1997; that legislation never appeared. In 1997, the new Labour Government assured us that they would tackle the issue and that legislation would be in place before the next general election; no legislation was in place by the time of this year's general election.

Finally, the legislative process has started, but can the Minister assure us that he will achieve the objective of having only photo-identity by May 2003? I hope that he can, but I know that there has been bureaucratic resistance to such a measure for the past half dozen years or more. I strongly urge him to accept in one form or another amendments that would put on the statute book the requirement that the measure must have been implemented by May 2003. Without that discipline and that argument to use against those who adduce reasons to delay, I greatly doubt his ability to deliver.

I do not doubt the Minister's intention, but I doubt whether he will be able to deliver in the next 18 months—the issue is delivery. We shall of course listen to what he has to say—what promises and undertakings he makes—but I repeat that to ensure the objective is achieved, it would be better for the provision to be on the statute book.

New clause 1 and the other amendments set out various forms of photographic identity document. Some of the proposals point towards the establishment of a system of identity cards for the whole population. The Liberal Democrat spokesman echoed the reservations voiced by the spokesman for the official Opposition. I have never understood why some people do not like the idea of identity cards, and I have never been able to find any coherent reason for opposing such a system.

Identity cards do not cause a problem anywhere else in Europe—this is one of the few occasions on which I recommend practice in the rest of Europe as a guide for us. Compulsory ID systems elsewhere are a convenience—it is quite a disadvantage not to have an identity card system. I see hon. Members turning around, and I do not want to open up an entirely different debate; I merely observe in passing that I do not understand the objections.

I should like the Minister to respond to one point relating to identity documents and the proposals before the House. On Monday, the Home Secretary made a statement in which he said that he would introduce by January a system of identity cards for asylum seekers that would use fingerprints, signatures and biometric techniques. All those bits of information would be on a smart card that would be available by the end of this year. I think that I am right in saying that, in Committee, the Minister said there would be difficulty in producing smart cards in that time scale. Evidently, progress has been made since the Committee reported, but I urge the Minister to look again at including that range of material on the appropriate cards, as we are dealing with people who are adept at forgery and manipulating the system.

There is a consensus in the House on the need to move to photo-identification alone and for that to be in place by May 20[illegible]. The only argument is about the details and ensuring that there is a statutory obligation; we urge the Minister to accept that there is a statutory requirement for such identification. That way, we might at least have some confidence. However, if we weighed the Government's pronouncements against the background of pronouncements by previous Northern Ireland Office Ministers stretching back over several Administrations, confidence would be in short supply.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): For the most part, I walked the same path as the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) in Committee, but we parted company on the issue of identification. The Minister is not being unreasonable in resisting the new clause; I trust that he will continue to do so.

The general consensus in Committee was that, while we were keen to have a Bill that would be powerful and effective in limiting the activities of electoral fraudsters, we did not want to do anything that would deter a significant number of people in Northern Ireland from being able validly to register and vote. If we are to succeed in the interests of democracy, we must ensure that whatever good we achieve in deterring the fraudster is not offset by deterring people who are genuine and want to exercise their franchise, as it is intended that they should. The Committee considered that balance as, indeed, must the House; the Minister had to consider it when the amendment was tabled in Committee, and he must consider now that it has been tabled on Report.

As right hon. and hon. Members have said, it is desirable to have an entirely photographic identification card system in Northern Ireland as soon as possible. Whether that identification is a driving licence, a passport, a custom-made ID card, or, hopefully, if the good intentions of the Minister are followed, the concessionary pass produced by Translink and the Department for Regional Development, the inclusion of which came about as a result of good, sound Democratic Unionist party policy, that is the way forward. However, we must

recognise that, at the moment, the most popular forms of identification at elections in Northern Ireland are probably benefit books and medical cards.

That is the reality; those of us who have attempted to carry out an investigation which, if not scientific, at least helped us to get some feeling of the use of identification at polling stations, came away with the clear view that those were the main identifiers in use. If that is the case, the burden is on the Government to ensure that those identifiers are replaced by photographic identification. The Minister should therefore delay any statutory requirement to take existing identifiers out of use and employ only photographic identification until he is sure that there is a sufficiently high uptake of the new identifiers.

I would not vote for the Bill—this is how important the matter is to me—if I thought that the end result would be a significant number of genuine people being unable to vote and if, correspondingly, an unspecified number of people, whose total is probably hard to determine, were able to abuse the system. The political parties in Northern Ireland and the Government must therefore be satisfied that the uptake is sufficiently high. That does not remove the requirement that the Government should have a clear goal, nor does it remove the requirement that the Northern Ireland political parties should ensure that they keep to that goal and timetable as far as possible.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Does the hon. Gentleman recall points made outside the House about the vulnerability of the Government to pressure caused by intimidation of the republican population, which may be threatened and attacked for using photographic ID cards? The Minister gave an opaque response in Committee, but those are the people who will be vulnerable. If republicans are intimidated by their so-called representatives into refusing to use photographic ID cards, it will be impossible for the Minister to meet his deadline, unless it is included in the Bill.

Mr. Robinson: That is a judgment that the Minister and, indeed, the political parties in Northern Ireland will have to make. If there is a campaign by a particular political party, that may very well be to the detriment of it and its political future. Every party should be consulted by the Minister periodically so that we are satisfied that progress is being made. There are other mechanisms in the House to call the Minister and Government to account if we believe that they are dragging their feet. The Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, which championed the need for legislation, will undoubtedly want to observe its progress and receive periodic reports from the Minister to ensure that he is on course for the deadline which, I believe, everyone in the House, wants to be met.

None the less, it would be irresponsible of the Minister to include in legislation a requirement for the removal of key identifiers for what is probably the majority of voters in Northern Ireland without being satisfied that they had taken the opportunity to get new ID cards, whether concessionary passes from Translink and the Department for Regional Development or cards produced by the chief electoral officer. In this case, it is right to support the Government because they are acting both sensibly and responsibly.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I want to underline the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and pay tribute to many of the remarks of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik). Furthermore, I admired the eloquence of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), especially his comments on the timetable for the legislation.

Many of my constituents in Newark and Retford are currently serving in Northern Ireland with the Sherwood Foresters; they have been there for almost two years. Last weekend, I spoke to one of their company commanders, a personal friend with whom I served in precisely the same camp—Omagh—12 years ago, performing the same duties in that part of world. The battalion's life has changed very little in the interim. When I asked my friend what he was doing, he said, "Guess what? I am on election training again."

To most people, the idea of forces serving in Northern Ireland probably sounds exciting, but alongside the dreadful upsurge of troubles in places such as north Belfast, there is a routine part of operations for the men and women of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and all ranks in the Army, Navy and Air Force who serve over there.

6 pm

I recall first having to protect a polling station back in 1975 in Dungiven. I was told that that would be the responsibility wholly of the electoral officers and the RUC, but it did not turn out that way. The RUC was stretched, as it is now, and the Army ended up taking a hand. Again, in 1977 I was faced with the same duties. In my nine tours in Northern Ireland, I do not think that I once avoided getting involved in an election protection scheme of one sort or another. Slowly, over the years, the duties have become more and more formalised, so poor old Tommy Atkins is faced with all sorts of complications in trying to avoid election fraud, support the RUC and support the electoral officers.

There was a funny side. I remember a tractor coming backwards to a checkpoint that I was holding. It was polling day, and we were protecting a polling station; I cannot remember where—Fermanagh, probably, in the middle of nowhere. A tractor backed all the way into the checkpoint. It turned out that the occupants were going to vote, but all the forward gears on the tractor had given out. So intent were those people on voting that they used just the reverse gear.

In west Belfast in 1982, we were warned that any number of attempts at personation would be made and that disguises would be used. We found a young man who looked curious, his cheeks puffed out with cotton wool. It turned out that he had a boil on his gum. Such were the difficulties of trying to understand what was going on and the various modes and means of personation. Now, training for polling protection has become formalised as a lengthy package for every unit serving in Northern Ireland and for the police, who do their best over there.

As the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire said, there are people and parties who want the legislation to be delayed. It is in their interests that photographic means of identification should not be adopted speedily and that the target date of 1 April 2003 should not be met. In view of the considerable amount of time that is wasted by the security forces, particularly the Army, whose duties should be far less complex and technical, I urge the

[Patrick Mercer]

Minister to look closely at the timetable and to introduce a universal photographic means of identification. Above all, the timetable must be adhered to, so that by April 2003 there is watertight legislation that will enable electoral fraud to be minimised in situations that are always difficult and fraught with problems.

Mr. Browne: I am pleased that the debate in the Chamber today has continued on from the constructive and helpful way in which the Committee conducted its affairs. I am grateful to right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions.

I shall resist the new clause and all the amendments. I shall deal first with new clause 1 and amendments Nos. 10 and 17, which all seek to impose a timetable on the removal of non-photographic identification from the list of specified documents. The other amendments, as my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) explained, are intended to make the electoral identification card compulsory for all voters in Northern Ireland.

As I said repeatedly on Second Reading and in Committee, the next scheduled Assembly elections in Northern Ireland are in May 2003. That has always been and will remain our target for the removal of all forms of non-photographic identification from the list of specified documents. However, for reasons with which I will deal in detail and which have already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), I must retain a degree of flexibility.

The people of Northern Ireland must be informed about—but, more importantly, they must accept—the electoral identity card. I have no intention of creating circumstances that inadvertently disfranchise people who do not have confidence in the system. The electoral identity card will be a voluntary card, but it will be in the interest of all the political parties in Northern Ireland to ensure that their voters obtain a card if they require one. We all have a duty as parliamentarians to explain that to the people of Northern Ireland and to help instil confidence in the process, as there is cross-party support for the measure.

A major publicity campaign will be necessary to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland is aware of the changes and aware of the photographic identification that they will need to exercise their franchise. It is not an unreasonable position for the Government to take to leave open the timetable for removing the existing prescribed documents which are not photographic, until we are satisfied that there has been sufficient uptake of the new electoral identity card.

There is no advantage to us in passing legislation that will make electoral fraud more difficult if, at the same time, we disfranchise legitimate and valid voters. Obviously, we will have to make a judgment as to whether people are volunteering for the identity cards, and a decision must be made as to what effect that will have on the poll. I repeat again that May 2003 is our target date for removing all forms of non-photographic identity from the list of specified documents, but I will not take the decision lightly.

I must retain the flexibility to assess whether there has been sufficient uptake of the electoral identity card, and to consult fully with the political parties in Northern Ireland before I make that decision. I am reinforced in that view by the fact that hon. Members whose constituents will be affected by the Bill realise that flexibility is crucial. That is no doubt why the hon. Members for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and for Belfast, East—the only two Northern Ireland Members who were present when we last voted on the issue—voted against the amendment during the Committee stage.

Lembit Öpik: Does the Minister understand that at the core of the argument for setting the deadline is the recognition that the Government are not passive in the matter? They do not merely react to the circumstances. The deadline would oblige people to get photographic identification. My concern is that the Minister is taking too passive a role for the Government in the matter.

Mr. Browne: My understanding is that I had been criticised for taking too active a role and for retaining the decision to myself. I intend to consult all the political parties in Northern Ireland—not all of which are represented in the House—about our progress in implementing the plan that I have set out. I have no intention of deviating from the objective of May 2003, but at various stages I will have to make a judgment on whether the people of Northern Ireland are being taken along in that process.

That responsibility is not mine alone; it is the responsibility of other politicians in Northern Ireland who support the change. We will all have to work together towards that objective. If any party decides to spoil the process, that will be a consideration, but it will not deflect me from the decision that I intend to make, if it is appropriate. The decision will be made in the circumstances, and it will not help the process if we impose an unrealistic timetable at this stage—*[Interruption.]*

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) says that the timetable is mine—yes indeed, but to impose it by statute would make it unrealistic, as that would deny the reality that a considerable number of people who are not represented in this debate—the voters—must be taken along with us.

Mr. Blunt: Can the Minister reassure the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and me that his arguments are based on considerations of practicality—whether it will be possible for him to introduce the cards in time for 2003, and whether the public information campaign to which he referred will achieve his objective in terms of take-up of the card? If he can run a public information campaign and introduce the measures, surely it would be in his interest to reinforce his position in statute.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, as it gives me the opportunity to set his mind at ease on the practicalities. I am confident that we can meet, in practical terms, the objective that I have set. Earlier, he invited me to tell him whether practical difficulties would arise and he said that he would not insist upon the amendment if that was the case. I do not seek to use that excuse, however, as my understanding is that the measure can be achieved practically. The one element that I cannot assess is the valid response of the ordinary voters of Northern Ireland, on which I shall have

to make a judgment. That is the only reason that I have ever given for the need to retain flexibility. I am not alone in holding that view, which has support. Hon. Members who represent significant parties and a substantial number of voters in Northern Ireland agree that that is the appropriate approach. There is a difference of view about the matter, but that is my position and has been since the issue was injected into the debate.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Putting it bluntly, the Under-Secretary appears to have handed Sinn Fein a veto on the process by refusing to include a deadline in the Bill. What will happen if it can blackmail, bully or intimidate its supporters into not carrying the card? I understand the argument of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) that they have no interest in doing so, but he is wrong. The Under-Secretary has said—he can correct me if I am wrong—that he could not introduce it without evidence of widespread support from all the parties. Is not that handing the bullies a veto?

Mr. Browne: With respect, the hon. Gentleman misrepresents me. I have never said that any party has a veto. Contributions to the debate suggest that one party may seek to obstruct implementation. If that happens between now and May 2003, it will be a factor that must be taken into account, but in no circumstances am I suggesting here or in any debate that if a party chooses to cause such difficulties, it will be a reason for not introducing the photographic identification cards. I am saying that we cannot introduce a change if an accidental effect is to disfranchise people who wish legally to exercise their vote, as would happen if they had no confidence in the system. It will be my responsibility as a Minister, and the responsibility of other politicians who vote for the change and operate within politics in Northern Ireland, to work together to achieve confidence. If we achieve that confidence, we will achieve the objective. There is no practical reason why we cannot do so.

Lembit Öpik: I intervene a second time only because the issue is so important. Everyone seems to agree with the desired outcome, but the Under-Secretary seems to need some flexibility just in case his desired deadline is not achieved. Will he at least consider including in the Bill a deadline that he is pretty certain can be achieved, even if it is May 2005 or 2006? That would at least enable everybody to know there is a date after which it would not be acceptable to use inappropriate identification

Mr. Browne: With all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, he asks me to put certainty into uncertainty. I am suggesting that there is one uncertain element in the process: the response of the voters. Until that element is tested, we will not know its effect. As I do not know how the electors will respond, it is pointless to include a deadline at all. I cannot attach certainty through uncertainty.

6.15 pm

Mr. Trimble: I am slightly confused about the point that the Minister is trying to make. Is he saying that he cannot introduce the measure if there is an insufficient take-up of cards, or that he will not do so if people lack confidence in the system? Most of his comments suggest that he holds the latter position. If that is the case and he is concerned only about whether people have confidence, will he explain on what possible grounds they might not be confident?

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution. If I was not making myself clear, I shall try to do so now. I was trying to explain that if the small proportion of people who may need the card do not have confidence in the system and do not claim it, that will lead to a lack of take-up. One is a consequence of the other. He shakes his head, but as neither of us has asked voters to come forward for voluntary or compulsory identity cards, he can be no more confident that his assertion is any better than mine in respect of whether a lack of confidence will lead to a lack of take-up. With all due respect to him—these are his voters and he may know them better than me—he has never before asked the electorate to do this. We should work together to inspire confidence in the system and to get people who do not have this new form of photographic identification to come forward for voluntary cards. We must secure sufficient take-up, so that we can pass the test that we have set ourselves and ensure that everybody has a reasonable opportunity to obtain the card. With confidence, we can then remove the non-photographic forms of identification.

Mr. Trimble *rose—*

Mr. Browne: Obviously, that is not clear enough for the right hon. Gentleman; no doubt I have confused him even more. We will soon find out.

Mr. Trimble: I think that I am beginning to understand the Minister. He is using the word "confidence" when it would be better not to do so. He appears to be speaking purely about uptake. He said that we had not asked people to do the same thing before, but that is not true. We successfully introduced the concept of identity documents for elections, which is novel to people outside Northern Ireland, just as we introduced different forms of voting long before any other part of the United Kingdom. The electorate of Northern Ireland are capable and intelligent enough to cope with the situation, as they have proved time and time again. The Minister appears to be speaking purely about uptake. He also used the word "confidence", but that is a different thing. Lack of confidence could be a factor in any failure to take up the card, but it would not be the only one. I was trying to find out whether he would take the decision purely on the basis of whether there was a lack of confidence or whether the matter is simply one of take-up. It appears that he is talking more about take-up than anything else.

Mr. Browne: If the right hon. Gentleman now knows what I am talking about, I can move on.

I regret to say that I shall also resist amendments Nos. 18 and 19, which were tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire. I express regret because he knows the regard in which I hold him on these issues. He has made a valuable and consistent contribution to debates about them for many years.

The amendments propose that the electoral identity card should be mandatory and the only form of identification that is acceptable at the polling station in Northern Ireland. As we said in the White Paper, the Government's ultimate aim is for every voter in Northern Ireland to be

[Mr. Browne]

issued with an electoral smart card bearing a unique identifier. I think that that answers another question asked by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann. In a moment, I shall deal specifically with his point about Home Office proposals. As I told the House on Second Reading, the introduction and use of an electoral smart card bearing a unique identifier is an aspiration. If every voter in Northern Ireland had to be issued with such a card, we would effectively be requiring all adults who wished to vote to carry a mandatory identification card.

There would be no point in introducing a mandatory smart card unless we could be certain that it was more secure than the existing forms of photographic identification. It would therefore need to contain biometric data about the holder, be that an iris scan, fingerprint or hand geometry scan.

The Government would be foolish to rush into such a radical new scheme before we could be confident of the practicalities or that the voters and political parties in Northern Ireland were happy to accept such a scheme. I hope that I have used the word "confident" properly in that sentence. We will continue to give further consideration to when it might be possible to initiate such a secure electoral identity scheme. However, such a scheme would not be introduced without wide consultation with all interested parties, and primary legislation would be required to introduce such a card. Hon. Members who seek an assurance from the Government should be aware that it remains our intention, as expressed in the White Paper, to proceed to such a system.

Mr. Barnes: I thank my hon. Friend for his earlier comments. The point about take-up has some relevance to my amendments. If a situation is reached where the take-up of identity cards is inadequate and the other forms of identification have to be used—if the legislation has not bitten—we may have to look closely at a system that is universal and compulsory. However, I welcome the Minister's comments about potential developments.

Mr. Browne: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I will use words similar to his later in my speech. If the system proposed in the Bill is not successful, we may have to look at proceeding more quickly to some form of compulsory card with the benefits that I have described.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann asked about Home Office plans for biometric identification cards—to be known as the application registration card—for asylum seekers. This is an extension of the current asylum application system. The Home Office already collects the fingerprints of all asylum seekers when they make their asylum application, so there is already a database of the fingerprints of all asylum seekers in this country. Immigration officers use mobile quick-check units to check asylum seekers' fingerprints against the database.

At the moment, asylum seekers are issued with a standard acknowledgement letter. The application registration card is designed to replace that letter. There has been concern at the ease with which those letters are being forged. A smart card containing a biometric element would make forgery virtually impossible.

That new system is very different from one in which we would require every adult who wanted to vote in Northern Ireland to provide us with their fingerprint or an iris scan. Not only would that involve mandatory registration, it would raise important questions of civil liberties—whether it was appropriate to require a person to provide biometric data about themselves before they were able to vote. Much discussion and consultation has to take place before we could proceed to a position where we could require people to provide that level of data about themselves before they were able to vote.

The electoral identity card proposed by this Bill will be freely and widely available to all those who require it. It represents the quickest way to create a situation in which we can remove from use the medical card and the other non-photographic identification. Our objective is to stop personation. We believe that requiring voters to show secure photographic identification at the polling station will meet this objective and, so far, no one has argued that that will not be the case.

Although I have cautioned that we must move steadily on the introduction of the electoral identification card and that we must take the electorate with us, I acknowledge that we have to take action as quickly as possible and reasonable. Introducing the electoral identity card as a stepping stone towards an electoral smart card allows us to act more quickly to remove all forms of non-photographic identification from the list of specified documents. That is why we are proposing the legislation in the first place, and why we intend to take advantage of the fact that other people can use alternative forms of photographic identification, such as driving licences and passports, that cannot easily be forged.

This brings me to the Translink smart card, which is mentioned in new clause 1. I have said that I am willing to add the new Translink smart card, to be issued to all those aged 65 and over in Northern Ireland from April next year, to the list of specified documents. However, it would be entirely inconsistent with what we are trying to achieve in the Bill to allow the smart card to be added to the list of specified documents before both the chief electoral officer and I are certain that the card will be secure proof of identity.

As I said in Committee, my officials are working with those at the Northern Ireland Department for Regional Development to resolve the outstanding problems about the security of the Translink smart card. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, East on his recent appointment as the Minister for Regional Development. I am sure that the outstanding issues will be resolved all the more quickly with him in command. Once these problems are resolved—I am sure that they will be—I will happily add the Translink smart card to the list of specified documents. That can be done by secondary legislation at the appropriate time.

Our target has been and will remain 2003 for the removal of all forms of non-photographic identification from the list of specified documents. I would not have continued to state repeatedly that May 2003 was our target if I did not believe that it was possible for all those in Northern Ireland who require an electoral identification card to have one by that date. However, we must maintain a level of flexibility, for all the reasons I have outlined.

Mr. Blunt: This debate has mirrored the one that we had in Committee, in that the longer the Minister went on defending his proposal, the less convincing he became. As the Minister went on, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and I became more and more incredulous at the case the Minister was attempting to put. I noted that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) shared my reaction.

Having listened to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), one can only admire the intellectual consistency and clarity that his solution would bring. However, because of the points that have been touched on earlier, I would continue to resist his amendments. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and I share his concerns about the practicality of introducing the cards and about whether the Minister can, in practice, meet his own deadline.

The hon. Member for South Down asked about the resources for the chief electoral officer, and that remains an issue. It is clear that the officer is overstretched in a number of respects. That was shown by his inability to check the absentee votes at the last general election. Those have not been tested fully because the officer is now engaged in putting together the new register. That is merely an example to show that there is at least a question mark as to whether he has sufficient resources.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Upper Bann that what we are putting forward is entirely in the Minister's own interests. Without the discipline of having a date in statute, the Minister is likely to fail to get the Bill on the statute book. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire challenged the Minister to agree that if the deadline could not be 2003, it could be 2005 or 2006. There should be a date in statute to ensure that the legislation will definitely come in.

If we had the certainty of a date—even if it is not April 2003, as the Liberal Democrats have suggested—the actions of the Minister's officials and the public information campaign in Northern Ireland to achieve take-up of the card would be reinforced by the fact that the scheme was to come into effect, so that there was no point in any organisation seeking to obstruct it.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Minister's claim that he cannot put a deadline in the statute because he does not know the rate of take-up could be applied to all kinds of legislation—for example, the introduction of mandatory use of rear seat belts? On every other matter, we seem to have deadlines, but on this one very important matter he is resistant.

6.30 pm

Mr. Blunt: It is odd. I know that the hon. Gentleman shares my perplexity.

I listened with care to the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). He supports the Government on this issue, and we must agree to disagree. My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) made a telling contribution about the historic importance of personation in electoral fraud in Northern Ireland and stressed the importance of a timetable, not least to give members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the armed forces, as well as the electoral officers, some certainty about when the transfer is to take place.

The Minister may come to regret resisting the assistance that we are offering him. He should have a chance to think again on the issue. We will want to examine his arguments in another place to determine whether it is appropriate to return to the matter. We are about to discuss more important causes of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland, so I will not insist on the new clause at this stage, but it may be appropriate to press the matter in another place. I hope that the Minister will reflect on the fact that his arguments have not convinced the House, and that he and the Government will think again.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 2

REGISTRATION: NOTIFICATION OF MULTIPLE REGISTRATIONS

'(1) In section 10 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (maintenance of registers: annual canvass) there is inserted—

"(5A) The information to be obtained by the use of such a form for the purposes of a canvass in Northern Ireland shall include an indication of any other address at which the person is registered."

(2) In section 10A (maintenance of the registers: registration of electors) and in section 13A (alteration of registers) of the 1983 Act there is inserted—

"( ). An application for registration in respect of an address in Northern Ireland shall include an indication of any other address at which the person is registered."

(3) Any person knowingly giving false information in response to any requirement of this section is guilty of an offence with liability on summary conviction to—

(a) imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months; or

(b) a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale,

or to both.'.—*[Mr. Blunt.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Blunt: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause, as new clause 8, was withdrawn in Committee, following the Minister's welcome statement that he had been influenced by our debate and wanted to give the matter further thought. He said:

"I am coming to the view that there might be some value in including in a canvass return a question such as: 'Have you registered at another address or do you intend to register at another address?' Since we shall be using individual canvass forms rather than household forms, that might have additional value."

He went on to say:

"I give the Committee an undertaking to discuss the issue with my officials and the chief electoral officer and to consult the parties in Northern Ireland, the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats, if that is appropriate, so that we have a clear position on Report."—*[Official Report, Standing Committee D,* 18 October 2001; c. 126-27.]

If there was consultation with the official Opposition, it did not include me. I waited with hope until Monday evening, the deadline for tabling amendments, to see whether a Government amendment on the matter would appear. Sadly, none did, which is why I retabled the new clause.

I speak with a slight sense of foreboding, because I fear that the Government have not decided to accept the argument. Multiple registration is an extremely important issue. I draw the attention of the House to the Select

[Mr. Blunt]

Committee report on electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland, which has been the origin of many of the proposals in the Bill. Paragraph 23 says:

"An accurate Register is vital. Without a trustworthy Register, there can be no secure confidence in the electoral system. At present, it is not absolutely clear how reliable the Register is. We do not share the confidence of the Interim Review Report that 'while there may be some scope for minor adjustments to the current system for the registration of electors in Northern Ireland, in actual terms the accuracy of the register is not seriously in question.' On the contrary, in our view the evidence indicates that there may be a serious level of multiple registration, at least in some parts of Northern Ireland."

The Minister will be enormously familiar with that, as he was a member of the Committee and signed up to its report, as did all the other members.

In addition to the Committee's statement, and no doubt influenced by it, there is the experience of the party of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), which undertook an exercise to identify pairs of people with the same name. The largest concentration found in Britain was 6,000, yet in a constituency in Northern Ireland—presumably Belfast, West—there were 18,000 people with the same name as somebody else. That is a serious ground for suspicion that there may be considerable multiple registration and illegal multiple voting.

There has been no evidence to challenge the Select Committee's conclusion in 1998:

"We acknowledge that registration in more than one place is a useful right for students and others."

We had that debate in Committee, and that was our conclusion, although the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) took a different view and thought that any form of multiple registration should be against the law. The Select Committee continued:

"Those who have a legitimate reason to register in two or more places should be allowed to do so, but should be under a duty to indicate that they are doing so and where the other registered addresses are."

In our previous debate, the hon. Members for South Down and for Belfast, East expressed reservations, but on this issue there is cross-community support. I hope that I am not prejudging the issue, but the remarks of the hon. Member for South Down in Committee and the fact that the hon. Members for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson) and for Belfast, East have put their names to new clause 2 make it clear that there is such support. I hope that I have correctly interpreted the remarks of the hon. Member for South Down in Committee at column 122.

The Government have an opportunity to reinforce an area in which there is welcome cross-community agreement. Our proposal gained the support of all the parties in Committee other than the Government. As he took the same view in 1998, I hope that the Minister, too, will offer us his support, as he suggested in Committee that he might. I look forward to his response.

If national insurance numbers were used on the register, which is the subject of our next debate, the new clause would not be needed, as we would then have a method whereby the register could be properly tested, but if the Government intend to resist the inclusion of national insurance numbers—which our Committee debate clearly suggested that they would—it becomes extremely important to address the issue by obliging voters to notify if they are registered in more than one place.

Mr. McGrady: Again, we are liable to repeat the arguments made in Committee, where the Minister said:

"I am coming to the view that there might be some value in including in a canvass return a question such as: 'Have you registered at another address or do you intend to register at another address?'"

The Minister added that, as the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) said:

"Since we shall be using individual canvass forms rather than household forms, that might have additional value. If the hon. Member for Reigate is prepared to withdraw his amendment, I shall undertake to consider that possibility between now and Report stage"—

that is, tonight. He continued:

"I shall consult with the parties in Northern Ireland, and with the chief electoral officer, and I shall come back with a clear position on Report. I am more persuaded now than I was before I listened to the debate."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 18 October 2001; c. 126.]

I hope that he will be, as we say in Northern Ireland, even more more persuaded after tonight's debate.

I believe that in response to some of my questions in Committee, the Minister suggested that it was a simple administrative matter to pose such a question on either the household or the individual registration form, whichever one we decide to have, and find out whether the person registering has registered at another address or addresses. I went on to suggest for the Minister's consideration that if that were the case, the would-be elector could simply say on the form which of the addresses he proposed to use in the election to which the new register would be germane. That is a simple administrative consideration, concerning the layout of the form. I would be interested to know whether the Minister has been further persuaded since our debate in the fourth sitting of Standing Committee D.

Lembit Öpik: I would oppose the new clause if it took away people's right to choose where to vote, but as it is formulated, it can be regarded only as a matter of common sense. After an election, it would help to work out much more quickly who is who and who has done what. We have already heard the strong rationale for making sure that we can "de-duplicate" potential multiple voters who have used different addresses. I, too, was encouraged that the Minister seemed to share this concern and, as the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said, gave a strong indication in Committee that he saw the sense of what is now being proposed in new clause 2.

We know that the Minister is passionate, as we all are, about getting rid of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. I also know that he, with his commitment to cross-community relations, will accept a good thing when he sees it, even if it originates from the Conservative party. *[Interruption.]* I could not resist saying that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is especially true if the idea has the support not only of Opposition Members but also of those who sit on the Government Benches. On the assumption that he will accept the amendment as a sensible and not very onerous addition to what we require of voters when they register, I thank him in advance for his good sense.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I join those who have confirmed that there was a consensus within the Committee that

requiring people who register to supply that further piece of information was not an onerous hardship to place on anybody. I do not think that it would do any violence to the Bill, or to the Minister, to insert it.

The Minister certainly did not consult me, as has been suggested. I can only assume that that means that he does not require any legislative force—

Mr. Browne: I myself signed letters to the leaders of all parties in Northern Ireland, so although I did not consult the hon. Gentleman himself, I wrote to the leader of his party. I know that the post was delivered, because the leader of the Alliance party responded to my letter. That is the only response that I have had.

6.45 pm

Lembit Öpik *rose—*

Mr. Browne: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, if he can contain himself.

My position has not changed from the position that I stated in Committee; it is not conditional on parties in Northern Ireland signing up to it. None the less, I wrote to all the parties in Northern Ireland at the same time.

Mr. Robinson: The House will judge whether that lives up to the expectation of the consultation that we were promised. I am surprised that the Minister could determine who the leader of the Alliance party was in order to send him the letter, so he must be congratulated on that.

The requirement would put little pressure on anybody filling out their registration form, and would supply information that would be useful in the electoral office for determining on the foot of the marked register whether people had voted illegally during an election. That information could also be used for the same purpose as some of us have suggested the national insurance number be used, if it were included as a further mechanism. It would allow us to look into multiple registration and multiple voting with a lot more information to hand.

It is right to say that in Committee I opposed both multiple registration and multiple voting. I did not express the same opposition in the Select Committee, for a reason that I explained in the Standing Committee. I said that I felt that in our proceedings on the Bill we had done much to overcome a number of the existing weaknesses in the system, but that as soon as we strengthened those parts of the system, we could be certain that the purposeful fraudsters would look to see where the new weaknesses were. If they do that, they will be thinking about multiple registration and multiple voting.

If that is the case, the Minister should, at the very least, identify those with multiple registration, because it would be an offence in itself not to fill in the form fully and properly. If the Minister is saying that he is not prepared to include the question on the registration form, I regret that. Is he saying that he is still looking at the issue, and has not ruled it out? He needs to satisfy the House on that issue.

I believe that the registration form should include the question, and I hope that the Minister can go further than he did in his intervention in meeting what seems a legitimate point of concern. It would not drive a coach and horses through the legislation.

Mr. Trimble: I shall not keep the Minister long, but will let him clarify his position. His body language earlier suggested that he would accept the idea, and I hope that he does. I shall simply express our support for the new clause, and say that I do not doubt what the Minister said when he intervened. Had I seen his letter, he would have received a positive response. Where the letter went is an interesting question.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said that the fraudsters, balked at one point, would move on to other areas, and he thought that multiple registration was one of those. The fraudsters also move on to entirely false registrations—registering the names of people who do not exist. The next set of amendments contain measures that try to cope with that problem.

7 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this vital debate, and to underline many of the points made by other hon. Members, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). I thank you, too, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to take part tonight.

I want to give my broad support to the Bill, but I have a number of specific concerns. After listening to the discussion so far, my greatest worry is the apparent weaknesses in the Bill. In so many areas, there appear to be loopholes and issues that are not being addressed in the way in which I believe most Members in the Chamber this evening would like them to be addressed.

In the past, there has clearly been much electoral fraud in Northern Ireland, and that will continue if checks are not introduced. That is not questioned on either side of the House tonight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I hesitate to stop the hon. Gentleman, but I wonder if he is making a Third Reading speech on the Bill in general. Is he speaking specifically to new clause 2?

Mr. Rosindell: Yes, if I may continue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One of the most significant deficiencies of the Bill is the failure to compel those registering to vote at more than one address to declare that information at the point of registration. The Government are right not to prevent individuals from registering at more than one address. Indeed, in many cases, doing so is necessary. For example, Members of Parliament probably register at their addresses in London and in their constituencies, which is a reasonable thing to do. However, the situation in Northern Ireland needs to be addressed. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate mentioned that some 18,000 names are registered twice on the same electoral register in the constituency of Belfast, West. That arouses many suspicions and therefore I hope that the Minister will consider supporting new clause 2.

The situation in Northern Ireland needs tightening up for many reasons, some of which have already been outlined. There is no evidence that simple monitoring alone will solve the problem. The system currently operates on trust and while that is acceptable for the majority of decent, law-abiding citizens who would not dream of trying to defraud the system, it allows for widespread abuse. A declaration from those registering to

[Mr. Rosindell]

vote about the number of addresses for which they intend to register would go far in clarifying those who are genuinely registering for multiple addresses and those who are not.

Some may argue that the system would not work, because declarations would be signed only by honest people, and those who sought to pervert the course of democracy would evade making them. Nevertheless, with the right level of efficient and competent administration and a good use of technology, declarations would provide clarity for those who are genuine multiple-address electors, leaving the chief electoral officer and his staff free to monitor and catch offenders. I hope that the Minister will reconsider the situation. The Bill has many holes, but I hope that he will address this specific problem.

Mr. Browne: I looked forward to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) revealing his thoughts on the many holes in the Bill, and he is welcome to the debate at this stage. One or two issues were considered in Committee and on Second Reading and, with respect, it is a gross misrepresentation of the Bill to describe it as the hon. Gentleman did.

In Committee, I gave an undertaking to discuss this issue with my officials and the chief electoral officer, to consult the political parties in Northern Ireland and to come back with a clear position on Report. I have not, in the short time since the Committee stage, been able to ascertain the views of all the Northern Ireland political parties, and it is important that I do so. As I said earlier, I wrote to the leaders of all Northern Ireland political parties, as far as I could ascertain them. Whether all those letters have been delivered is not my responsibility, but they were certainly sent and I have received one reply. It is incumbent on me to give the other leaders a reasonable time to respond, and we have not had much time between Committee and Report.

The hon. Members for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) are owed an apology. The circulation list for the letter was based on my contribution to the Committee on 18 October, recorded at column 126. Column 127, as the hon. Member for Reigate pointed out, includes a reference to the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats. They were not included, due to an administrative error, and for that I apologise. The error will be corrected tomorrow. Thanks to this debate, of course, I know what the Opposition's position is, but I will consult them as I agreed to do.

I am minded to agree with the chief electoral officer that a mandatory question on application to the electoral register, as suggested in new clause 2, would prove a useful tool in tracking multiple registration. However, I will resist the new clause as I do not believe that the penalty is proportionate to the failure to answer the question properly.

Furthermore, on advice, I believe that a question such as, "Have you registered at another address or do you intend to register at another address?" could be put to electors on application to the electoral register by regulation rather than by an amendment to the Bill. Under paragraph 1 of schedule 2 to the Representation of the People Act 1983, regulations may authorise the chief electoral officer to require persons to give information required for the purpose of his registration duties. Paragraph 13 enables regulations to make it an offence to fail to comply with, or to give false information in pursuance of, any such requisition of the registration officer as is mentioned in paragraph 1. The regulations may set a penalty not to exceed level 3 on the standard scale, which in Northern Ireland is £1,000.

Therefore, it is possible—I am happy to give an undertaking to do so, subject to the consultation with the political parties in Northern Ireland and with the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats—to give the chief electoral officer the power by regulation to ask people if they are registered at another address on their application for electoral registration. Any person knowingly giving false information would be subject to a fine not exceeding £1,000, which is consistent with the penalty that applies to giving false information on other forms.

Mr. Blunt: The Minister gives an undertaking subject to consultation with the political parties. Five of those parties are represented tonight, and hon. Members from three of them represent constituencies in Northern Ireland—and those are the three largest parties wholly committed to democracy in Northern Ireland, which is the subject of the debate. The Minister knows the views of those parties so why cannot he give the assurance in terms now?

Mr. Browne: Because there are other parties that are not represented in the House. If we are to change the electoral system, we should consult those parties. The hon. Gentleman knows who those parties are and he may not wish to consult one of them but, as a Minister, I have to consult them all. There are at least five other parties. I have written to their leaders, but I have not yet had a reply. Indeed, I have written to the leaders of the political parties represented in the House tonight and I have not had a reply.

Mr. Trimble: That is a coincidence.

Mr. Browne: The right hon. Gentleman earlier called into question my desire to see this matter through and is now, by implication, calling into question my honesty about the letters I have written. I have evidence that one of the letters received a reply, and that all the letters went out in the same post.

I am not concerned that I have not yet had replies from all the people to whom I wrote, but courtesy requires me to wait and allow them the opportunity to reply to me.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): We must clear this matter up, as hon. Members may have to decide how to vote on the amendment. No one has impugned the Minister's honesty, or the good faith in which he gave that assurance. We accept the apology that he has given to the House, but we are perhaps impugning the efficiency of his Department. We leave it to him to sort that out.

However, we have to draw the conclusion that the Minister is much more conscientious about consulting parties outside the House—a need that he has laboured at length—than about consulting parties in the House. I am sure that he would not want to take up such a perverse position.

If the Minister has not completed consultation with the parties that he has mentioned by the time that the Bill reaches another place, will he assure the House that the Government will not seek to block this amendment, or its equivalent, in the other place? I do not know on what date the Bill will be considered there, but will the Minister assure us that there will be no further obstacle to his issuing a regulation in accordance with the procedure that he has outlined?

Mr. Blunt: I am partly grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I will not have my own honesty impugned, and neither will I allow the efficiency of those who have served this process faithfully and well to be impugned in this House. Those people have worked very efficiently up to now, and that includes the way in which they have serviced requests from other parties on this matter. In fact, all letters were all faxed and posted on 25 October, and in my hand I have a copy of a reply, dated 29 October, that I have received from the leader of one of the parties.

An error was made in regard to the Conservative party. I have accepted responsibility for that, and apologised for it, but that error does not affect my view. The two parties affected by the error are represented in the House and have expressed their opinion on the matter.

Mr. Quentin Davies *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Browne: The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) appears irritated that I am replying to his intervention. I have apologised for the error, but that does not change the fact that I have written to a number of people for their views on this matter. Common courtesy requires that I give them a reasonable time to reply.

I anticipate that in a fortnight from today I shall have had a reasonable time in which to reach an informed decision based on the views of the Northern Ireland political parties. I shall then write to all the parties to which I have written previously—and to the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats—confirming what I intend to do. At the moment, I am minded to introduce the question by regulation. No one has yet advanced an argument as to why I should not do that, and I do not anticipate that such an argument will be advanced.

I am minded to act as I have described, but I have embarked on a process of consultation by letter, and common courtesy requires that I give the people to whom I have written the opportunity to reply.

Mr. Blunt: Clearly, this has not been a shining moment in the way that the matter has been handled by the Minister or his Department. I tabled a new clause in Standing Committee on the matter, and withdrew it when the Minister gave me an undertaking that he would consult me. I regarded that undertaking as an obligation, but I have accepted the Minister's apology in that regard.

However, the Minister also gave the Committee an undertaking that he would be able to clarify the position on Report, yet the letters were not signed out by the Minister's officials—or by the Minister himself—until a week after he gave that undertaking. It is therefore impossible for him to be able to say that his position, following consultation, is now clear. That is not acceptable.

Mr. Browne: My position is clear.

Mr. Blunt: The Minister, from a sedentary position, says that his position is clear. However, it is clear that he has yet to consult and come to a conclusion. That is certainly not the implication to be drawn from what the Minister told Standing Committee D, when he said:

"I give the Committee an undertaking to discuss the issue with my officials and the chief electoral officer and to consult the parties in Northern Ireland, the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats, if that is appropriate"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 18 October 2001; c. 127.]

I thought that the words "if that is appropriate" applied to the Minister's auxiliaries on the Liberal Democrat Benches, rather than to anyone else, but they now seem to apply to everyone.

I wish the debate to return to the co-operative and good humoured mood that has characterised most of our deliberations so far. I hope that the Minister will undertake to ensure that the regulation that he has promised will be formulated and proposed before the Bill is considered in another place. However, if by that time there is no sign that the Government are proposing a regulation that resolves the problem of multiple registration—the Minister has accepted the chief electoral officer's recommendation that there must be registration—we will revisit the matter in another place. I am certain that the support for the measure evident in all parties means that the necessary provision will appear in the Bill. If the Minister wanted to reverse that, he would have to return to this House to do so.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

REGISTRATION: PROVISION OF SIGNATURE AND DATE OF BIRTH

Mr. Blunt: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 10, after "completed", insert—

'(aa) the National Insurance number of each such person, if they have one'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments:

No. 7, in page 1, line 11, at end insert—

'and

(c) the national insurance number of each such person, if they have one.'.

No. 8, in page 2, line 9, at end insert—

'and

(c) the national insurance number of each such person, if they have one.'.

No. 2, in page 2, line 23, leave out—

'both his date of birth'

and insert—

'his date of birth, his national insurance number if applicable,'.

No. 9, in page 2, line 33, at end insert—

'and

(c) the national insurance number of each such person, if they have one.'.

No. 5, in clause 3, page 4, line 15, at end insert—

'(3A) In section 6 (absent vote at elections for an indefinite period) and in section 7 (absent vote at a particular election), there is inserted at the end of paragraph (1)(c) the words—

", which shall include the date of birth and the national insurance number of the applicants, if applicable".'.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

No. 6, in Title, line 2, after "signatures", insert ", national insurance numbers.".

Mr. Blunt: Amendment No. 1 is designed to assist the Minister to return to the conclusion that he and his colleagues on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee reached in 1997. He was not at that time burdened by the cares of office, nor by the need to negotiate with the Treasury to ensure that the necessary resources are available for the actions that he has promised.

This group of amendments is the most important to be debated this evening. In relation to the previous group of amendments, I hope that we shall in the end learn the considered position of five of the six parties involved in the Standing Committee. The Minister will know, however, that all the Northern Ireland parties support the proposal that people should supply their national insurance numbers when they apply to join the electoral register in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Barnes: Some members of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs adopted a position that was not a knock-down argument in favour of this amendment. Had they not done so, I assume that the amendments that I tabled earlier would have been supported by the Opposition spokesman.

Mr. Blunt: Of course, unlike the Minister, I was not a member of that Select Committee and did not take part in its proceedings. I am perhaps therefore not entirely bound by the terms adopted by that Committee and do not feel a loyalty to them. But in connection with the first group of amendments—which would have required that everyone in Northern Ireland had an electoral identity card—I paid tribute to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) for his clarity, and for his consistency in sticking to the Select Committee's conclusions. I am therefore puzzled that the hon. Gentleman appears now to be inconsistent in his stance on national insurance numbers. He may of course have been influenced by the debates. The Government widened the membership of the Committee to include representatives from the SDLP and the DUP, which was extremely welcome. However, it meant that the Committee was, unusually in this Parliament, on a knife edge. On that occasion, every party except the Labour party supported making national insurance numbers a requirement to register. The majority in Committee was only nine to eight. The hon. Gentleman's vote was clearly of immense significance to the Government.

Paragraph 58 of the 1998 Select Committee says:

"Registration forms should contain more identifying details to overcome the problem of illicit multiple registration and to make fraudulent applications in another's name harder. These should include date of birth, a signature and the National Insurance number of the voter."

The Select Committee was heavily influenced by the evidence of Mr. Pat Bradley, who had been a chief electoral officer in Northern Ireland for nearly 17 years when he came before the Committee and who was clearly an expert. I should like to quote his responses to questions from the hon. Members for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs). When asked by the hon. Member for South Down about his canvassers collecting and confirming information for putting the register together, Mr. Bradley replied:

"The officers collect the data from each household. They collect the information on the registration form. They are not able to confirm the information—and that is what the system is set up for at the present time—or to turn round and be convinced on the spot that each person on that form has shown to the canvasser some sort of documentation to show they are who they claim to be and they live there. If you like, that is the weakness of the system, the fact that it is the householder's responsibility for putting down the names of those who are eligible and that information is then taken on board."

The hon. Member for East Antrim then asked Mr. Bradley:

"Would the inclusion of National Insurance numbers, which are individual to everyone, not help that situation for your records?"

Mr. Bradley replied:

"I would welcome either a National Insurance number or a date of birth, and that is common in many countries."

His next point was crucial:

"If one has the two parameters, i. e. the date of birth and National Insurance, it is a very easy matter to run a search through the computer database and that would solve the problem and I would welcome that very much. It would make life much easier and reduce the scope for abuse considerably."

We had a lengthy debate about this in Committee. Indeed, the subject took up the whole of the Committee's first sitting, at the end of which the Minister replied to the Committee. I do not think that he convinced himself. Indeed, he was so unconvinced by his own arguments that he returned in the afternoon to put forward further objections to including national insurance numbers. I will deal with these in turn, and if I am being unfair about the arguments I am attributing to the Minister I hope he will correct me.

The Minister's first argument was that people do not know their national insurance number or how to find it out. That argument does not stand up to analysis. The Minister was particularly concerned about the elderly. Elderly people receive pensions and therefore have their national insurance number immediately to hand in their pension book.

In the process of registration, canvassers call at people's houses up to three times to get the information. The Minister shakes his head, but I received that information directly from the chief electoral officer. People have up to three weeks, if not longer, to complete the forms. To argue that people are unable to obtain their national insurance number in that period does not stand up. There are any number of forms of assistance open to them if they are unable to do so.

7.15 pm

The Minister also argued that people who did not pay tax or receive benefits might not have a national insurance number. He gave the example of a student who had come back from South Africa. The fact that the Minister was having to grub around for such examples showed a degree of desperation in his attempts to convince the Committee of the merits of his argument. My amendments and those in the name of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) address the matter by saying that the very few people who do not have a national insurance number cannot be required to give it. They hardly represent an overwhelming number of electors.

The Minister argued that a chief electoral officer had to check records held at the Treasury, where all the national insurance numbers for the United Kingdom are held. He said that members of the Committee might say that that could be resolved and that no doubt, in terms of computer technology, it could be. We all say that, and as the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said, sifting Northern Ireland national insurance numbers would hardly be at the cutting edge of technology. To find a software programme that would distinguish between the national insurance numbers of people registered in Northern Ireland and those of the rest of the United Kingdom would not be terribly difficult.

Mr. Barnes: It would not solve the problem entirely, because people are entitled to move from Britain to Northern Ireland. Presumably it would be difficult to find their registration numbers during that period.

Mr. Blunt: That was one argument. The Minister was adducing arguments under data protection legislation that it would be inappropriate for the chief electoral officer of Northern Ireland to search the whole United Kingdom database. I do not see why it is remotely inappropriate for the chief electoral officer to search the whole United Kingdom database to check that a national insurance number belongs to the person who has claimed it. In the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman describes, that would indeed be appropriate. I was trying to address the arguments that the Minister put forward later. The last refuge of a Minister in trouble when proposals are being made to simplify and clarify the system is the argument that there are problems under the data protection legislation.

Mr. Barnes: It may well be reasonable to argue that all the United Kingdom national insurance registration numbers can be investigated and discovered, but it shifts the ground. The hon. Gentleman argued earlier that all one would need to do would be to look at the Northern Ireland numbers.

Mr. Blunt: Both arguments hold good. If the Minister says that it is inappropriate to check the whole register of national insurance numbers—that is his argument, not mine—it is perfectly possible to separate them. However, I do not see why it should be a problem to check the national insurance numbers of the whole of the United Kingdom.

The Minister's next argument concerned practicality. He said that whether the issue could be resolved against the deadlines the Government and others had set for the changes was a different matter. The deadline is of the Minister's own making. We have just had a debate about deadlines and he has so far refused to be bound by them. He has not been prepared to put one in the Bill. Had he done so, there might be a modicum of merit in his argument. Even then, I do not think that there would be when it comes to deadlines.

Checking national insurance numbers is simply a question of passing the necessary legislation, complying with the Data Protection Acts if necessary, and having the computer capacity to enable the chief electoral officer to undertake the checks. There is no reason why national insurance numbers cannot be put on the return that people have to complete.

The Minister's argument about data protection is the final refuge of people who oppose simplifying any of our bureaucracy. I do not accept that the data protection legislation would necessarily apply if the software program were written so as to include only national insurance numbers in Northern Ireland. If, as he suggested, primary legislation were necessary to effect that change and include the numbers as part of the process, that should be enacted.

I assure the Minister that he would have the wholehearted support of the Opposition to achieve that objective. There is no reason why such legislation could not be put in place to make the register as reliable as it must be. If the register is unreliable and we do not get it right, there will be a question mark over the conduct of democracy in Northern Ireland. We attended to those arguments in Committee, where the hon. Member for South Down made it clear that the future of Northern Ireland and the development of politics there were being affected by electoral fraud. At some stage, there may be referendums on the future status of Northern Ireland. Under the present arrangements, an individual vote can carry huge weight in local elections and can decide which parties will represent people on councils.

In Committee, the Minister did not even convince himself with his own rhetoric. There is cross-community support for this proposal. The hon. Member for Belfast, East was in alliance with the hon. Member for South Down and united with the Ulster Unionist party, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives.

The amendments can only further the aims of the legislation. They are aims that the Minister and everyone in the House shares—tackling electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. In the main, the Minister has conducted himself with grace during the passage of the Bill. If he wishes to spare himself embarrassment in another place, I hope that he will have the grace to accept these amendments.

Mr. McGrady: As the mover of the amendment, the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), said, my party and I have supported the inclusion of national insurance numbers as a form of identification for all electoral purposes—registration, postal voting and, in the appropriate circumstances, casting votes. The reason is simple. We understood the national insurance number to be unique to each individual and to be universal. Including that identification number on a registration form would enable other counter-checking measures to be used in the fulness of time. We would have three telling personal identification details—the date of birth, the signature and the national insurance number—all or some of which could be a means of identifying a fraudster.

The difficulty is that national insurance numbers are not universal, as the Minister explained well in Committee, which was an instruction to me. He gave some strange examples, one of which has been referred to—the teenage girl returning for education from South Africa. I confess that in the short time since our debate in Committee, I have searched my constituency for a childless French woman who has never worked or received benefit. I am not unoptimistic that I will achieve my objective, with all sorts of consequences perhaps in due course, but to date I have failed to identify such people.

The difference between the debates in Committee and this evening is that the amendment states that national insurance numbers should be used when they are

[Mr. McGrady]

available. I will not go into the cause and effect, but that is a reasonable proposition. In some genuine cases, they may not be available to people—by that I mean that they do not have such a number, not that they do not know it.

In my simplicity, I understood that every boy and girl was issued with a number at the age of 16. I may be wrong. I do not know how long the system has been in vogue, but it must be some considerable time—at least a decade. People who do not have a number must not have a pension and must never have worked, paid tax or filled in a tax return. That narrows the gap considerably.

The proposals in the amendments would seem to allow an exception for people who genuinely do not have a national insurance number—be they returning expatriates or European or Asian men or women who have not worked but have come to reside and at times to vote in Northern Ireland, where they are most welcome. It would not be an onerous task for the electoral officer, when he receives such an application, to see that the person seeking registration has not got a national insurance number and to telephone to find out why. One could ascertain the validity or the invalidity of the reason.

The important thing is that the majority of people—perhaps 97 per cent. or 98 per cent., although that is pure guesswork—have a national insurance number. It is an individual identifier, it is held on a common database and it is readily available to everyone on all sorts of documents that are carried daily—a tax form, a pension book and, I think, the Translink card, although I am not sure yet.

Using national insurance numbers would offer a great opportunity to create a significant database for the electoral system. At this stage, we cannot use signatures. They will not be digitised for some time. However, that does not prevent us from seeking the information. Initially, it will be used for the postal vote comparisons, which will presumably be manual until computers have the necessary sophistication.

We would be building a database. The national insurance database is enormous and can be checked, and I think that it would throw up any irregularities, which is all that we are concerned about. I am sure that we could cope with that with relative ease using computer technology. For that reason, I support the inclusion of national insurance numbers in the information given at registration, which can then be deployed for other purposes. The amendments propose a pardon for people who do not, for good reason, have a national insurance number. A simple inquiry would resolve that problem, which wipes out most of the arguments for not including the numbers as a personal identifier.

Lembit Öpik: I could say that of all the debates in Committee, this was the most weakly argued by the Government, but I am a positive chap and I will say instead that of all the debates it is the one that provides the Minister with a shining opportunity to demonstrate the listening ear of the Government. I am sure that he is all ears as he listens to this debate and will show, once again, that the Government are primarily interested in doing the right thing rather than offering what at times seem to be specious arguments and setting their face against a common-sense proposal that is recommended by Northern Ireland parties on a cross-community basis, as well as by the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats.

Despite a long debate in Committee, the Minister failed to convince anyone—apart perhaps from himself and some of the loyalists in his party—that the argument against the inclusion of national insurance numbers was reasonable—*[Interruption.]* I realise that I may have just offended some loyalists and I apologise for doing so.

7.30 pm

The arguments have already been set out clearly by previous speakers in the debate, but I have some brief points to add. The restrictions of the Data Protection Acts have been cited as a reason why the Government cannot include national insurance numbers. However, it would indeed be ironic if legislation to protect the public from corruption actually prevented the Government from introducing an electoral measure that would also protect the public from corruption in the form of electoral fraud. I do not believe that that is a reasonable argument behind which to hide. The Data Protection Acts were introduced to help us, not to hinder us. Certainly it cannot be strategically beyond the wit of the Government and their employees to ensure that the legislation is not a barrier to the change that we propose.

There was reference to the possibility of needing to check through 50 million or 60 million national insurance numbers. As the Minister knows, any computer could do that job in seconds—or minutes at most. That would not be a restriction. Furthermore, with a little creative thinking it would be easy to establish a list of those who were eligible to vote in Northern Ireland. The use of a tactical, technical defence to oppose the strategically important proposal to use national insurance numbers as a unique identifier does not stand up to scrutiny.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) gave us an entertaining description of his research to show the small number of people who might be in the same category as the student whose family moved to South Africa—the example used by the Minister. An even more extraordinary example was that of the childless French woman, who was not working, not claiming benefit and was married to a Northern Ireland resident.

Mr. Browne: It got a laugh.

Lembit Öpik: Yes, but the point is that we would know that fraudsters were using that approach because there would suddenly be a huge rise in the number of childless French women who were not working or claiming benefit, were married to Northern Ireland residents and were attempting to vote in elections in Northern Ireland. Once there were so many obstacles to cheating the system, the fraudsters might take the radical step of campaigning on the streets, handing out leaflets and canvassing rather than finding such exotic and elaborate means to continue their electoral fraud.

The Government have an opportunity to help themselves through the amendment. They should not regard the cross-community support for the proposed change as being based on a wish to beat the Minister into submission or as suggesting that he is not committed to doing the right thing. However, as we debate this point, it becomes increasingly difficult for those of us who support the use of national insurance numbers to understand the substantive opposition to the inclusion in Northern Ireland elections of what amounts to a human

bar code. There really seems to be no more reliable means than the national insurance number to ensure that each person has a single, unique identifier. It already exists and does not need to be created especially for the election.

If the Minister has come up with genuinely new and significant arguments, I am sure that we could be persuaded by them. However, he has had a substantial amount of time, in Committee and afterwards, to explain the reasons for the Government's resistance to the inclusion of national insurance numbers.

With a little effort, everyone can find out their national insurance number pretty easily. They do not need to keep repeating—

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): What is yours?

Lembit Öpik: I am being challenged to read my number, but obviously I would not like to see it in *Hansard* as it might cause me unforeseen problems—people might forget my name and would just refer to me by my national insurance number. However, I assure the hon. Lady that if the matter was important enough, I could leave the Chamber and find out my national insurance number, even though I was not prepared for that question. Furthermore, I am sure that for individuals in their own homes who are willing to play an honest and constructive part in the electoral process in Northern Ireland, such a matter would be no more difficult than it would be for me.

I remind right hon. and hon. Members that the change is not being proposed as a blanket, all-pervading necessity. The amendments allow for the fact that it may not be possible to provide a national insurance number. I appeal to the Minister to acknowledge that the amendment is a common-sense proposal that has significant support from both sides of the House, and to show that the Government are willing to listen to sensible ideas and, in the process, ensure that Northern Ireland has a much more reliable system than anything we have so far debated for checking that individuals are who they say they are.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I am sure that the whole House realises that the electors of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) have much for which to be thankful in having a Member who is so dedicated in his pursuit of issues that arise in Committee. Where that research might lead the hon. Gentleman, should he discover the person he seeks, only he can tell us. However, although he might have enjoyed that aspect of the Committee's business, I doubt that the Minister is enjoying this moment.

The Minister has been squirming for some time as we have debated the amendment—and so he should. He had a difficult time in Committee because his past was brought up, dragged before the Committee and thoroughly inspected. Once, the Minister was open minded; he was a free thinker who was allowed to reach conclusions based on his own judgment, but now he bears the heavy burden of office. Now, he has his civil servants around him. Now, he has the benefit—enjoyed by many—of having others to prepare the words he has to utter at the Dispatch Box.

The reality is that when the Minister was able to consider in the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs the merits and demerits of proposals such as those in the amendment, he knew where the argument lay. He knew on which side the weight and burden of the issue came down. He concluded—as did everyone on the Select Committee, even those of his colleagues who are also in denial tonight—that the right thing to do was to include the national insurance number on the registration form.

The Select Committee was not alone in reaching that conclusion. Others held the same view. The Northern Ireland Forum set up a committee to consider the issue and made the same recommendation, realising that the proposal made good sense. The Northern Ireland Office published a review paper which noted that it was worth investigating the inclusion of the number on the form. The paper went even further, by proposing not only that the number should be on the registration form but that people could be asked to give it at the polling station. That is a step beyond my proposal in the Standing Committee and that in the amendment. The proposal is much more moderate than that which the Minister and others have been prepared to align themselves with in the past.

In the past, people have considered and judged the proposal and found it worthy of merit, but on this occasion it has found the fulsome support of every Opposition party in the House. It managed to unite all the Northern Ireland parties in Committee, and I presume in the House as well. I thought that it was Government policy to achieve cross-community support. If such a consensus were achieved on any other issue, the Minister would almost die for it, yet here he has the Northern Ireland parties jumping up and down in front of him and he waves the proposal away; he does not want it. Why is it that when the Minister has, on a Northern Ireland issue, the Northern Ireland parties all saying, "Go in this direction!" he decides to turn his back and go another way?

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The hon. Gentleman is posing a puzzle to the House. He suggests that the Minister, when he was a Back Bencher, was a seeker after truth and that the burdens of office have borne down on him and he has changed his mind. Might it not be that he is still a seeker after truth and that, as a Minister, he sought the advice of his colleagues in the Government and they said, "Above all you must not concede this amendment; the national insurance scheme is in chaos, but you cannot admit that in the House because some English Members also hold that view, and would like to hear it expressed from the Treasury Bench so that they may use it in campaigning to secure the national insurance system so that it is a safeguard of people's identity and can be used in a way that people on both sides of the House tonight wish it to be used in Northern Ireland"?

Mr. Robinson: The House has heard what the right hon. Gentleman said. Given the right hon. Gentleman's history, I am sure that the Minister will want to be not only a seeker but a teller of the truth, and will want to respond to what has been said. The question is more for the Minister than for me, so I will pass it back to him and listen eagerly to his reply.

As the hon. Member for South Down said, the national insurance number is a unique identifier. Unlike the signature, unlike the name, unlike the date of birth, it is one for which there is a database, and it is something that can be extracted by the chief electoral officer to identify instances of multiple registration. If the chief electoral officer sees the name of John Murphy in the register half a dozen times in a street or an area, he has no real way of determining whether it is the same John Murphy, but

[Mr. Robinson]

if the national insurance number is to be given, very quickly he will be able to determine whether there has been a multiple registration by the same person and whether action needs to be taken. If the marked register is examined and it is found that someone with the same national insurance number has voted several times, it will identify where multiple voting has taken place, perhaps illegally in the context of anything other than a local government election. The mechanism will allow cross-checking to take place.

Re-reading the report of our debate in Committee, I was led to believe that the Minister's response did not amount to much more than what in Northern Ireland we refer to as waffle. There was no real substance to the argument that he attempted to marshal against ours. After he had had lunch and a regrouping—no doubt of those civil servants who give him advice, of whatever variety—the Minister came up with two points. One was that not everyone has a national insurance number, but he did not say how small was the group that did not have one, and he did not quite overcome the problem that we had posed by suggesting that the question on the form could end with the words "(if any)". It seems to me that no one will be punished if they do not have a national insurance number and do not write it on the form. The words "(if any)" appear elsewhere on the registration form, and it would not be inappropriate to insert them in this instance if there was any problem with people not having a national insurance number.

7.45 pm

The second defence that the Minister put up was that not everyone can remember, or find, their national insurance number. The answer to that was simple. Potential electors will not be asked to fill out a form on the doorstep. A matter of weeks will pass between receipt of the form and the date by which it must be submitted, and that will allow people plenty of time to discover their national insurance number.

The defences put up by the Minister in Committee did not have much substance, so I hoped that he would reflect on the position and be prepared to meet the whole of the Opposition on the matter on Report. I hoped that he would be able to concede to the wish of the parties in Northern Ireland, and I regret it if, as his earlier remarks suggest, he intends to continue to resist it.

I hope that the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) will press the amendment to a Division. I believe that in future the Minister will look back at that Division and be saddened that he allowed himself to be whipped by his civil servants into taking the stand that he is taking. I know that it is not his own inclination. I know his true inclination because I shared with him those amendments in the Select Committee when, in comradeship, we went down the same road together, and I hope that once again, when he has the opportunity to be freer in the way that he acts and speaks in the House, he might return to his former principled position.

Mr. Barnes: The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) has had some good fun at the expense of my hon. Friend the Minister, because my hon. Friend now adopts a different position from that which he signed up to in the Select Committee report—a report which I also signed. If the hon. Member for Belfast, East is so keen on consistency with the Select Committee report, it is unfortunate that when he was given an opportunity to support my amendments Nos. 18 and 19, which were taken from that report, he did not do so. I do not really condemn him for that because people's ideas alter according to their experiences. My position may have changed since I signed the Select Committee report; the Minister's certainly has.

I am keen on the argument that there should be an identifier, such as a national insurance number. It might be the case that the smaller the nation, the easier it is to sort things out. In Malta, which has identity cards, the identity card number appears on the electoral register. Moreover, a card is issued to an elector, through the police, at each election, and is handed in when people vote. A fresh card is issued afterwards. Therefore, it is possible to develop techniques that make use of good organisation in order to tackle some of these problems.

In Committee I expressed concern—and was taken to task by the hon. Member for Belfast, East—when the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) accepted that the national insurance system was less than perfect. How much less than perfect is it? If some people give their national insurance numbers and their numbers are not confirmed within the system or are not seen to be those that are supposed to relate to them, those people can be disfranchised, or temporarily disfranchised, until the problem is sorted out.

Mr. Blunt: The national insurance system might be in chaos, as the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said, but the suggestion is not that people have no national insurance number, but that they have more than one. That is what needs to be sorted out. Any check of the cross-reference, such as that suggested by the hon. Gentleman, in which the correct national insurance number was included, would almost certainly involve a cross-check to that person.

Mr. Barnes: My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) suggested that the national insurance system was in chaos. If that were correct, there would be many serious problems in using the system as a check. If the chaos merely involves people having more than one number, it might be possible to sort out the problem if records are kept showing all the different numbers. Something that lies between being less than perfect and being chaos may be the type of problem we have to consider. If problems exist with national insurance numbers, there is a difficulty with the amendment. In Committee, the hon. Member for Reigate alerted me to that.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): All the Opposition parties view the date of birth system proposed by the Government as inadequate. We have a better system—the national insurance system. Surely it is better to use that system, even though it is flawed to an extent, than to rely on a date of birth system, which most Opposition Members believe to be inadequate?

Mr. Barnes: I understand that signatures and dates of birth will be used, and it is being proposed that national insurance numbers should be added. The date of birth is

relevant because electors will be asked their dates of birth in addition to having to show their cards when they turn up at polling stations. Some people might get that wrong and some people might be disfranchised as a result, but that is very unlikely. It is much more likely that there would be difficulties with national insurance numbers.

People would have to complete forms and provide their national insurance numbers, signatures and dates of birth, and the one that they would be liable to get wrong is their national insurance number, so the electoral returning officer would have to return to the constituents to check whether an error had been made. When looking at national insurance forms and details and writing them down, how many people would get them wrong, especially in households where several people have to do that? Even if only 1 or 2 per cent. of the population get those numbers wrong, those people would be disfranchised, or they would have serious problems.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East was eloquent in saying that he did not want a system that actually disfranchised people who were entitled to be on registers, and I am keen not to introduce a measure that would remove people from the franchise.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The hon. Gentleman is skating on such thin ice that he could drown at any moment. The logical extension of his argument is that the Government should never produce any sort of form in case people fill it in wrongly. His argument is nonsense on stilts.

Mr. Barnes: The Bill deals with voting arrangements, not the others things in which Governments engage. If people apply to the Benefits Agency for benefits and fill in their national insurance numbers wrongly, it is possible to go back to them to get the correct numbers, and it may also be possible to use other records to find the right numbers. That will not be so readily and easily the case with electoral registration. Under electoral registration law, people have a right to be on the registers, and they are technically subject to a £1,000 fine if they are not. That is a fundamental building block of our democracy, and we must ensure that, whatever system we use, we do not disfranchise people even though we are doing other beneficial things. Much in the Bill will get rid of fraud but, as the hon. Member for Belfast, East said, we cannot get rid of fraud at the expense of removing people who are on registers legitimately.

Mr. Andrew Turner: The hon. Gentleman made that point extensively in Committee. I was not convinced then and I am not convinced now—and so far as I can tell, neither is any other Opposition Member. He has not established why it is impossible for the returning officer to go back to those who may have made a mistake and ask them to check. Will he explain precisely why that is so impossible?

Mr. Barnes: If 1 or 2 per cent. of the electorate are involved, the electoral registration officer would be involved in quite a task. He would have to contact people directly himself, or he would have to send canvassers or other people around to discover information about the small number of people who have been missed. Those people are likely to be among those who are also expected to choose identity cards. We would be in danger of creating a group of people who would be deprived and depressed in society. They would find it difficult to obtain identity cards, or they may not be keen to do so. They may be the very people who would get such information and details wrong.

We should not make the system too complicated. I wanted to make it universal, so that everyone would be involved and have to get a card to vote, but that could be achieved without the problems that the amendment would involve. I am simply saying that it is not beyond peradventure and absolutely clear that that system would work in the way that some of us, with our naive nature, and having listened to Mr. Bradley addressing the Committee, believe that it could.

Lembit Öpik: First, does the hon. Gentleman accept that the system will involve a big job just once—the first time that everyone has to fill in the form—and that that is a small price to pay to reduce fraud? Secondly, will he note that the amendments states, "if they have one", so we do not want to change the national insurance system? We would merely create a data collection expectation, and the task would diminish massively when we had completed it once.

Mr. Barnes: Fresh people will appear on the registers, so they will have to go through the system themselves. Perhaps it would be easier to work with young people who come into contact with their national insurance numbers and their electoral registration rights for the first time, and perhaps few difficulties would occur. People move in and out of Northern Ireland from the Republic and are entitled to vote—and from Great Britain as well. So such a system would not be automatically ready and easy.

I am in favour of modernised electoral registration systems that use all types of new technology. That is why I advocate the rolling register, and we have something like a stopping, standing still and crawling register, which has improved things. However, there is still a tremendous amount to be done, but much of that has to be done on a United Kingdom basis, and I believe that it should be tied in with identity cards, so that we could operate a nice clear system. I am worried that we may spatchcock some ideas on to the existing arrangements and that that will not work well.

Mr. Trimble: I wish to put a couple of things on record. First, my colleagues and I fully support the amendment, and if it is pressed to a Division, we will support it. It is a sensible measure, and we note the strength of support for it on both sides of the House. I shall return to that point later.

8 pm

In Committee, the Minister pleaded that one reason for not accepting the proposal was that some people do not have national insurance numbers. However, I draw Members' attention to the question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs), who asked

"how many and what percentage of United Kingdom citizens have a National Insurance number"?

[Mr. Trimble]

The Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), replied:

"The vast majority of the approximate 48 million UK adult population have a National Insurance number".—[*Official Report*, 30 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 643W.]

Therefore, most people are covered by the requirement.

I express my disappointment at the way in which the Government are conducting business. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) focused his comments on the Minister and on the inconsistency between his past and present positions. However, the Minister is a member of the Government and he is now adopting their position. I am disappointed at their approach because when the measure was first suggested, we strongly expressed the view that although particular provisions were good in themselves, the Bill needed to be strengthened.

The Government assured us that they would give us a sympathetic response if we came forward with proposals that were, in particular, supported by both sides of the House and the main parties in Northern Ireland. If arguments against the amendment had carried any weight in Committee or in this debate, I could have understood the Government's reasons for rejecting it. However, we are faced with their stock response. They have published the Bill and decided to put up the shutters by fighting any amendment tooth and nail, irrespective of the merits of the argument.

The merits of the argument are clear. I greatly respect the hon. Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and I know that he has done much good work. He made a valiant attempt to defend the Government's position, but I am afraid that although we give him credit for doing so, he was not convincing.

Mr. Barnes: I am not sure whether the terminology is appropriate given the position in Northern Ireland, but I am not usually considered to be a Labour loyalist.

Mr. Trimble: Indeed, and I notice that, at the end of his comments, the hon. Gentleman came towards what will be the eventual solution, namely, an identity card system. I am sure that, in time, we will come to that, but how long will the luddites in the Home Office and the Northern Ireland Office prevent us from moving towards that solution?

It is ironic that the current national insurance number system developed out of compulsory wartime identity cards. As the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) suggested, over the years that system may have fallen into confusion and may need to be overhauled completely. That overhaul will come when we move to a nationwide system of compulsory identity cards—the issue can be resolved then.

I do not wish to delay our proceedings, because I know that other Members wish to speak. I simply wish to put on the record the fact that we support the amendment. I have read the Committee debates and I have not seen any reason why we should not. The House has had a little fun at the Minister's expense, but he could put an end to that and do himself and the Government much credit by undertaking seriously to consider our proposal.

Mr. Andrew Turner: The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) spoke eloquently in Committee about the nature of elections in Northern Ireland. It is well worth repeating some of his sentiments, to explain—particularly to those outside the House—the widespread support for the amendment.

For some political parties, elections in Northern Ireland have for many years been an extension of the armed struggle. They are now a substitute for the armed struggle. They are militarised and they are conducted by men with guns who will fight, intimidate, bully, kneecap and sometimes murder to make sure that people turn out to vote in the way that those men want—not once, not twice, but as many times as they can get them to the polling station in whatever guise they can be bullied into adopting. That is the nature of an election in Northern Ireland, so it is no surprise that the turnout in elections there is continually high: it is the result of widespread militarised fraud conducted by paramilitaries.

It is splendid that the Government have introduced a Bill which at last attempts to tackle the problem of fraud in Northern Ireland elections. One party in particular undertakes such fraud. It is trying to squeeze out the party of the hon. Member for South Down, and it is in danger of doing so.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a general speech rather than addressing his remarks to the amendment.

Mr. Turner: I thank you for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall move straight to the amendment, but I wanted to put it in context. I thank you for your indulgence in permitting me to do so.

The amendment would prevent people as far as possible from registering twice when they were not entitled to do so. For example, they might register two different versions of the same name, or the same name in two or three different locations. They might even register in the same name at the same address, in the expectation that the returning officer or his assistants could be persuaded that there was an older and a younger man—or an older or younger woman—of the same name at the same address.

The amendment would require that when people registered to vote, they not only furnished their signature, date of birth and name and address but provided their national insurance number. A national insurance number is a unique identifier. There may not be many Lembit Öpiks in Montgomeryshire; there may be more Harry Barneses in North-East Derbyshire; there is certainly more than one Andrew Turner on the Isle of Wight; and I wager that there are many Peter Robinsons in Northern Ireland. However, the national insurance number is a unique identifier that the returning officer can use to check against the name.

If there were no unique identifier or the name did not match the national insurance number, the returning officer could undertake further inquiries. The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) objected to that because he felt it might prevent people from registering in time for an election. However, in these days of a rolling register, it takes just 30 days between filling in the form and appearing on the register. Except in the most extraordinary circumstances, that should be time enough to allow any returning officer furnished with the right resources to check whether the applicant for registration does or does not exist.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) ably related the proposal's history. The Select Committee on which the Minister sat agreed that such a provision was necessary. The hon. Gentleman changed his mind at some point before the Bill was drafted, and he explained his reasons in the Committee that considered it. They were feeble. He said that the difficulties involved in recalling a national insurance number at the time of registration might make it more difficult for people to register. He said that, on balance, it was unwise to proceed with the proposal.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate said, the Committee was so unconvinced—and more important, I suspect the Minister was so unconvinced—that the Minister went away and, between lunchtime and the beginning of the afternoon sitting, came up with new reasons. But they were not reasons to exclude the national insurance numbers proposal from the Bill. He had already given those reasons which, as I have said, he recognised were feeble. All the Northern Ireland parties supported an amendment similar to this in Committee, as did the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats, and although it was defeated, I do not believe that the arguments were defeated.

The only mildly constitutional party—if I can use that phrase—from Northern Ireland that opposes the inclusion of national insurance numbers chooses not to be represented in the House, and it is the greatest beneficiary of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. It is a scandal that its wish is being pushed through by the Government in the Bill against the advice of all the constitutional parties of Northern Ireland and the people whom they represent, who have suffered so long at the hands of the bullies, gunmen and terrorists whom Sinn Fein represent.

A date of birth can be duplicated, a signature may be inconsistent and names are frequently repeated, but a national insurance number cannot usually be duplicated. The amendment makes provision even for that tiny minority who do not possess a national insurance number. It would also enable greater scrutiny of postal votes. As we know, many people apply fraudulently for postal votes in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire repeated the assertion of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) that the national insurance system is in chaos. The Government have not relied on that argument yet, and unless they are prepared to do so, I see no reason why the House should reject the amendment.

Mr. Hoban: The amendments would allow the use of national insurance numbers. That would add a great deal more protection to the integrity of the electoral system in Northern Ireland than the measures set out in the Bill. The vast majority of people have national insurance numbers. They are a prerequisite for paying tax and obtaining benefits. National insurance numbers are probably the most complete and easily accessible record of adults in the United Kingdom that we have, and we should not dismiss them lightly. I look forward to hearing the Minister's arguments on why he opposes the amendment because the arguments of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) did not persuade many hon. Members.

It is right to collect the numbers at the time of the canvass and cross-check them against the national insurance database prior to publication of the draft electoral roll. It is an important check on the validity of the voter's identification. I believe that there is sufficient time between the canvass and the publication of the register to undertake a proper check.

We should consider three questions in connection with the registration phase: will people know their national insurance number or have access to it; what happens if an elector does not have a national insurance number; and how will we manage access by the chief electoral officer to the national insurance database? Most people either know their national number or have access to it. I cannot say offhand what mine is, but I know that it is on my P60 and my payslip. People who receive benefits will know their national insurance number from their records. The argument that people do not know their number is neither watertight nor valid.

8.15 pm

What happens in the rare instances when people do not have a national insurance number? I have seen the examples that the Minister gave in Committee. Some people may not have a national insurance number, but we will have enough time to go back to them to establish why. I appreciate that, in the first year of the register, additional time may be spent checking out people's arguments, but once the register is in place—it will have a relatively small turnover from year to year, and relatively few people will lack national insurance numbers—the practical long-term arguments against checking them out make that concern invalid.

On how we manage access by the chief electoral officer to the national insurance database, we have heard about the restrictions that the Data Protection Act 1998 places on access, and about the swathe of data to which he will have access and whether or not that will be irrelevant. Notwithstanding the myriad problems that seem to affect information technology projects commissioned by Governments, it is not beyond the wit of man to cross-check national insurance numbers against a database. It would be helpful if the database of national insurance numbers could cross-refer to the computerised records of tax and benefits. That would allow us to check not just the national insurance number and its uniqueness and validity, but the address that is given on the electoral registration form, so we can ascertain that it is the same.

I do not accept the argument that the Minister used in Committee. He said the law would have to be changed, which would not be feasible in the time scale. In response to the events of 11 September, Departments have moved quickly in recent weeks to the pressing need to change legislation.

The amendments offer a powerful way to improve the integrity of the electoral voting system in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister will not simply say no and employ flimsy arguments, because so far the arguments have lacked validity and do not stand him in good stead.

Mr. Rosindell: Having listened to the debate, I wonder how serious the Government are about cracking down on electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. Much could be done to improve the Bill, including the use of national insurance numbers, as set out in the amendment. It is astonishing that, despite the broad agreement of all

[Mr. Rosindell]

constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, the Government oppose that. Having read the Committee proceedings, I know that the Minister's arguments were weak.

Of course, not everyone can say off the top of their head what their national insurance number is; I certainly could not. However, to suggest that it is not possible within a 30-day period for someone to produce their number is pathetic. Either the Government are serious about tackling electoral fraud or they are not. There is an opportunity to improve the Bill, and I should like the Government to take that on board.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have followed the Bill's progress from some distance, but my interest in Northern Ireland is well known, as the Minister is aware. Following the excellent speeches made by some of my hon. Friends, will my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) speculate in greater detail about why the Government are resisting what are clearly sensible amendments? My hon. Friend makes it amply clear that the proposals are supported by all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, so why are the Government resisting good sense and good policy?

Mr. Rosindell: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The Government have yet again shown that in certain instances when dealing with issues relating to a part of our kingdom, Northern Ireland, they appease rather than take the action necessary to get a grip on the situation and ensure that democracy prevails against those who have turned to, and continue to employ, solutions that are outwith the democratic arena.

Although it is important that sensitive information is not disclosed unnecessarily, it is a typically public sector approach to admit that the technology to prevent that is achievable but to discount its use because of artificially imposed deadlines. I have read that in other reports. If something is likely to strengthen a measure, it is worth ensuring that it is included and delivered on time. It is typical of the Government's haphazard approach that they dismiss potentially useful ideas because they would be difficult or inconvenient to implement.

It has taken some time to produce the Bill. I am astonished that it has taken the Government so long, but judging by comments made earlier in the debate, it appears likely that it will take even longer to be implemented—yet another example of the Government's appeasement. The Government are being hypocritical: it is hardly credible to use as an excuse lack of time or the fact that people might not know their own social security or national insurance number. Few complain of not knowing their national insurance number when claiming benefits, so I do not understand why it should be such a problem when they want to vote.

There is no question but that the Bill will enable significant headway to be made. That is welcome. However, I urge the House to support the Opposition amendment to include national insurance numbers as additional identification markers for electors registering in Northern Ireland. I see no good reason why any of the obstacles that the Government claim exist should prevent the use of national insurance numbers in the electoral registration process.

Of course it will take time to construct a workable system, but in the long term the ability to cross-check national insurance numbers against those registering to vote—and later, if necessary, those voting—will provide an extra layer of security against electoral fraud. Simply giving dates of birth and signatures may prove to be insufficient to stop those who are determined to get around the system. National insurance numbers might not make the system foolproof, but they are unique pieces of information, specific to individuals, that are too valuable to ignore. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Browne: If the few years that the Government took to consult widely on our proposals and to draft and introduce the Bill can be described as appeasement, I wonder what 18 years of refusal to address the problem can be called. Perhaps the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) can provide a suitable description before the end of the debate.

Amendment No. 1 requires electors to state their national insurance number, if they have one, on their annual canvass return. Amendment No. 2 terminates an elector's right to remain on the electoral register if they have a national insurance number but fail to provide it. We established in Committee that not everyone has a national insurance number, nor is everyone entitled to one. I acknowledge that the amendments are worded to get around that difficulty, but I remain concerned that they would disadvantage legitimate voters who simply do not know their national insurance number. Faced with the problem of finding out, people—especially the more vulnerable members of the community—might simply return their annual canvass form without including their number. Moreover, the amendments would impose an unnecessary administrative burden on the chief electoral officer, who would be required to check all those cases in which an annual canvass form was returned without a national insurance number to determine whether the elector actually had a number or was entitled to one.

Amendment No. 5 would require people to state their national insurance number, if they have one, when applying for an absent vote for either an indefinite period or a specific parliamentary election. It is possible, whether legitimately or not, to have more than one number. If someone gave a different national insurance number on their application for an absent vote from that which they had provided on registration, that would be a reason to deny them their vote, even if they held the two numbers legitimately. As I have said before, the chief electoral officer should be given as much useful information as possible to enable him to check absent vote applications against the information that an elector will be required to provide on registration, but the chief electoral officer does not consider that a requirement for electors to state their national insurance number on registration or on their application for an absent vote would be of any additional value to him if he is already able to check the signature and date of birth of electors against his records.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I have immense respect for the Minister, who is, from time to time, very amusing. Will he state how an individual can legitimately have two national insurance numbers? I might have misheard him, but I think that that is what he just said. Will he explain?

Mr. Browne: My understanding is that in certain circumstances individuals can be given temporary

national insurance numbers, and that they can therefore have two national insurance numbers for different purposes.

Lembit Öpik: The Minister gave the same explanation in Committee, and I have no reason to doubt its accuracy. However, is he going to list a series of practical problems as the Government's justification for not accepting national insurance numbers as a form of identification? If he is, does he not accept that those are points of detail and that we are in fact discussing an extremely important strategic opportunity to identify each potential voter using what is, for the overwhelming majority of people, a unique identifying number?

Mr. Browne: My concern, which I expressed repeatedly in Committee, is that we may inadvertently disfranchise people because of changes in the rules that we make. We had to strike a balance between interdicting fraud and not placing unnecessary obstacles in the way of legitimate voters, and identify where in the use of national insurance numbers such difficulties might be found. However, I am conscious—this was forcefully pointed out to me in Committee and on more than one occasion today—that all the Northern Ireland political parties represented in the Committee and in the Chamber today are as one on the issue. Mindful of that pressure and consistent with my approach throughout proceedings on the Bill, I have put a number of options to the test again, including data protection aspects, which are not minor, to see if the national insurance number can be used for electoral purposes in a way that does not disfranchise legitimate voters. However, as presently advised, I am not satisfied that they can; until I am, I have no alternative but to resist the amendments.

8.30 pm

Mr. Blunt: The Minister concluded his explanation on a wholly inadequate note; his arguments have been similarly inadequate throughout Committee and on Report.

First, I want to take up the Minister's point that the previous Government did nothing for 18 years. If that had been the case, there would not be a need for consolidation of the legislation now. There are so many different pieces of legislation floating round the system, which, from memory, were introduced in 1983, 1985 and 1989 to try to address the issue of identification in polling stations and elsewhere in piecemeal stages, that there is now a desperate need to consolidate them. The Minister knows well that that is the position of the chief electoral officer.

Of course, the Bill is welcome, but it only goes so far; on that issue, it could go much further to ensure that the register is, as far as possible, and given the limitations on the current national insurance system, beyond reproach. The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) amused the House with an account of attempting to find a person who qualified as someone who does not have a national insurance number. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) made it clear that there was no more reliable way of establishing an individual's identity. It was a joy to see the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) put the Minister through his paces and make him relive his past as a free-thinking member of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. Indeed, in attempting to reject the amendments, the Minister should bear in mind the fact that the hon. Gentleman was prepared to give him a flexible timetable on the introduction of identity cards. He might ask himself why, on this issue, the hon. Gentleman does not want to give him flexibility.

The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) made a noble effort to defend the Minister. He confessed that, in 1998, when he was a Committee member, he was naive to accept evidence given to the Committee. I have never thought of the hon. Gentleman as naive, and he was certainly not naive when he agreed with every other Committee member, from every party, in reaching his conclusion in 1998. That conclusion is still shared by all the other parties that have taken part in consultations on the process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) properly drew attention to the level of intimidation and the issue of a unique identifier. He said that if the chief electoral officer were furnished with the right resources, there is no reason why national insurance numbers cannot be introduced. I wonder what advice the Minister has received from the Treasury. When he concluded his contribution, he said that he had received advice that led to his not being satisfied. He left it at that, leaving the House in the dark about the detail of advice that was so overwhelming that he could not accept the proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) asked just how serious the Government are about the proposals. I must tell him that I take what the Minister is trying to achieve in the Bill at face value. It would be wrong of the House to impugn his general motives. However, why are the Government resisting the amendment? They should consider just who their allies are. There are none in the House, but my hon. Friend will see that, in its evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in 1998, Sinn Fein said:

> "Sinn Fein believes that there is a compelling and logical argument to ensure that the electorate have the maximum freedom to exercise their vote as freely as possible. We would therefore argue for an end to the current identification regulations because we believe they restrict the electorate's freedom and impose an unnecessary burden on them."

Well, that is a surprise. Why is it that, on the issue of electoral fraud, the Minister finds himself in alliance with Sinn Fein, rather than all the other parties in Northern Ireland? He should ask himself that question.

Mr. McGrady: The hon. Gentleman and others have impugned the Government's intention as being in some way an appeasement of Sinn Fein and other groups. Has he any evidence whatever that that is the case? I, who reside in Northern Ireland, have no such evidence. It would be wrong to make such assertion if there was not a reasonable certainty of its validity.

Mr. Blunt: I hope that the hon. Gentleman listened carefully to what I said. I did not say that. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford used those terms, but I have taken some trouble to dissociate those on the Conservative Front Bench from that suggestion, and to make it clear that we take the Minister's intentions at face value. I am not suggesting that he is in league with Sinn Fein in his proposals. I am merely pointing out to the House that it so happens that on this issue he finds himself at one with Sinn Fein, which would no doubt resist the proposal. It is

[Mr. Blunt]

the only other party that would do so. The Minister should consider the position in which he finds himself. I am not saying that there has been some arrangement or that a direct effort has been made to appease Sinn Fein on other issues. I am grateful to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) for giving me the opportunity to make that clear.

Mr. Frank Field: Is not the truth of the matter that the Government are in league not with Sinn Fein, but with the Treasury, and that the Treasury has told the Government that the proposal is unworkable because the national insurance system is a shambles?

Mr. Blunt: Having listened to the Minister's arguments in Committee and on Report, it is almost impossible to resist agreeing with the right hon. Gentleman. The Treasury has been behind many inexplicable decisions, when Ministers have been forced to explain the unexplainable to the House and put the case to protect the Treasury. Given the weakness of the Minister's arguments in Committee and on Report, the right hon. Gentleman's explanation is the one that most appeals to me.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend is making an extremely good case. If the Government seek to justify the introduction of identity cards for the security of the state, and such an identity card could well include a national insurance number, why should not a national insurance number serve to safeguard the country's democracy?

Mr. Blunt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's general point. We have yet to see the Government's proposals for identity cards for the security of the nation. My hon. Friend's point about the security of democracy is extremely important.

Lembit Öpik: On the suspicions directed at the Treasury, does the hon. Gentleman accept that however much of a mess the national insurance system might be, it is not a factor in the debate, because as long as someone could find his number, it could be entered and used in a database in Northern Ireland? The state of the national insurance system is probably not the explanation, but that makes the Minister's seeming intransigence on an eminently sensible idea even more confusing.

Mr. Blunt: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I am still attracted by the explanation from the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). The Government would have to admit that the entire national insurance system was in chaos. If it is in chaos, it is imperative that the Government sort it out. That is no argument against a cross-reference system to help protect against electoral fraud.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) suggested that the Government were putting the shutters up; that they had produced the Bill and were too inflexible to consider change during the proceedings. That is one explanation, which we have encountered too often in the House, when the Government have been defeated on the detail of the argument. In this case the Government have been defeated strategically and in detail, We will press the matter, and if we are not successful this evening, the Minister will not have heard the last of it.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 262.

Division No. 47] **[8.39 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McGrady, Eddie
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*

Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N

Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Angela Smith and
Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 3

ABSENT VOTES AND DECLARATIONS OF IDENTITY

Mr. Blunt: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 3, line 36, after "application", insert—

'is made on a form supplied by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland containing such marking or coding as he may determine,'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 15, in clause 2, page 3, line 47, at end insert—

'(2A) In section 6 (absent vote at elections for an indefinite period) after subsection (1) there is inserted—

"(1A) Any application under subsection (1) for an absent vote must be by means of an application form provided by the Chief Electoral Officer; and

(1B) Any application form supplied by the Chief Electoral Officer under subsection (1A) shall be marked with a bar code unique to each form.".'.

No. 4, in clause 3, page 4, line 4, after "application", insert—

'is made on a form supplied by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland containing such marking or coding as he may determine,'.

Mr. Blunt: It is quite an evening when we reduce the Government's majority to 87. That is indicative of just how badly the Minister lost the argument on new clause 2, in this Parliament of such unhappy numbers.

I am grateful for the progress that we made in Committee, when the Government changed the Bill to include a requirement to put the date of birth on applications for absent votes. Yet again, I am here to help the Minister. He has accepted our help, to some extent, on one occasion. In Committee, he said:

"Our aim is automated processing of absent vote applications—that is, by computer—in the time period available, which is different from the time period in Great Britain".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 16 October 2001; c. 71.]

The amendments would achieve precisely that.

This is an area of key importance in addressing electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. Paragraph 38 of the excellent 1998 report from the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs concludes:

"Absent voting provides a serious threat to the integrity of the electoral system in Northern Ireland—a view with which the Interim Review agrees."

The extent of absent voting in Northern Ireland and the potential for abuse, which was predicted in the report, was confirmed by the statistics that emerged from the 2001 general election. The seats that were contested most fiercely and resulted in gains by Sinn Fein, which has been associated and identified with a fairly ruthless and, in the words of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), a paramilitary organised approach to these issues, included West Tyrone, where the astonishing number of 2,012 proxy votes and 3,427 postal votes were granted. There was a total of 5,443 absent votes. In Fermanagh and South Tyrone, 4,664 postal votes and 1,116 proxy votes were granted, and there was a total of 5,784 absent votes.

The number of proxy votes granted in West Tyrone is fabulous, and I do not think that any other constituency in the United Kingdom can come remotely close to that figure. Certainly, no constituency in Northern Ireland does, because the next highest number of proxy votes is about half that.

The constituencies of West Tyrone, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and Mid-Ulster, all Sinn Fein held, were the ones with the highest number of absent votes. To say that there is a coincidence between those figures and the fact that Sinn Fein is on the receiving end of accusations about an organised approach to the abuse of the electoral system is to take coincidence one step too far.

The prediction that was made by the Select Committee in 1998 appears on the basis of the statistical evidence to be borne out by what happened in the last general election. Unless the amendments are accepted, as the law stands—and will continue to stand under the Bill when it is enacted—only the information with an absent vote application has to be delivered to the chief electoral officer. The Bill does not specify in which form that information is to come.

If the Minister wants to meet his aim of automated processing of absent vote applications, those application forms will have to marry up with the computer system for the information to be read in the appropriate place. So far, the House has not agreed to include the requirement for national insurance numbers, but if we require the signature and date of birth as factors to be tested between the absent vote application and the register, the forms must enable that to happen. Otherwise, we will be in the same position as we are today.

In the general election in Northern Ireland, 31,048 postal vote applications and 10,000 proxy vote applications were made, which gives a total of more than 40,000. The chief electoral officer was not able to check, even after the event, whether those applications merited further investigation. In the 1997 general election, the chief electoral officer was faced with a tidal wave of up to 10,000 applications that were produced at the very last moment. There was a only a short time between the presentation of those applications and the general election, and given the way in which the forms are constituted, there was not a cat in hell's chance for the chief electoral officer to check them properly. That is known, so people who wish to abuse the system have an opportunity to do so.

9 pm

In Committee, the Minister mentioned the fact that we should not advertise the opportunities to defraud the system by explaining that it was sufficient to provide the necessary information without using the official form, but I am sure that those who wished to do so could work it out for themselves. The abuse of the electoral system is sophisticated and if we leave a loophole, it will be exploited. It is our job to ensure that that cannot happen.

The Government resisted similar amendments in Committee and squeaked through the Division nine votes to eight, which means that all five Opposition parties were united in their view, including all the parties representing Northern Ireland. The Minister said that the change would be an unnecessary restriction on normal activities as part of the political process. I do not accept that. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and the chief electoral officer—who has been in post for 17 years—believe such fraud to be the commonest form of vote stealing in Northern Ireland and it must be addressed. The most effective way to address it is to ensure that the forms on which people apply for absent votes are those issued by the chief electoral officer.

My amendments would leave it to the chief electoral officer to decide the format of the form, but the amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrats would require the form to be bar-coded and would place a duty on the chief electoral officer to ensure that the forms could be individually identifiable. It is the chief electoral officer's intention to bar-code the forms, if possible, but I have been convinced by the arguments for flexibility and would leave the decision to him. However, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire and I differ only slightly on the issue.

The issue is important and the Minister needs to address it. He was able to give some comfort to us earlier tonight and I hope that he will be able to do so again.

Mr. McGrady: The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) suggested that the absent vote system—for the sick and disabled, and for proxy votes—presented the biggest opportunity for electoral fraud and I can but agree with that statement. However, statistics are wonderful things and I shall give a few figures from the table mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

In 1997, before the 1998 report from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, the percentage of absent votes in West Tyrone was 7.5 and it went up to 9 per cent. in 2001. For Fermanagh and South Tyrone, in 1997 the percentage was 9.3 and it went down to 8.7 per cent. in 2001. In Mid-Ulster, it was 8.6 per cent. in 1997 and fell to 6.7 per cent in 2001. High figures for absent votes are not a new phenomenon but have been going on for many years. I should like to attribute great insight to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, but modesty and the statistics forbid me.

However, this is a serious issue, and one with which we have wrestled for many years at hustings in Northern Ireland. The difficulty is that it has been traditional for the political parties, in the most honourable and trustworthy way, to help people to vote who otherwise could not go to the polls for one reason or another. The people thus helped have included those permanently on the sick list because of disablement, or those temporarily affected by sickness or injury during an election. Some people, of course, are unable to vote in elections for other reasons, or are elsewhere when election day comes around.

The phenomenon of trusted proxies is relatively new, but their use as a way to represent people at the polls is valid and is increasing. However, I think that imposing on the electoral officer and his assistants the requirement that each postal vote application form issued should be coded individually would cause practical difficulties.

Moreover, I believe that the proposal would diminish the ability of people to secure a postal vote when there are genuine reasons that render them unable to vote in person on the day of an election. Perhaps that is its purpose. In my experience, it is very difficult to get the electoral office to issue postal applications in time for people to return them, and requiring the applications to be allocated on a one-to-one basis would make that process even more difficult.

If all the people unable to get to the polling station on election day had to apply for a form permitting them an absent vote, I believe that the system would break down, as they would have to complete the form, get it attested, and send it back in time for inclusion in the poll. I am fully aware of what goes on in certain areas, and that means that I am reluctant to make the process so difficult. The danger is that many people would be disfranchised if numbered and traceable application forms were introduced.

It has been suggested that block applications could be given to the existing accredited representatives of political parties, and that those block applications could have a single, identifiable code number that would allow the person or group to whom the block application was issued to be identified. In other parts of the country colours could be used to identify the block applications, but that could cause all sorts of difficulties in Northern Ireland.

Although the use of a code number would not be foolproof, as no doubt the number would filter out somewhere down the line and duplication could take place, it would be a step towards what is proposed in the amendments. On balance, however, I am unable to support what is proposed in the amendments because I judge that many people who are legitimately unable to vote because they are ill or absent on election day would be disfranchised. In addition, I consider that the proposed system would be unnecessarily complicated.

Lembit Öpik: As in the last group of amendments, when I made common cause with the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), so also we make common cause on amendment No. 15. This has already been touched on, but let me outline the key reason why I believe, along with the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Lady, that bar codes are an important evolution in reducing fraud.

I have been concerned about the opportunities for fraud with regard to absent votes in United Kingdom elections as a whole. Some of the important check steps are absent if people are absent themselves. As such, the people in Northern Ireland for whom the legislation is intended are most likely to go to the point of least resistance once other changes have been made. Even with the Bill's limitations, given that the Government have not accepted our amendments, there will be some improvement in the situation in Northern Ireland. However, if the Government do not accept the proposal in amendment No. 15, we still have the Achilles' heel of absent votes.

The principle of the proposal was debated in Committee. We stipulated that applications for absent votes must contain a bar code, which are easy to scan and difficult to reproduce. The basic principle is to have each application form for an absent vote marked in a specific way so that applications cannot be photocopied wholesale

[Lembit Öpik]

many times over, as has been the case in the past. Each code will be unique to its particular application form and, by direct implication, to a particular person.

The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) said that about 40,000 absent votes were recorded in Northern Ireland in the recent election. Even if that figure were 80,000, the cost of specifying a particular bar code for each paper would be relatively small, perhaps a few pence per sheet. Given the benefit that would be gained, the investment of a few thousand pounds would surely not be prohibitive. So cost is not an issue. The logistical challenge of creating these forms is well within the Government's technological capabilities, so there is no logistical barrier to having a supply available.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), who is resistant to amendment No. 15 and this group as a whole, can be reassured by the fact that we would not have to maintain the existing limitations on availability of forms. We could streamline it and speed it up and still maintain a cohesion as to who gets which form. We could track where large blocks of forms go and ensure that there was no concerted effort to duplicate the applications, which would show up with the bar codes.

In terms of the cohesion of the system as a whole, bar codes would enable us to spot patterns if a large block of forms was completed in the same handwriting in a suspicious fashion. We could trace patterns much more easily if each form was observed afterwards as having come from a particular block given to a particular grouping.

There is no absolute certainty, even with bar codes. A fraudster who was inventive and determined enough could still be responsible for a limited degree of fraud. However, it would get much more difficult as the circumstantial evidence would mount up until the people behind the fraud could be identified and prosecuted.

If bar codes are not introduced, the Liberal Democrats are concerned that we would be unable to make significant progress. As right hon. and hon. Members who served on the Committee will recall, at present one can use any piece of paper in Northern Ireland or in any election in the United Kingdom with which to apply for a postal vote. When I was a councillor in Newcastle upon Tyne, the incidence of requesting postal votes on anything other than a proprietary form was fairly small. The political parties active in the Newcastle area were assiduous in using the readily available forms from Newcastle council. If we can be sure that honourable individuals and their associated political parties are willing to use these forms at council level, I would like to think that the same would apply to Northern Ireland.

Sadly, we have just rejected the case for the use of national insurance numbers, which are unique to individuals as right hon. and hon. Members will recall. I fear that we will have to return to that matter in another place. In their absence it makes it even more important that individual absent vote forms are traceable. In that way, we can ensure that forged signatures and so forth can at least be tracked as I described.

What is the Minister's view of the desirability of tracing individual forms and has it changed since the Committee? If he accepts that there are no logistical or significant costing negatives to introducing bar codes, will he at least consider the case that we have put forward and respond in kind to the many hon. Members who are interested in ensuring that each form can be traced?

9.15 pm

Mr. Trimble: At this stage I wish merely to direct the Minister to the comments that he made in Committee at columns 68 and 70, where he said of having bar codes or some other number on the forms:

> "The chief electoral officer will in future ensure that applications . . . will be given a unique identifier, be it a serial number or a bar code."

Evidently the object, as I understand it, is to move to a position where such applications will be processed automatically.

The Minister went on to say with regard to that processing:

> "I cannot stand in front of the Committee and claim that all of that can be done now, because none of it can be. The purpose of the Bill is . . . to match the plans for computers and software so that we will reach a point in 2003 when we can interdict the dishonest use of votes".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 16 October 2001; c. 68-70.]

Will the Minister elucidate on whether he is any closer to realising those proposals? Can he assure us that sufficient resources will be provided to ensure that a system in which an individual identifier is put on the application forms is introduced, and that they can be automatically processed by 2003, in time for the next Assembly election?

Mr. Browne: I can assure the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that the resources are available and will be made available as necessary to achieve the objectives that have been set out in the planned programme of change for the introduction of the necessary computers and software in the electoral office. That will enable the very things that I spelled out in Committee, on Second Reading, and today to be done in time for the planned elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly in May 2003. As currently advised, we are still on course to achieve that objective. I intend to consult the parties in Northern Ireland and to find a mechanism to keep them involved in discussions about progress towards that objective.

We had detailed discussions in Committee about many aspects of absent voting—properly so, as there is clearly great concern about abuse of the electoral system. It is not merely a matter of statistics although, interestingly, when one aggregates the statistical evidence for Northern Ireland, the rate of absent voting is not significantly greater than the overall rate for the rest of the United Kingdom. It is concentrated in certain constituencies. The statistical evidence given us by my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) is also of some interest, in that there has been no consistent rise in the number of absent votes used in certain constituencies.

Whatever the explanation for these shifts—perhaps we need not dwell too much on an explanation of why there may have been shifts in individual constituencies—there is well justified concern about the potential offered by the absent voting system for fraud and about evidence that suggests that fraud is being perpetrated by the use of absent votes.

Apart from that very general concession to the points properly made by contributors to the debate, I shall concentrate on the specific amendments for the remainder

of my speech. The intended effect of the amendments would be that any individual application for an absent vote would have to be made on an original form provided by the chief electoral officer. It is on that point that I part company with the supporters of the amendments. I believe that the proposals would hinder individuals who wanted to apply for an absent vote.

As I said in Committee, the current law does not require people anywhere in the UK to apply for absent votes on a particular form. There is no evidence to suggest that the existence of that opportunity has been exploited by anybody intending or attempting to commit fraud in the electoral system anywhere in the United Kingdom.

In Northern Ireland, unlike the rest of the UK, an applicant for an absent vote is required to give the chief electoral officer certain information. Until now, the law has been that it is the information that entitles the applicant to the vote—not the form on which the information is presented. However, it is currently the norm for applications for absent votes in Northern Ireland to be submitted in the main on forms—or copies of forms—that are provided by the chief electoral officer. The chief electoral officer already plans to take administrative measures to ensure that applications for an absent vote will be given some kind of unique identifier—be it a serial number or a bar code—and that can be achieved without either primary or secondary legislation.

When it comes to tracing to whom the original form was issued, it will not matter if an application for an absent vote was made on an original form or on a photocopy, because the bar code would be copied on the copy. We do not have to insist that all forms are original to find out who took them out of the office. The chief electoral officer has only to record to whom he gave the individual forms. Although electors will not be required to submit their applications on a form from the electoral office, I suspect that it will continue to be the norm for most people to do so. I have no reason to believe that in future there will be a sudden flood of applications on odd bits of paper. However, I am not inclined to remove the possibility that people currently have to make an application in a form other than on an original form or a copy of an original form provided by the chief electoral officer. We live in a democracy and I shall not put into legislation any measures that could disfranchise people.

Lembit Öpik: In that case, will the Minister explain why he said in the Standing Committee:

"The chief electoral officer will in future ensure that applications for an absent vote will be given a unique identifier, be it a serial number or a bar code."?—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 16 October 2001; c. 68.]

Surely that means that if two forms came in with the same bar code they would not be accepted by the electoral officer.

Mr. Browne: I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman reads my whole contribution, he will see that I made it perfectly clear on more than one occasion during that Committee debate that it would still be open to parties to copy those forms. Although the form would be unique when it was provided by the chief electoral officer, it would still be open to parties to copy those forms as they do at present.

Earlier today, I made the point that as long as the original form that is copied includes the bar code it will be possible to identify to whom it was given. As I explained in Committee and now repeat, it is not my understanding that the effect of any of the amendments would be that parties would not be able to pick up more than one form from the chief electoral officer. That would defeat the objective of being able to identify to which specific voter a bar-coded form was sent or given. Those who tabled the amendments in the group are not suggesting that parties will not be able to go in and pick up forms in hundreds, or even more, if they are available. In those circumstances, how does amendment No. 3 achieve the objective of making it possible to trace a particular form to an individual voter?

Lembit Öpik: The Minister makes a fair point. After reading the fuller contribution that he made in Committee, I recall his views on the subject. However, will he at least recognise that there is a difference of view here—on one side a concern that it is easier if each form genuinely is an original, and on the other the argument that he is making—and will he accept my concern that if any photocopying is allowed, it significantly weakens the opportunities to trace voters who exercise absent votes? I do not want to pursue the matter further; I believe that we have both made our points.

Mr. Browne: I accept the objective that the hon. Gentleman has now set up, but that objective, which the official Opposition may share, could be achieved only by an amendment that required an individual voter to make application individually to the chief electoral officer for a form and to obtain that form from the chief electoral officer, so that in the first place the chief electoral officer knew which voter was asking for the form and could give a bar code to that individual voter.

Lembit Öpik *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Browne: Failing that, those who apply for more than one form will need to have in advance the names of the voters who will use those forms. It seems to me, with respect, that we are in danger of creating a level of bureaucracy in relation to absent votes that will be calculated—I use that word advisedly—to defeat the opportunity for many people to vote, either by proxy or by post.

Mr. Blunt: There is an issue about the traceability of the forms that are going out from the CEO to individuals. The Minister's argument that the process would be too bureaucratic is well made, and he talks about the opportunity for parties to photocopy the forms and make application on photocopied forms. That in a sense is not, as I understand it, precluded by amendments Nos. 3 and 4.

The Minister must still address the fact that the reason why at the moment the forms are in pretty much the same format as those issued by the chief electoral officer is that they cannot yet be checked by computer, but by 2003 he wants to be able to computer-check these things. Unless the applications come in on a specified form once the computer-checking is up and running, the whole point of that computer-checking will be negated.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman makes my point precisely. Amendments Nos. 3 and 4 do not prevent parties from collecting one form from the chief electoral officer and photocopying that form, because that would

[Mr. Browne]

still be a form that had been provided by the chief electoral officer and an application would be made on that form. They are therefore consistent with what we are putting in place administratively, and there is no need for the amendments to achieve the objective that we can achieve administratively.

The hon. Gentleman is arguing that unless the information is submitted in a format that is identical to the format of every other application, it cannot be checked by the chief electoral officer using a computer. I do not accept that that is necessarily so. In my view, the information provided on the form can be checked against a simple keying process on the computer, but in any event the bulk of the applications will come in—I expect that they will continue to do so—on forms that have been provided by the chief electoral officer and then copied, or on the originals of those forms. The comparatively small number that may arrive in another form will still entitle people to vote. I do not accept that a flood of applications will suddenly come in on odd bits of paper.

9.30 pm

The requirement for electors to provide additional identifiers in the registration and in any subsequent application will improve the efforts to authenticate absent vote applications. Applications and declarations of identity will require the elector to provide a signature and a date of birth, and those data can be compared with those that an elector provided on registration. That is how the system will operate, and in the light of those remarks I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be persuaded to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Blunt: I shall reply briefly to this short debate, in which we have dealt with absent votes. The Minister has gone round the same course as in Committee, and we do not yet have a satisfactory answer to the issue that I raised in an intervention. The behaviour of parties that want to abuse the process will change when they realise that to avoid automated checking—the position that the Minister wants to reach—they need to supply the information on a large scale on forms other than those issued by the chief electoral officer.

The Minister is entitled to say that, so far, there has been no suggestion that people will not use the forms, or copies of the forms, produced by the chief electoral officer. Plainly, that is all right at the moment because it is convenient. However, rather than make their own forms, parties that want to abuse the process will give 10,000 applications to the chief electoral officer at the last possible moment, so that he is totally overwhelmed and unable to check them because it has to be done manually. The moment the system is computerised, the way to stop computer-checking will be to ensure that the information is presented on a non-standard form. That opportunity exists, and the House should prevent that loophole from being exploited by parties that might be determined to do so.

Mr. McGrady: Surely the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is a question not of identifying the form, per se, but of determining that the form has been returned by the applicant. That will be based on the signature and the date of birth identifiers—and, we hope, on the national insurance identification in future—not on the actual piece of paper, so individual application forms need not be bar coded.

Mr. Blunt: I take the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, and I think that we agree, but the form must be standard if the signature is to appear in the right place to be read by the computer and then to be cross-referenced to the information on the signature that is held on the register, so that people can check that they are the same. I presume that the same is true for the date of birth, as well as for the name. I imagine that it would be impossible for the computer to read that information if it did not appear in a standard place.

The Minister has said that a simple keying process would deal with that problem, but manual keying processes should be avoided as far as possible, given that 10,000 application forms may have to be checked at the last moment. The Minister will want to consider the issue further. He has had a fairly rough evening so far and I rely on him to reconsider the issue, so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

9.33 pm

Mr. Browne: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill has remained largely unchanged since its introduction. *[Interruption.]* For the edification of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), I was merely stating a fact. The Bill will give effect to the proposals in the White Paper "Combating Electoral Fraud in Northern Ireland", and will provide the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland with additional powers to address the problem of electoral fraud.

In recent years, there has been growing concern about the perceived level of electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland. Electoral fraud is a crime and the Government are determined to combat it wherever it occurs.

The Bill represents a broadly acceptable, workable and fair set of proposals to combat electoral fraud. It is the culmination of a great deal of work by, and extensive consultation with, the Northern Ireland political parties and the chief electoral officer.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute once again to my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), for his work on this issue in his time at the Northern Ireland Office. I also pay tribute to all my former colleagues on the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. Its report made an important contribution to the thinking behind the Bill, as did the work of other bodies such as the Northern Ireland Forum. However, it should not be a criticism of the Bill that it does not implement all the Select Committee's recommendations.

The Bill is the result of extensive consultation. When taking measures to prevent electoral fraud, we have to ensure that we do not put obstacles in the path of genuine voters. Only if we do that will the measures that we take be acceptable to the House and to the people of Northern Ireland.

As I said earlier, the Bill's purpose is to provide the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland with additional powers to address the problem of electoral fraud there. In the debate on Second Reading, in meetings with political parties before the Committee Stage and in Committee itself, I have continued to listen carefully to all proposals and suggestions that have been made to me and that hon. Members have argued will improve this Bill.

I thank colleagues for the hard work that they put into tabling amendments and for the robust and civilised debates that we have had on a wide range of topics. I know that colleagues are as keen as I am to tackle successfully the problem of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland.

We amended the provisions relating to absent voting. Originally, the Bill stated that applications to vote by post or by proxy must be signed and that the signature on the application must correspond with the signature provided to the chief electoral officer on registration. Now an application for a postal or proxy vote for either an indefinite period or for a particular parliamentary election will have to include an elector's signature and date of birth. Both will have to correspond with the signature and date of birth supplied by the elector on registration. Similarly, a postal ballot paper will have to be signed and an elector will have to state his date of birth or that ballot paper will not be deemed to be duly returned.

I will continue to reflect on a number of points that hon. Members have made during the Bill's passage and I will consider carefully, with the chief electoral officer, whether those suggestions would help our efforts to combat fraud and improve the electoral system in Northern Ireland.

I have already indicated my willingness to explore other possible forms of photographic identification that may be used at the polling station. I hope that the Translink smart card, which will be issued to all those aged 65 and over in Northern Ireland from April next year, will meet the security requirements that will enable me to add it to the list of specified documents.

I have written to the political parties in Northern Ireland to ask for their views on whether there might be value in including in the annual canvass form—or any other application to be included on the electoral register in Northern Ireland—a question asking an elector whether they were registered or intended to register at another address. I will continue to explore further ways in which data held by other organisations might be used to combat fraud.

We will consider all these issues, and others that are suggested to us, carefully and with an open mind. The Bill and other measures that have already been taken by the chief electoral officer respond to calls from within Northern Ireland itself and from parties across the political spectrum.

The Bill sends a clear signal to those people intent on committing electoral fraud that it is a crime that the Government are determined to combat. We have a duty to protect the electors of Northern Ireland's right to free and fair elections. The Bill does that by countering electoral abuse directly and at every stage of the electoral process. However, we will not prevent genuine voters from making their voices heard.

Tonight, I have heard people arguing that a strict timetable should be imposed for the implementation of certain features of this Bill, but I hope that they now see that such a measure would not necessarily assist the joint aim of interdicting electoral abuse while not preventing genuine voters from making their voices heard.

I am happy to reassure the House yet again that the measures in the Bill will be implemented as soon as is practicable, and our target for the removal of all forms of non-photographic identification will remain May 2003. However, we will take all the necessary steps to ensure that no one is disfranchised because of the proposals contained in the Bill.

In all our discussions with the Northern Ireland political parties, we have been constantly reminded of the need to proceed in a careful and considered manner. The Bill has maintained cross-party support thus far because it contains carefully thought-out, workable measures to address the specific problems in the Northern Ireland electoral process. It strikes the right balance between limiting the opportunity for abuse and putting obstacles in the path of genuine voters. I commend it to the House.

9.40 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Minister began by saying that the Bill had been largely unchanged since its introduction. That does not merit self-congratulation, let alone complacent self-congratulation; instead, it is of considerable concern to everyone inside and outside the House who cares about how this place works.

The Government have used their massive majority to override the combined suggestions based on the separate wisdom and experience of every other party in the House, including those from Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, Northern Ireland parties rarely find a consensus, but they have this time, and the Government will not listen to them because they have a massive parliamentary majority and do not care. That is shameful. This is not an attractive episode or an edifying moment in Parliament. The phrase that the Minister used should weigh on his conscience.

I do not think that the Minister is personally responsible for the way in which the legislation has been treated. It is not a case of his being personally arrogant or obtuse; he merely reflects the culture and frame of mind into which the Government have fallen after more than four and a half years of taking for granted a massive parliamentary majority and using a regiment of spin doctors who believe that they can manipulate the press with impunity. They believe that they can close their minds to every other influence and insight that is available and that should be brought to bear in the formulation of legislation. It has not been a good evening for Parliament or the Minister. He was having to thrash around to find excuses for the position that he is forced to defend.

The first group of amendments dealt with the deadline for introducing photographic identification in Northern Ireland. A deadline is not a matter of principle or even substance; it is an administrative matter. However, the Minister was forced to concede that there were no administrative objections to having a deadline. He said that he had to consult before he could accept the proposal. As the Government consult only on matters of substance and principle, the consultation is immaterial to the acceptance of deadlines. He lost credibility by taking that line.

We also debated the declaration of multiple addresses when someone chooses to register at different addresses for the purposes of an election. The Minister got out of

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

an awkward spot in Committee by promising to consult in time for the debate on Report, but he told us today that he did not have time to consult properly, so he has contradicted himself.

We also discussed using national insurance numbers to protect against electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. We were told that the Minister took a different view when he was a Back Bencher on the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee. Once again, he has contradicted himself. That is a serious state of affairs, especially for someone in public life and with accountable responsibilities. To manage to contradict oneself twice during the proceedings of the same Bill in the same evening is unfortunate. I can only feel sorry for him, but when he accepted the role of spokesman for a Government who act in such a fashion, he committed himself to suffering those humiliations. None of us feels the same degree of personal sympathy for him as we would for any other human being in similarly invidious circumstances.

Despite the fact that I sincerely mean everything that I have said so far, I want to end on a serious but positive note. It would be perverse of the Opposition to vote against Third Reading. If we can get a whole loaf of bread, we will take it, but we will accept half, three quarters or one quarter of a loaf if that is all we can get. We shall continue to battle here, in the other place and elsewhere, but for now we will accept the Bill as a positive contribution to the workings of democracy in Northern Ireland.

The Bill has appeared at a moment of high drama in the Province. Last week, we heard encouraging news of the first act of decommissioning by Sinn Fein-IRA. Although there is a constitutional crisis, we hope that it will be resolved this Friday—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that we are discussing the Bill, not other matters. We cannot go wide of the Bill.

Mr. Davies: I was only touching briefly on the context in which the Bill will proceed to the other place and thereafter—in an improved form, we hope—on to the statute book.

Now is an opportune time to reflect on the way in which democracy works in Northern Ireland—its mechanisms and safeguards. We all hope that from the context that I briefly described will emerge a rosier future for democracy, and that people will have greater confidence in the devolved institutions of Northern Ireland and their ability to meet the aspirations of the electorate. Now is a good time to debate such a Bill as this.

It is obvious that among Northern Ireland's many problems is an unfortunate tradition of electoral abuse and fraud more prevalent than is usual elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland Members on both sides of the House have, with their characteristic frankness and honesty, accepted that fact. It lies with us to do something about it, and we are doing so. We are improving the system, albeit not as fully as we wanted to while the Bill was in the Commons. I believe that today we have made a contribution to improving the prospects for the people of the Province and their public life to which the whole House is strongly attached.

9.48 pm

Mr. Trimble: The Bill deals with electoral fraud, so the objective should be to introduce measures to curb electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. There is no doubt that fraud exists, nor about some of the ways in which it is perpetrated.

Toward the end of Committee stage, figures were given on the abnormally high—in relation to other constituencies—number of absent votes cast in certain constituencies in Northern Ireland. There is no doubt, too, that in those constituencies—I have in mind Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mid–Ulster and West Tyrone—a significant proportion of the absent votes cast are fraudulent. It is likely that the fraudulent votes in those three constituencies are sufficient to account for the results, and that if we had honest voting and honest elections in Northern Ireland, fewer Sinn Fein Members would be returned to serve here—although, of course, they do not serve here.

I am sure that if there had been an honest election in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Sinn Fein would not have won, and that the person who ought to be and is the true Member of Parliament for that constituency—my colleague Mr. Cooper, who fell victim to the fraud of Sinn Fein, which was assisted by the Democratic Unionist party's choosing to run a candidate in that constituency—would be here tonight.

On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) mentioned the election petition that was then outstanding in respect of that case. Of course, the matter could not be pursued because the case was sub judice. Since then, the election court has made its decision, and I want to share with the House just a few phrases that it used about the conduct of the election and of Sinn Fein in that constituency. The judge referred to "extremely reprehensible" incidents. He said that

"nothing can excuse the scenes of threatening intimidation which took place . . . Such behaviour"—

meaning that of Sinn Fein—

"is the negation of a parliamentary democracy."

He then referred to the disturbance in St. Martin's school, Garrison, a polling station where votes were cast well after 10 o'clock. The court said that the disturbance was

"serious and intolerable, but it was an isolated incident".

That last phrase was accurate in terms of the evidence given to the court, but it is not true. It was not an isolated incident.

After the election petition was lodged within 21 days, as it had to be, in the first week of August, there was reliable and credible information that voting had continued at the polling station at St. Joseph's primary school, Ederney, for a period of approximately 10 minutes and that one of the police personnel present was prepared to appear in court and confirm it. However, because that information was not available earlier, it could not be included in the election petition, and consequently it could not be presented to the court. There is every reason to believe that if that evidence had been given to the court, the result of the petition would have been different.

I referred to that incident to bring out two simple points. First, the rules about election petitions inhibit the giving of evidence. Evidence could not be given in that case because the rules were unduly restrictive. Secondly, and more importantly, the information that became

available after the petition was made should have been available beforehand; it was known to the electoral office, but was not conveyed to anyone. We are considering a Bill on electoral fraud that tries to strengthen the law. The primary responsibility of the electoral office in Northern Ireland ought to be to ensure that the system operates properly and fairly but, disturbingly, when we tried to deal with clear misconduct in the election, our experience was that it was not concerned with bringing out the truth or exposing wrongdoing. It was more concerned with trying to show that everything had been okay and that nothing had really happened. Indeed, its attitude was one of trying to cover up the bad behaviour of Sinn Fein and breaches of electoral law.

Will the Minister reflect on that? If he likes, we can give him more detail about what happened. Will he consider carefully what measures can be introduced in the Bill to ensure that the electoral office carries out its duties properly and sees its first duty as ensuring that the law is observed? If that means ensuring that information is put into the public domain that assists the making of a petition, the office should do so and not try to cover up matters, which was the approach taken in this case.

There is an opportunity in another place to strengthen the Bill further. The Minister congratulated himself on the minimal changes that have been made, but he should try to consult the parties properly, listen to what we have to say and introduce proposals that ensure that electoral law is observed properly and that we get honest results. That would be a significant achievement, and the Minister could then congratulate himself.

9.53 pm

Lembit Öpik: As I said at the beginning of the Committee stage, in my many years as Liberal Democrat Northern Ireland spokesperson, I have seen Ministers come and go, each more brilliant than the last. Looking at the Minister, I can honestly say that I see a very nice man. Frustratingly, however, he does not listen. As other Members have said, I heard him congratulate himself on the fact that the Bill has changed very little; that made me think of an iron fist in a velvet glove, frightening Labour Back Benchers into supporting things which, if they had reflected for a moment, they would not have supported.

In the Chamber, the majorities in votes on this matter have been large, but in Committee, many Divisions were nine votes against eight. In terms of political parties, the Minister was losing votes by five parties to one on many of the arguments. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) made the point that cross-community support has been garnered for many ideas which the Government have rejected. As a consequence, the Bill will not be as good as it could have been with the benefit of that input.

With regard to national insurance numbers, the Minister once again failed to justify his refusal to adopt the proposals made by so many people and so many parties. We had a debate on bar codes, then he had the audacity to say that we should now see that our proposals were unhelpful, but his arguments were not particularly robust. On time scale, his desire for flexibility made him inflexible in dealing with our proposals. Any business would set a time scale and regard that as a proactive gesture that would focus the team to achieve the launch date that had been outlined.

I have learned a great deal in the debate. I have learned that although she challenged me on whether I know my national insurance number, the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) knows hers by heart. I hope that the shame that she must now feel will cause her to encourage the Minister to think again. I have learned that our winning some of the arguments was insufficient to cause the Minister to think again. That is a matter of concern. I have also learned that there is cross-party support for the essence of the Bill. On occasions, that cross-party support, at least on the Floor of this House, has not been sufficient to convince the Minister to think again.

On balance, the Bill is good, but it could be even better. On balance, the Bill will have an impact, but not the full impact that it could have had with those further proposals. There is work to be done in another place, and no doubt the Government will be challenged on some of the familiar territory that we covered in Committee and on the Floor of the House. I congratulate the Minister on his ever-patient and ever-pleasant demeanour. In the words of Arnie Schwarzenegger, "We'll be back."

9.57 pm

Mr. McGrady: This is an important Bill to eradicate the scourge that has persisted for many years in the democratic system in Northern Ireland. It could have gone a wee bit further, but it is difficult to achieve a compromise between securing the integrity of the voter and not preventing legitimate voters from exercising their right. We will revisit many of these matters.

I do not agree with the Minister's comment at the start that no change has been made during the passage of the Bill. There may be no change in the wording of the Bill, but the *Official Report* of the Committee and the debate tonight is riddled with promises and undertakings, which the Minister will have to live up to, after he persuaded us to withdraw our amendments. We will hold him to that.

I offer the Minister, his predecessor and their current and past staff a great deal of thanks for the many, many hours of consultation that they gave us and other parties. However, the Minister did not take on board the fact that we and other parties in Northern Ireland had a unity of purpose and a unity of mind that were unique. He should have grasped the historic moment when it was available to him.

9.58 pm

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): This has been an important debate on an important Bill. I am only sorry that despite the many promises that were made by the Government and the previous Government to bring the matter to the Floor of the House sooner, and the consultation that was carried out, we have had to wait until now for the Bill to appear. We may need such legislation much sooner than envisaged in view of some of comments about the Assembly elections that are due in May 2003. Many people in Northern Ireland would welcome that prospect.

It is important that as well as new legislation to strengthen provisions against fraud, the necessary resources are made available to the chief electoral officer. We may have new provisions, but if we do not have the resources to implement them, we will be no better off.

[Mr. Nigel Dodds]

Lack of resources for the chief electoral officer has been one of the problems in tackling electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. One of the things that has struck me—

It being 10 o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [10 July].*

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Third time, and passed.

DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM

Ordered,

That Mr. Ian Stewart be discharged from the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform and Mr. Dai Havard be added.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Civil Service (Maladministration)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

10 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): In this short debate, I wish to concentrate most of my remarks on one example of maladministration in the civil service: the Government's regulation of Equitable Life. I want to comment on the welcome decision of the parliamentary ombudsman to begin his investigation and I also wish to address issues of financial compensation.

When I first wrote to you on 17 October, Mr. Speaker, seeking this debate, it was immediately after publication of the Financial Services Authority report on the review of the Equitable Life Assurance Society from 1 January 1999 to 8 December 2000. That report disclosed clear prima facie evidence of maladministration by the regulator. I intended to use this debate to examine the decision that the ombudsman had communicated to all MPs in September, which was that he did not intend to investigate until after publication of the Penrose inquiry. Fortunately, that is no longer necessary following the ombudsman's announcement on Monday evening.

It is worrying that the ombudsman seems to have been given the impression by the Government when they announced the establishment of the Penrose inquiry in August that they were not going to publish the FSA report until after Penrose had reported in the second half of 2002. However, I do not blame the ombudsman, because I suspect that he was the victim of Government spin and that the Government intended not to publish the FSA report until after Penrose but then had to change tack in the light of pressure from the Opposition, the engineering union and other union interests to which they sometimes listen.

I am delighted that the parliamentary ombudsman reconsidered his position when the FSA report was published and that he has now announced the terms of his independent inquiry, which are set out in his letter of 29 October to all MPs. The ombudsman's announcement came shortly before the Economic Secretary to the Treasury gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Treasury. Naturally, the members of that Committee pressed her on the issue of redress for policyholders. After considerable prevarication—I quote not the official record, which is not yet available, but today's press—the Minister eventually said:

"If the Ombudsman reports that an injustice has been carried out to policy holders, then of course it is something we will look at."

Today's newspaper headlines went much further: "Treasury boosts hopes for Equitable payout", said *The Guardian*; "Treasury may help victims of Equitable", said the *Daily Mail*; and "Minister to consider redress for policy holders", said the *Financial Times*.

The Financial Secretary's statement to the Committee was a very welcome advance on the answer that she gave to the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on 15 October. He had asked whether the Government would

"establish a scheme to compensate policyholders of Equitable Life for losses sustained by them as a result of regulatory failure."

The Minister replied:

"We have no plans to do so."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 850W.]

However, she did not offer policyholders anything yesterday that went beyond that which she is required to do under the Treasury's own rules on financial compensation for redress where it is recommended by the parliamentary ombudsman.

I shall quote some of the key paragraphs of the rules set out in the Treasury's own document, "Government Accounting 2000", at chapter 18, which is entitled "Losses and Special Payments". Paragraph 18.7.4 states:

"The question of whether financial redress should be paid may arise (a) as a result of a recommendation by the Parliamentary Ombudsman following investigation of a complaint referred by a Member of Parliament".

Paragraph 18.7.5 states:

"If the Department concerned accepts that maladministration has occurred and that financial redress is appropriate, the general principle should be to provide redress which is fair and reasonable in the light of all the facts and circumstances of the case".

Paragraph 18.7.24 states:

"Claims for compensation may arise on grounds other than actual financial loss or costs. These include the following . . .

(d) Compensation for the loss of a physical or financial asset, or a reduction in its value: an example might be where it is claimed that the department had failed to carry out a regulatory function properly or that its action or inaction had resulted in the creation of a false market."

Obviously, that is the paragraph under which the policyholders who will be seeking redress for maladministration will be looking.

Paragraph 18.7.27 states:

"Claims arising under 18.7.24d are likely to be particularly contentious and the amounts speculative. Such cases are therefore particularly difficult, potentially very repercussive and should be approached with particular care. If financial redress is felt to be justified, the approach might be a payment in general recognition of the detriment suffered as a result of official failure rather than to put the complainant into the position it is argued he or she might have been if the official failure had not occurred. Such a position is inevitably highly uncertain."

The paragraphs that I have quoted should ring alarm bells among policyholders who may have had their hopes raised by some of the headlines in today's papers. I hope that the Minister will be able to state clearly and unequivocally that if the independent parliamentary ombudsman recommends financial redress, the Treasury will pay up. Otherwise, people will rightly think that the compensation regime for maladministration is grossly asymmetrical with the penalty regimes operated by the Treasury and by the Financial Services Authority.

As ever, the Treasury is quick to take but slow to give. By way of an example, this week we have seen reports that the FSA has imposed fines on Prudential amounting to £650,000. That money is to be taken from the with-profits fund of Prudential and will go straight to the Treasury. It is extraordinary that the burden is being borne by the with-profits fund of Prudential rather than by the shareholders, but that is a separate issue. That £650,000 will go straight to the Treasury as a penalty.

Every day, individual taxpayers and VAT-registered businesses pay fines and penalties imposed by the revenue-collecting arms of the Treasury. Surely the least the Treasury can do is to accept that where its own maladministration leads to loss, those losses should be met in full.

Another example of asymmetry came out before the Select Committee on the Treasury. The Economic Secretary, when asked a series of questions about what the Treasury had been doing in relation to Equitable Life in 1998, said that all the papers relating to that period had been passed on to the Financial Services Authority as part of the service level agreement, and that she did not have the information to enable her to give an answer. Mr. Speaker, you and I know that we are required by the Inland Revenue to keep our tax records going back seven years. It is a pity that those same rules do not seem to apply to the Treasury itself, so that when the Economic Secretary is asked questions, she has the resources to enable her to answer them.

The next aspect on which I hope the Minister can help is the time scale for the investigation by the parliamentary ombudsman. We are told that the average time that it takes to carry out an investigation is 43 weeks. That is for an average case. In the case of Equitable Life—where the issues are complex and the potential compensation very significant—the time scale could be far longer. The parliamentary ombudsman is so far limiting his investigation to the period from 1 January 1999 to 8 December 2000. I hope that he will extend that period in both directions.

Nobody, least of all those policyholders who took out policies in 1999 and 2000, would want a decision on their cases to be delayed because of the limited resources of the ombudsman. That is why the Government—indeed the Treasury—should give the ombudsman all the resources he needs to do his job. Last year, the ombudsman had his second-highest work load ever and, from my constituency correspondence and my experience of rapidly plummeting standards of administration under this Government, I know that this year's referrals could be at an all-time high. Individual learning accounts, naturalisation, attendance allowance, war pensions, the Public Guardianship Office, housing benefit administration, foot and mouth, the Valuation Office; all of those feature in my constituency case load.

I do not believe that a Member of Parliament's role should be that of an expensive progress chaser for Government Departments. Surely our proper role should be to scrutinise policy and legislation. In all the years that I have been in the House, we have never been so overloaded with routine administration affecting our constituents. I spoke informally to the Minister earlier about a constituency case that has involved one problem after another. I hope that, if nothing else, he will be able to tell me that that has been sorted out and that such a case will not arise again.

The parliamentary ombudsman is understandably concerned about overlap of effort between his investigations and the work of Lord Penrose, but it is becoming clear that the Treasury neither expects nor wants the latter to apportion blame or consider issues of redress. Yesterday in the Treasury Committee, the Economic Secretary used the words:

"If Lord Penrose decides that issues of compensation are within his terms of reference".

She spoke as if she had not given him those terms of reference in the first place. Why did the Government specifically not instruct him to investigate allegations of maladministration and consider compensation?

Yesterday, the Economic Secretary even made the ludicrous suggestion that individual policyholders might take legal action against the regulators? Was she serious, one asks. It was pointed out to her that from the end of

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

November it will not even be possible to sue the Financial Services Authority for negligence unless it can be established that there has been bad faith. The Government are putting this regulator beyond the law, and in so doing they are making the role of the parliamentary ombudsman even more crucial.

In my submission, one key issue that Lord Penrose and the ombudsman need to address is the letter issued by the Treasury insurance directorate on 18 December 1998. That guidance letter endorses Equitable's decision to seek to solve its problems by charging the costs of the guaranteed annuities to the with-profits bonuses of clients without guaranteed annuities. That was clearly a high-risk policy, given that there were two separate contracts covering with-profits bonuses and guaranteed annuities. Had the Equitable board decided in 1998 to follow a similar course of action to other mutuals with guaranteed annuity problems, such as Scottish Widows and Clerical Medical, its policyholders would now be substantially better placed.

While Scottish Widows and Clerical Medical decided to sell out to a major financial group capable of standing behind their businesses, the Equitable board decided not to do that. To what extent was that because of the Treasury guidance, which remained in place until it was suspended on 20 July 2000? It remained on the Treasury website right up to that date.

The 1 January 1999 start date for the period being examined by the parliamentary ombudsman seems increasingly artificial. The same people were regulating Equitable Life in 1998 and 1999, but from different locations. It must surely make sense to widen the ombudsman's area of inquiry.

I should be grateful for the Minister's assurance that he will look into the following specific issues that have been raised with me by policyholders. They are only some of many. Is it right that the Personal Investment Authority ombudsman should refuse to deal with complaints of mis-selling, as there may now be a compromise? The person who raised that with me invested almost £500,000 in Equitable during and mainly towards the end of 1999. He was assured by the Equitable Life field representative that he need do nothing to protect or preserve his investment. He wants his case considered by the PIA ombudsman. Does the Minister think that a reasonable request?

Is it right that the FSA should be giving no advice to individual policyholders about whether to accept a compromise? Is the FSA certain that, in the event of a compromise being accepted by the policyholders, Equitable Life will be able to withstand large class actions alleging general mis-selling of with-profits policies, brought by those who have left the society? Unless there is some certainty about that, even if the compromise is accepted, Equitable Life might go into insolvency.

What is the Minister doing about all those civil service pensioners who made investments under the civil service additional voluntary contribution scheme when one arm of Government, at least, knew that there were serious problems with solvency at Equitable Life?

One civil service pensioner has written to tell me that, as late as October 2000, Equitable Life was described in the relevant Home Office notice as a leading life assurance company. The Home Office permanent secretary told him that when his inquiry was raised with the Cabinet Office, as managers of the civil service AVC scheme, the reply was:

> "It would be wrong and inappropriate to seek to provide information on the basis that the Cabinet Office or employing Departments are in some way entitled to privileged information that is not available to the pensions industry more generally. There is a clear difference between the role of the Cabinet Office as managers of the civil service AVC scheme and the regulatory role carried out elsewhere in Government."

That may well be so, but—and this goes to the heart of the matter—why did the regulator keep to himself information that should have been shared with policyholders and investors?

The latest annual report of the parliamentary ombudsman highlights his concern at

> "the length of time it takes Departments to respond to inquiries and to the statement of complaint which is the preliminary to an investigation, and also to resolve issues, especially issues of redress, after we have sent them a draft report on our investigation."

Paragraph 1.9 of his annual report says:

> "Among my own concerns is that Departments are putting increasing burdens upon citizens (for example, through self-assessment of income tax) with severe penalties if those burdens are not discharged, while allowing themselves generous periods of time to carry out their own functions and with perhaps only token redress if they overstep those periods".

What guarantee can the Minister give that the Treasury will co-operate enthusiastically with the ombudsman's inquiry, and that the ombudsman will be allocated sufficient resources to enable him to reach proper conclusions within a reasonable time scale?

I shall stop there, because otherwise the Minister will not have time to respond. However, this is an extremely complex subject, and I hope that he will lobby his colleagues to ensure that we can have a fuller debate on it in Government time soon.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The title of this evening's debate is extremely broad, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on securing parliamentary time on the subject of maladministration in the civil service—a big area to investigate. I welcome the opportunity to present the Government's views to the House.

The process of scrutiny of public service delivery often involves criticism of policy, and the assertion of different opinions and views. However, it is important at the outset to distinguish between a debate on the merits or otherwise of a particular policy, and the examination of whether a given policy has been effectively executed and administered.

Parliament has a long tradition of holding the Executive to account for administrative shortcomings, and in many ways this is as valuable as scrutinising changes in policy. Maladministration, whenever it occurs, can not only tarnish the reputation of public services in general, but cause harm and disadvantage to individual consumers, taxpayers and citizens. It is therefore vital that administrative systems are sufficiently robust and well conceived to prevent, or lessen the likelihood of, failures.

I shall touch on the existing methods by which complaints of administrative failings can be pursued, and also briefly on how the Government are working to improve both complaints procedures and the capabilities of the civil service in general.

First, however, the hon. Gentleman may find it helpful if I address specifically the points that he raised, focusing primarily on Equitable Life. I would like to express my sympathy for all the Equitable Life policyholders who have been affected by recent events. My colleagues in government and I fully understand the distress and anger that they feel. Equitable Life raises important issues that deserve consideration by a full independent inquiry, and that is why, as hon. Members will know, my hon. friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury announced on 31 August that such an inquiry had been set up under Lord Penrose.

The inquiry will consider what lessons can be drawn for the conduct, administration and regulation of the life assurance industry. We recognise that it is important that lessons are learned from what has happened. The inquiry will allow us to do that, and Lord Penrose's terms of reference will enable him to consider events from all angles. They are:

"To enquire into the circumstances leading to the current situation of the Equitable Life Assurance Society, taking account of relevant life market background; to identify any lessons to be learned for the conduct, administration and regulation of life assurance business; and to give a report thereon to Treasury Ministers."

It is clear that the problems at Equitable date back many years. By virtue of its wide-ranging remit, Lord Penrose's inquiry will be able to look back as far as necessary to ascertain the origin of the problems and investigate those issues that he thinks have a bearing on the subject regardless of where and when they arose. In particular, he will be able to look carefully into the actions of Equitable itself, the regulators and other key players over the years. We expect Lord Penrose to report in the second half of next year.

I understand that the investigation that the parliamentary ombudsman has announced will be limited to looking at the actions of the Financial Services Authority between 1 January 1999, when the FSA took over responsibility for regulation, and 8 December 2000, when Equitable closed to new business. The Government and the FSA will, of course, co-operate fully with the parliamentary ombudsman's investigation into the regulation of Equitable Life. I shall have more to say later about the parliamentary ombudsman, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that he will have the resources at his disposal to conduct an efficient and effective inquiry.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of compensation following any conclusions by the ombudsman. It does not make any sense to anticipate the findings of the investigation, but if the ombudsman were to make such a recommendation the Government would consider it carefully. The hon. Gentleman raised several other specific issues connected with Equitable Life and the FSA which I shall certainly draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary.

Mr. Chope: Does the Minister understand that the Penrose inquiry has a remit to consider issues of maladministration by the regulator and issues of compensation and redress? The Economic Secretary yesterday was ambivalent on those points. If there is doubt about whether the terms of reference go that far, will he put pressure on the Economic Secretary to ensure that Lord Penrose has a specific remit to include those issues in his inquiry?

Mr. Leslie: As the hon. Gentleman knows, those are primarily matters for my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, but my understanding is that Lord Penrose's remit is broad and he will be able to consider several specific issues. In the course of his inquiry, I am sure that he will address many of the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised this evening.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the specific case of a constituent of his. I am grateful for the notice of that issue that he was able to give me earlier today. It is a complicated case and I shall try to give a brief outline. I understand that an appeal was due to have been heard by the War Pensions Appeal Tribunal on 6 October 1998, but that that hearing was adjourned because the pensioner concerned had presented several new pieces of evidence and the chairman wished to give the War Pensions Agency the opportunity to consider them.

Because of the complexity of the associated medical issues, the agency took some time to consider the new evidence carefully. In parallel, the appeal hearing was rearranged for 27 October 1999, but was postponed at the request of the pensioner concerned. A new date was set but the hearing had to be adjourned, again at the request of the pensioner concerned. In the interim, the pensioner lodged a separate appeal, on different grounds, but the hearing on that had to be adjourned because the War Pensions Agency had not provided full documentation to the tribunal. I understand that the agency's chief executive has apologised for that omission. He did, however, take steps to ensure that full documentation was available to the tribunal when it heard both of the appeals on 10 July 2001. The tribunal's decision was reserved, but the pensioner concerned has now been sent a copy of its decision.

I have been assured that the hon. Gentleman will receive a direct response in the near future to the particular points he raised with the Lord Chancellor's Department.

I come now to the wider issues raised by the hon. Gentleman. Most public services have well developed complaints procedures, through which members of the public can pursue a grievance of maladministration and seek redress. Increasing numbers of organisations follow consumer-oriented policies, and the Government must be no exception to this.

Progressively, many more public services consult their users and publish the standards of service that they aim to achieve. By accepting the principle that people who use services have a right to information and a right to complain, the public sector is endeavouring to focus on achieving greater consumer satisfaction.

It is clear that more work needs to be done, but proper handling of complaints is central to the Government's programme to modernise and improve public services, and greater responsiveness to people's needs is a key objective. There are also a number of statutory bodies through which the public may raise complaints even if internal departmental complaints processes have been exhausted without satisfaction. The Parliamentary

[Mr. Leslie]

Commissioner for Administration—normally known as the parliamentary ombudsman—is such a body, and assesses claims from members of the public who complain that they have suffered injustice because of maladministration by Government Departments or certain other public bodies. The ombudsman also deals with complaints about problems in obtaining access to official information.

The ombudsman is independent of Government and is not a civil servant. He is an Officer of the House of Commons, appointed by Her Majesty, and reports directly to Parliament. Complaints to him are confidential. His investigations are private, and he does not charge for his services. At present, complaints to the parliamentary ombudsman must be made through a Member of Parliament.

In general, the term "maladministration" is taken to mean poor administration, or the incorrect application of rules. For example, maladministration can usually include avoidable delay, faulty procedures or failing to follow correct procedures, and the term can also include the failure to tell individuals about any rights of appeal that they might have. It can cover unfairness, bias or prejudice, the giving of advice that is misleading or inadequate, and the refusal to answer reasonable questions. Covered too by the term are discourtesy, the failure to apologise properly for errors and mistakes in handling claims, and not offering an adequate remedy where one is due.

The ombudsman does not investigate complaints that are about Government policy or the content of legislation. Policy is for the Government to determine, and legislation is for Parliament to decide. Criminal investigations, the decisions of courts and public service personnel matters are also outside the remit of the ombudsman

In 1999, following representations from the members of the ombudsman's office, we announced a review to determine whether the present arrangements were in the best interest of complainants and others. That was against a background of moves towards more integrated public services, and an increasing focus on the needs of the people and organisations that use these services.

The review team consulted widely and its report was published in April 2000. We published a consultation paper on the report a few months later. In July this year, I announced that the Government's conclusions would respond to the consultation paper. We were satisfied that there was broad support for the review's main conclusions, and that we would therefore replace the existing arrangements with a more unified and flexible ombudsman body for central Government, local government and the national health service, other than NHS pensions. In due course, we will publish proposals for the precise powers and accountability of the new body—to which the public will have direct access—and on whether its jurisdiction should be extended beyond the bodies subject to the jurisdiction of the existing ombudsmen.

The effective design and specification of administrative systems to deliver Government policies is crucial, and there is a constant process of learning the lessons from the mistakes of the past. Clearly, Ministers have always relied heavily on the capabilities of the civil service to ensure that policies are implemented effectively, efficiently, transparently and fairly. In order to improve the capacity of the civil service to deliver improved outcomes for the public at large, a reform programme is under way, building on the firm foundations of the impartial and competent service that has served the nation so well for so long.

Under-achievement and poor performance can be tackled in a number of ways and it is clear that the parliamentary ombudsman, Parliament and the Government's reform programme all have a part to play. There have been many examples of maladministration in the past. Although we all strive to ensure that the machinery of service delivery is as perfect as possible, there will no doubt be problems in the future as well. The best that we can do is to try as hard as possible to improve our systems, learn from the past, and reform and modernise public services so that they match as closely as possible the aspirations and needs of the people whom we all represent.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 1 November 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

Ordered,

That Mr. Speaker do issue his Warrant for the Clerk of the Crown to make out a new writ for the electing of a Member to serve in this present Parliament for the Borough Constituency of Ipswich in the room of Jamie Charles Cann, Esquire, deceased.—[*Ms Armstrong.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Manufacturing (Eastern Region)

1. **Alistair Burt** (North-East Bedfordshire): What recent representations she has received about unemployment in manufacturing industry in the eastern region; and if she will make a statement. [9547]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I have received several representations. Manufacturing employment in the region is falling, as it is in most industrial countries, but unemployment in the region is down, and there are more people in work in the east of England than ever before.

Alistair Burt: I thank the right hon. Lady for her answer. Is she aware that many people in my constituency and in the eastern region as a whole see manufacturing as the silent casualty of the past few years? With the sector officially in recession, unemployment rising and Government measures such as the climate change levy beginning to bite, what personal targets is she setting to obtain some relief for manufacturing in this year's budgetary round? How does she intend to judge her success or failure on behalf of manufacturing when the Budget measures are announced?

Ms Hewitt: Manufacturing in every industrialised country is going through difficult times. Indeed, in the past three months, manufacturing output fell in Japan by 4 per cent., in the United States by almost 2 per cent., in the eurozone by well over 1 per cent., but in the United Kingdom by only 1 per cent. Although many of our manufacturing workers and businesses are having a difficult time in the global economic slowdown, we are better placed in Britain, as a result of the policies that the Government have been pursuing, to withstand the global downturn—as the International Monetary Fund confirmed just a couple of days ago. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I will continue to work with manufacturing industry and workers to ensure that more of our manufacturing companies become and remain highly productive and competitive in the world economy.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Does the Secretary of State agree that one way to encourage even more employment opportunities in manufacturing in the eastern region, and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, is to encourage the development of new technologies such as renewable energy? If so, what further action is she taking to encourage businesses such as Shell and BP that have significant manufacturing businesses in renewables overseas to set up manufacturing plant here?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right. My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy and I have been working closely with those companies and others to encourage them to expand their renewable energy production in the United Kingdom. We are investing more than £250 million in renewable energy. We have created an incentive in the exemption of renewable energy from the climate change levy to encourage businesses to obtain more of their electricity from renewable sources. In the eastern region generally, we have the enormous advantage of Cambridge and other world-class universities, which are working increasingly closely with business and the regional development agency to ensure that the region is a centre of successful, growing high-tech manufacturing.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): What does the Secretary of State intend to do about over-regulation, which is so damaging to manufacturing industry in the eastern region and elsewhere in Britain, and how should we measure her progress in that?

Ms Hewitt: I know very well that when Opposition Members talk about over-regulation, most of the time they are talking about measures to give better protection to workers, including the minimum wage, which they opposed in the last Parliament, and measures on working time, including the right to four weeks' holiday. We are working closely with business and the Better Regulation Task Force to deal with red tape problems when they arise and to reduce the burden of administrative costs on business. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, we have less product market regulation than the rest of the OECD, and that Arthur Andersen found in a worldwide study earlier this year that this is the best place in the world to start and grow a business.

Small Business Service

2. **Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What assessment she has made of the operation of the Small Business Service. [9548]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): The Small Business Service is helping to build an enterprise society in which small firms of all types can thrive. Among its achievements in the first 18 months is the raising of

£100 million for early-stage high-technology businesses. Other achievements are set out in the annual report, which is in the Library.

Brian White: The Minister will know that the success of Milton Keynes is largely based on small firms coming to the area, supported by agencies in the public and private sectors. The business plan for the local small business service is based on that same ethos of partnership. Will he ensure that the local service holds to those commitments and give an assurance that the money will go to companies and not into bureaucracy?

Nigel Griffiths: I am certainly concerned about the underspend on operational costs in Milton Keynes, and I am monitoring the performance of Business Links. However, I am delighted by the quality of the support given to local firms that are badly affected by foot and mouth in my hon. Friend's area, such as Hot Air Balloon Adventures. The company informed me this morning that help from Business Links solutions was vital in assisting its survival and recovery.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I think that the Minister will agree that we all hope that the Small Business Service will be truly effective. Many residential homes in my constituency are concerned about the national minimum standards being imposed by the Government. The Small Business Service should act on their behalf, but in this case it has shown its ignorance of the Department of Health's consultation process. In fact, the official report of the Small Business Service to the Department shows that the service has been seeking business representation on a strategic group that does not even exist.

Nigel Griffiths: I am sorry to hear of any constituency concerns about the Small Business Service; it has given us very good service during the past 18 months. I am sure that better is to come and I am happy to take note of the hon. Gentleman's comments and to consider the matter. During the past quarter alone, the Small Business Service has helped more than 130,000 businesses through the advice given by Business Links.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Some small businesses are providers of services to people with individual learning accounts. Did the Department of Trade and Industry or the Small Business Service have any input in the recent decision of the Department for Education and Skills to stop taking new recruits for the ILA programme on 7 December? If so, was it not undiplomatic for that Department to send letters to small businesses telling them not to rush people into new, inappropriate accounts? After all, not all small businesses are run by cowboys.

Nigel Griffiths: I recently met the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey), who has responsibility for that sector. We agreed that the help given to people should be constantly monitored, updated and improved. With the aim of improving the available services, I have certainly noted the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes). I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is also aware of the matter and is looking to ensure that an effective programme is improved and continues to provide a good service for all our constituents.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Will the Minister tell the House what advice he has received from the Small Business Service about the likely impact on small and medium-sized enterprises of the removal by the European Parliament of the concessions for smaller businesses in the information and consultation directive? That concession was brokered by the UK Government. Would it be too much to ask that in future, when the British Labour Government negotiate concessions in Brussels for the benefit of British business, Labour MEPs vote for them, not against them?

Nigel Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman gave us the position of the European Parliament, but there has been no change in the agreement on the common position on that matter. Indeed, I met Commissioner Liikanen last week in Brussels to discuss the strong representation that we and other member states are making to ensure that small businesses can thrive and grow in the EU.

Aerospace Industry

3. **Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): What recent discussions she has had with the United Kingdom aerospace industry on the changes predicted as a result of the events of 11 September. [9549]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): My colleagues and I are in very close contact both with individual companies and with the trade associations in order to understand and evaluate the effect of the appalling events of 11 September on the aerospace sector. We are already of course putting in place measures to help the workers affected by the redundancies that have been announced, but it is too early to predict the full impact on the sector.

Mr. Pike: My right hon. Friend will know that in Burnley, as in many places, we have lost jobs in the aerospace industry since 11 September. Will she confirm that the Government believe that it is a high-skill, high-value industry crucial to the future of our economy, and that they will do everything possible to secure its future? Will they also do everything possible to ensure that those people who lose their jobs can retain their skills for the advantage of the industry and the country in years ahead?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of the aerospace sector: it is a world-class high-tech manufacturing sector. During the past three years, we have invested £1 billion in support, through Airbus UK and Rolls-Royce, to ensure that we maintain that world-leading position. I also draw his attention to the very welcome announcement a few days ago that Lockheed and its British partners have won the new contract for the joint strike fighter. That will be worth more than £22 billion in investment and orders over the

next 10 years and will help, with further Government backing, to ensure that workers and businesses in the aerospace sector have a strong future.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Traditionally, at difficult times for the civil aerospace industry, capacity is utilised by appropriate increases in orders for the military manufacturing sector of the industry. The Secretary of State's announcement of the Lockheed Martin order for the JSF—in which we are participating—is especially welcome news. Can she make it clear that the Ministry of Defence will now sign a contract for the A400M aircraft that will ensure the continuance of many British jobs? That contract is especially important in view of the Italian Government's decision not to sign.

Ms Hewitt: We will continue to work closely with colleagues in the Ministry of Defence to ensure that the British aerospace industry continues to flourish and to meet the needs of the defence as well as the civilian sector. I shall certainly raise the hon. Gentleman's point with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): The announcement of 1,900 job losses at Rolls-Royce in the Derby area shocked many local people. Steps are being taken to deal with the short-term implications of what we all consider a temporary setback for a great company. However, what steps are being taken to ensure that when the upturn comes, the investment that Rolls-Royce and other aerospace businesses want to make is located in the UK? Furthermore, what steps have been taken to ensure that the supply chains of that company are shortened and brought as far as possible within a UK compass?

Ms Hewitt: The announcement of the Rolls-Royce redundancies was an appalling shock, especially for workers in my hon. Friend's constituency and other parts of Derby. We are working closely with the company and with colleagues in the Employment Service to ensure that every support is given to the workers who face losing their jobs. The Minister for Industry and Energy will shortly meet the Rolls-Royce taskforce to ensure that my hon. Friend's points are taken on board as we develop an effective strategy so that the aerospace sector remains competitive and employs large numbers of British workers in very good jobs.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Is the Secretary of State aware of the possibility of serious misuse of the public funding of £530 million for the Airbus project? Has she realised that, whereas in the rest of Europe industrial assistance is being spread throughout the supply chain, in the UK, all the DTI funding is going to the prime contractor, which in turn is demanding that all the British suppliers provide the full up-front development costs, putting them at an enormous competitive disadvantage? Will she investigate that matter and intervene if necessary, because there is a real possibility that large amounts of taxpayers' money will end up providing employment for Italian subcontractors?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We are of course in touch both with prime contractors and the first-tier suppliers as we look at the impact—in particular of 11 September—on the aerospace sector. I shall certainly look further at the point that he raised.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): The announcement about the joint strike fighter and the benefits that will come to the north-west from the creation of many thousands of jobs is wonderful. However, the supply chain is the worry. When we follow the supply chain back through BAE Systems, we find that some of the work is going to the former Russian bloc. I fear that that is uncompetitive and will disadvantage local skills and companies. Can my right hon. Friend help?

Ms Hewitt: We are working with the aerospace sector, as we are with other sectors, to ensure that throughout the supply chain our companies and workers are competitive, wherever the competition comes from. Having considered the implications of the award of that contract to Lockheed, I understand that we are looking not only at £22 billion of orders during the next 10 years, but at some 7,000 jobs throughout the British supply chain as a direct result. I am sure that my hon. Friend will join me in welcoming that news for the British aerospace sector.

Wave and Tidal Power

4. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): What steps her Department is taking to develop electricity generation using wave and tidal power. [9550]

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): The Department is taking a number of important steps to develop electricity generation from wave and tidal power. We have supported the development of the world's first commercial wave power station on Islay, and we recently announced that we will provide further support to Wavegen—the company involved—for its most recent project. Earlier this year, the wave programme was extended to cover tidal-stream technology.

Mr. Carmichael: The Minister is no doubt aware that the Select Committee on Science and Technology concluded last year that the United Kingdom should establish a marine energy test centre. He is no doubt also aware that since then, research commissioned by the Scottish Executive and Highlands and Islands Enterprise has concluded that the best site for that centre would be in Stromness, Orkney. What discussions has he had with the Scottish Executive and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to move that project forward to the next stage? Is he prepared to commit any funding from his Department towards establishing the centre?

Mr. Wilson: The announcement to which I referred about further support for Wavegen is relevant to the testing station on Orkney, because I understand that Wavegen will develop the technology for an offshore wave-power machine, which will be tested there. There is close liaison between those responsible for our UK-wide policy and those responsible for what is happening in Scotland. We work very closely with the Scottish Executive on all energy issues, especially renewables, and

the funding will come from the DTI where appropriate, and from the Scottish Executive or Highlands and Islands Enterprise where that is appropriate.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): The Minister will share the concern of Members who read the report in the recent Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology bulletin that changes to reduce the price of electricity have resulted in a decline in the amount of energy produced from renewable sources in recent months. Will he be particularly vigilant to ensure that in attempting to reduce energy costs, we do not score an own goal?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend's point is extremely well taken and succinctly expressed. There is a problem, but the new electricity trading arrangements are working well in their own terms. NETA has led to a significant 20 per cent. reduction in the wholesale price of electricity, but there is no doubt that NETA, among other factors, has had an impact on renewables, especially wave power and combined heat and power. That is why I have announced a consultation exercise on NETA's implications for renewables and CHP in its first few months of operation, but the rhetoric must match the reality, and I will be very interested to know about NETA's effect. NETA has many benefits, but we must also pursue and give substance to our targets on renewables and CHP.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): May I make it clear to the Minister that the Opposition strongly support efforts to encourage the development of renewable energy sources, such as wave and tidal power? We welcome the measures that he mentioned, and those to which the Secretary of State referred earlier, but may I press the Minister on the issue that has just been raised? The support that he described is almost worthless when set against NETA's effect on the industry. As he said, NETA has been very successful in driving down electricity prices, but it is also driving renewable energy producers out of business. Does he accept that if the Government are to meet their renewable energy targets—rather than waiting for the outcome of a review or the consultation exercise to which he referred—action is needed straight away?

Mr. Wilson: I am delighted to hear that the Tories now support our policies on renewable energy, because the reality is that they never did anything about it. If they had done so, Britain might have kept its lead in wind power in particular and we, instead of Denmark, might have a £4 billion manufacturing industry today. I am determined that we will not lose our technological lead in wave and tidal power, CHP and other industries that can contribute enormously not only to our energy policies but to our manufacturing policies. That is our objective, and it is why I am so determined that we shall not be diverted from those targets. We will study NETA's effect. Ofgem is an independent regulator. Its priority is to reduce the price of electricity, which is also a popular and successful policy, but we have our targets for renewables and CHP, and we must consider the reality of what is happening in the first few months of NETA's working.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Is it not the case that the European Union has now set a target of 20 per cent. for renewables, by contrast with the 10 per cent. by 2010 that we have set? Is it not now time for us to look beyond 2010, and to set higher targets for renewables in the years ahead? In the current context of international terrorist threat, will my hon. Friend tell the House whether he personally would feel safer living next to a wind farm or a nuclear power station?

Mr. Wilson: I would feel extremely safe living beside either, and no one should suggest otherwise at this or any other time. On the wider point, I should like even more ambitious targets for renewables to be set, and those involved in the energy review are studying that issue among others, but I am not interested in setting targets that cannot be achieved, so if we set a higher target for renewables, which I would strongly welcome and support, we must do so on the basis of hard evidence showing that we can deliver. That is precisely what the energy review will set out.

End of Vehicle Life Directive

5. **Miss Julie Kirkbride** (Bromsgrove): If she will make a statement on the start date and implementation of the end of vehicle life directive in the United Kingdom. [9551]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): The end of vehicle life directive requires transposition into national legislation by 21 April 2002. We are working to achieve that. The directive is complex, with far-reaching consequences for car and component manufactures, importers, vehicle dismantlers and shredders, material recyclers and car owners. It is therefore important that we get the legislative framework right.

Miss Kirkbride: Does the Minister accept that the lack of detail in her reply will be viewed as complacent by my many constituents who work at MG Rover, whose livelihoods could depend on the decisions that she is about to take? Does she accept that France and Germany have decided to implement the directive with a five-year delay on old cars? Will she promise the House today that that will be the minimum delay in implementing the Government's decisions on the directive? Does she accept that if she does not do that, she could cause bankruptcy at MG Rover, destroying the livelihoods of many of my constituents?

Miss Johnson: I assure the hon. Lady that there is no question of our putting United Kingdom business at a competitive disadvantage in transposing or implementing the directive. We will ensure that there is a level playing field with other member states. I also assure her that we have been consulting the industry on the possible implementation options. We welcome the views that we have received from the industry, and we are considering them carefully. It is crucial that we work together with the manufacturing and retailing industries to identify the best approach to implementation. That is what the Government are doing.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): In wishing my hon. Friend well, may I say that it is important to take the right decision, rather than a quick decision, on this issue? Using expressions such as "level playing field" is unhelpful

when we are talking about several playing fields. In particular, the Federal Republic of Germany's car manufacturing industry produces very different types of car from our own and has a different set of priorities in relation to end-of-life vehicles. Will she be very careful about what she says in relation to one country or another because the simplistic Eurospeak of level-playing-field comparisons is misleading and dangerous in such situations?

Miss Johnson: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks and his caution about the term "level playing field". I understand his point entirely, but I re-emphasise that we have no intention of putting UK business at a competitive disadvantage. I hope that he recognises the force of our views on that.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, many car manufacturers, such as Toyota, have stated publicly—for example, to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry recently—that they recognise the environmental benefits of the directive. The House must remember that the directive's objective is to achieve those benefits.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The Minister will know that the heart of the British car industry today is much more focused on the newer arrivals, such as Nissan, Honda and Toyota, which has its UK headquarters in my constituency. Will she reassure those companies that the Government will not allow the directive to require the newer entrants to the market to pick up recycling costs that rightly belong to a period 20 or 30 years ago, before they had a significant presence in our markets?

Miss Johnson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are discussing carefully with the industry how the directive is to be transposed and implemented. We will continue to do that, but car sales have been at record levels during September and October, and the car industry is a flourishing part of our economy.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that the end of vehicle life, waste electronics and electrical directives and many more are being introduced for the good of the environment? Hon. Members will surely be in favour of that. There will be a lot of pressure from motor manufacturers to slow down the process. We want a level playing field, but I hope that she will stand firm on progress and say to the industry in this country that environmental enterprise offers us as a manufacturing nation a wonderful opportunity to take advantage of the new environmental climate in which we will operate. Those are real opportunities. It is not a lose-lose situation, but win-win, because we win for the environment and for innovation.

Miss Johnson: Indeed. I applaud the objectives that my hon. Friend set out. Those are the Government's objectives on both the environmental side and the business side. I remind the House that greater recycling of end-of-life vehicles will contribute to the Government's target to reduce waste going to landfill. We already recycle 75 per cent. of end-of-life vehicles. The directive will bring that up to 85 per cent. by 2006.

Manufacturing

6. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): What plans she has to improve the quality of advice provided by her Department on manufacturing on a regional basis. [9553]

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): I am strengthening my assistance to manufacturing industry in the regions through increased support for the regional development agencies to raise innovation, enterprise and skills and by improving universities and industry links. We are taking forward our announced initiative to provide a manufacturing advisory service in England and Wales, based on provision on a regional basis. In Scotland, advice to manufacturing industry is provided through the enterprise network.

John Robertson: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware of the high unemployment in my constituency of Glasgow, Anniesland: it is running at about 6.9 per cent., well above the national average. We are seeking to encourage investment, particularly in shipbuilding in the constituency, and unemployment has fallen significantly since the Labour Government came to office in 1997. That success has been brought about in the main recently by the excellent partnership between the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments. What plans does he have to broaden that partnership to the rest of the UK?

Mr. Wilson: The unemployment figure that my hon. Friend quotes is of course one of the higher figures in the country. I think it is worth bearing in mind that perhaps four or five years ago it would have been one of the lowest figures in the country for a constituency. That is how things have changed in the past four years.

I agree with what my hon. Friend says about co-operation. We have a very good model in Scotland—there has been a very good model in Wales for a long time—of how an economic development agency can function, work alongside industry, and be part of a team that not only is proactive in promoting investment, but in times of difficulty gets in there with everyone else and helps to save jobs and to promote investment for the future. I believe strongly that the role that Scottish Enterprise, and the Welsh and Northern Ireland development agencies have played for many years since being established by a Labour Government can now be repeated throughout England by the regional development agencies, also established by a Labour Government.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Will the Minister tell the House how many jobs have been lost in manufacturing across the regions so far this year? Will he confirm that the recession affecting manufacturing industry started long before 11 September, although the events of that day will undoubtedly make the prospects for British business harder still? Will he explain why, when the Government claim to attach such importance to improving the competitiveness of British industry, the latest World Economic Forum league of international competitiveness shows that Britain has fallen still further: we are now in 12th place having been in fourth place just five years ago?

Mr. Wilson: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman look at the remarks of the IMF on that subject. He would find a

very different picture. It seems to want to talk Britain up rather than to talk it down. Of course, manufacturing has difficulties and they pre-dated 11 September, but as the Secretary of State mentioned earlier, the decline of our manufacturing output is less than in comparable countries throughout the world. The point is not simply to say that manufacturing has difficulties. The real test of a Government is what they do about it. Instead of standing idly by saying that it is all to do with the market, in every situation we are working alongside companies and sectors that are in difficulty in order to defend as many jobs as possible and at the same time to ensure that investment takes place. That is what we are doing in the cases of Rolls-Royce and shipbuilding on the Clyde, it is what we did earlier this week with the mining industry, where there were some difficulties, and it is what we will continue to do. That is what people expect from a Labour Government and what they get from a Labour Government.

Mr. Whittingdale: The Minister is right to say that the test is what the Government do to affect competitiveness. Does he really believe that the competitiveness of British industry is helped by the fact that, according to the CBI's pre-Budget submission, business is having to pay an extra £6 billion in tax as a result of his Government's actions? Will he even now try to persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer to do away with the climate change levy, which, as the Engineering Employers Federation has said, is imposing an ever greater and disproportionate burden on manufacturing at a time when the industry is already in recession?

Mr. Wilson: We can all play the game of quoting from the bumper book of selective quotations, but by any standard if we ask manufacturing industry whether it has a better relationship with Government than it did in the past, the answer would positively be yes. Of course, fiscal issues are always raised by any sector of industry. They will be considered by a Treasury that is well aware of the implications of any measure, but we have responsibilities to the environment, to employment and to ensure the economic success of this country. Any Government working from a Labour perspective will put those together and take measures that are fiscally appropriate and will not damage manufacturing industry. Those are our priorities. We are doing pretty well. That is why the electorate gave us the vote of confidence that they did.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): What action has my hon. Friend's Department taken to encourage and assist regions to implement the national strategy for the textiles and clothing industry and particularly to allow it to move into new areas such as technical textiles? In order to show his support for the industry and the fact that it can have a positive future, will he consider visiting the wonderful millennium textiles banners exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall, which reflects the identity of the villages and towns in my community in Amber Valley and the honourable heritage of the textiles industry, which we hope to preserve into the future?

Mr. Wilson: I do not like to organise my diary on the hoof, but I could perhaps combine that invitation with my meeting with the Rolls-Royce taskforce and visit what I am told is an excellent exhibition in Amber Valley. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is upstairs."] Well, I like to go back to roots and see where it all comes from.

The textiles point is very relevant to a discussion on regional development agencies because, largely owing to the work done by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in her previous role, there is a strategy. I believe strongly that sections of the textiles industry, and niche companies within it, have a very bright future. Working through the RDAs, we will reinforce these sectors, which have real long-term prospects. That is a commitment that I am happy to put into effect in practice.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): The Minister may recall the advice given by his Department following the large number of redundancies in Marconi this June. Recently, that has culminated in a successful rapid response bid, for which I am most grateful. Unfortunately, there have been more manufacturing redundancies—just last week, a large number in an engineering company—and I hope that there will be further assistance. The matter goes beyond the redeployment package that might be offered. We have vacated sites in an area that has, in fact, a very low level of unemployment. I seek an assurance that the regional development agency, in its guidance and—

Mr. Speaker: Order. There has been no question so far. It is not the practice of the House that a question should be read out in this manner, but perhaps the Minister can pick up on what the hon. Lady has said so far.

Mr. Wilson: I welcome the hon. Lady's comments about the rapid response to the Marconi situation. Of course there will be more job losses in manufacturing. There is no doubt about that. The question is what we do in response. When companies have a future but there are short-term difficulties, government in all its forms, at local and national level, by working constructively with companies, can get good results, saving many jobs and laying the foundations for a better future. That is the approach that we are increasingly developing. There is to be a manufacturing summit later this year at which we will work up that approach further. It is not enough to stand by and express regret. We must be in there working and using all the tools of government to get the best result possible, often in difficult circumstances.

I am sure that the hon. Lady and others will welcome the fact that Government funding for RDAs will rise from £1.2 billion in 2001 to £1.7 billion in 2003–04: a substantial increase that will allow the RDAs to play the role that I described and that I am sure she wants.

Consumer Protection

7. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): What steps she is taking to improve protection of consumers. [9554]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Enterprise Bill will benefit consumers by strengthening the competition regime, introducing measures to take swift action against traders who do not comply with their obligations to consumers. The consumer credit review

will ensure that consumers are adequately protected against unfair and exploitative lending practices, and consumer support networks across the country are making it easier for consumers to get quality advice and information.

Siobhain McDonagh: Will my hon. Friend specifically address the issue of car maintenance and repair? Many of my constituents who come to see me feel most vulnerable in that area and often pay large sums for poor work. What guarantees can she and the Government give that they will be better protected in future?

Miss Johnson: I entirely share my hon. Friend's concerns: £9 billion a year is spent on servicing and repairing our cars and consumers are far from confident that they are getting a fair deal. Our proposals include the promotion of minimum standards of customer service, improving the effectiveness of codes of practice, and advice to help consumers feel more confident and better informed in their dealings with garages, including a good garage scheme.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): But can the Minister confirm that over a quarter of a century has passed since the Conservative fair trading legislation; that the previous Secretary of State's rip-off Britain campaign descended into farce, fiasco and failure and caused much needless offence to British industry; and that, despite a White Paper in the middle of 1999, we are unlikely to have legislation before next year at the earliest? When are this Government going to take the needs of British consumers seriously instead of relying on cheap soundbites?

Miss Johnson: The House will judge where the cheap soundbites are coming from.

This is the first full-scale review of the consumer credit legislation in more than 25 years. For much of that period, there were Governments of the hon. Gentleman's persuasion in office, yet they did nothing. We are aware that the laws are more than 30 years old and we are taking steps to introduce changes that will protect consumers and radically modify and modernise the regime. There are many measures in the Enterprise Bill, and many of the measures in the consumer White Paper have already been implemented.

Miners' Compensation

8. **Andy Burnham** (Leigh): If she will make a statement on the progress of the compensation scheme for former miners. [9555]

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): More than £600 million has now been paid out in coal compensation. Nearly 52,000 individual payments, in either interim or full settlement, have been made to respiratory claimants, and 64,000 to vibration white finger claimants. The schemes are expected to cost more than £5 billion.

Andy Burnham: I thank the Minister for the work that he and the Secretary of State are doing to make progress on this important issue. More than 2,500 claims by former pitmen in my constituency are still unsettled. One claimant recently passed away, and his family are still waiting for the release of his organs, so that they can give him a proper burial. Does the Minister agree that the system is still too bureaucratic and causes great distress to families? Will he consider cutting out more of the paperwork and making more approximate offers? Most people would rather have the money now, even if it is less than they are entitled to. Surely it is the least we can do, to give them some dignity in retirement when they are suffering from these terrible conditions.

Mr. Wilson: I express my regret and sympathy to the family of my hon. Friend's constituent. One of the tragic aspects of this whole business is that, almost by definition, because of the medical conditions involved, and because most of the claimants are elderly, deaths will occur before payment can be made. I can never say that that will not happen. All that I can do is to give an absolute commitment—which I give—to minimising the number of cases in which that happens.

There are two constraints on us in delivering what my hon. Friend seeks. First, we work by agreement with the claimants' solicitors. Secondly, we are governed by the judges' ruling, which is complex and means that there can be no question of uniform payments to all claimants. Having said that, I endorse utterly what he says about minimising the bureaucracy and delays. I am pleased to announce that we have made an important breakthrough with the solicitors that will allow us to make full and final offers in cases for which the work histories have not been finally agreed. That will lead to thousands of full and final offers being made in the coming few weeks. My target for next year is that 50,000 such offers will be made, 15,000 of which will be in Wales, as I said on my visit there earlier this week.

We have to keep up the pressure. There is no complacency. There is an absolute moral responsibility to pay out the money and—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Price.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I know that the Minister brings a deeply felt personal commitment to this issue. What can he tell us about the surface workers who were promised by his Department on 10 July 2000 that they would be eligible to make a claim under the scheme but whose solicitors have now been informed that that is no longer the case? Will he make good his original promise? Can he confirm also that claims over £50,000 have been called in by his Department? Does not that add a further level of bureaucracy and delay to claims from what are inevitably the oldest and the sickest miners?

Mr. Wilson: I discussed that last point when I was in Wales earlier this week, and I am assured that it is not true that delay is being caused. We are dealing with the biggest compensation scheme ever anywhere in the world, and very substantial payments are being made under it, so we have a responsibility to check a sample of the larger payments, but that is done on the same day—it is turned around within 24 hours—so no additional delay is involved.

My understanding is that discussions with the surface workers' solicitors are on-going, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman about that.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the progress so far in speeding up the claims, but plenty of former miners still come to my surgeries complaining of delays, and when my staff investigate—the IRISC people are very good, by the way—it often turns out that the problem lies with the solicitors, who leave offers sitting on their desks for weeks and sometimes months. They are being paid very generously by the Government for handling these cases. Is not it about time we had an audit, to make sure that we are getting value for money from these solicitors?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend makes a perfectly fair point. At the meeting in Cardiff earlier this week, one of the unions handed my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales a list of six cases in which there had been delays. When he checked those cases, he found that three of them were lying in solicitors' offices. That is where the delays were, and they are a practical example of the problem. However, solicitors are working closely with us and I do not want to blame anyone. All I want to do is get the payments made as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Solicitors will note my hon. Friend's remarks and take them to heart. Let us work together and get the payments made. As I said earlier, it is an uncapped scheme so there is absolutely no financial benefit to Government in delay. If a miner dies, the claim passes from the deceased to the widow and to the estate. In fact, delay costs the Government more than it does to pay out quickly. Therefore, every effort is being made to maximise the output of the scheme. The latest agreement with solicitors will lead to a big increase in the number of full and final offers.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I entirely endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes). I welcome the statement of my hon. Friend the Minister that a breakthrough has been made on the issue of work histories. I urge him to redouble his efforts so that the worst cases are dealt with first. Will he also consider the position of widows who, in some cases, have been waiting for pay-outs on claims that have lasted for three or four years?

Mr. Wilson: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that we have recently reached agreement with the solicitors to prioritise the claims of widows along with those of the oldest and sickest. Inevitably, that will mean that estate claims and claims from younger miners and ex-miners will take a little longer, but I think that everyone understands that priority must be given to the oldest, the sickest and widows. If everyone accepts that and we get the system working, the figures that have been made available will clear a large part of the backlog that has built up over the past year.

We have built up reasonable momentum, but it must be maintained. Many payments have been made. I stress that £600 million has been paid out, and that means that a huge sum of money is going into mining communities on a daily basis. The scheme is uncapped and it is estimated that it will cost between £5 billion and £6 billion, but claims are still coming in at the rate of 1,000 a week. Therefore, we do not know when the scheme will end or what the final figures will be. All that I can say is that every claim will be met.

Regional Responsibilities

9. **Mr. Michael Fallon** (Sevenoaks): If she will make a statement on her responsibilities for the regions. [9557]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): We want every region to enjoy strong and sustainable economic growth. In pursuit of that goal, my Department sponsors the regional development agencies; we provide regional selective assistance and enterprise grants; we ensure that European structural funds support our policy goals; and we provide services to small firms through the Small Business Service and our network of business links.

Mr. Fallon: All good stuff. However, can the Secretary of State explain why she and a junior Minister are responsible for the regional development agencies while, over at the Cabinet Office, the Deputy Prime Minister and another junior Minister are responsible for the Government offices of the regions and the regional co-ordination unit? A third Department of State—the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions—has three more Ministers responsible directly for the regions. Does she not accept that having three Departments of State and seven Ministers with direct responsibility for the regions looks much more like jammed-up government than joined-up government?

Ms Hewitt: Regional policy goes considerably wider than the economic responsibilities that I have at the Department of Trade and Industry. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is leading the work that we are doing on the White Paper on regional governance and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is responsible for regional policy overall. The position is quite clear.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): Given that economic development is such an important part of the Government's regional decentralisation programme, can my right hon. Friend assure me that she will work closely with the other relevant Departments to promote regional government in those areas that want it through a referendum, and that she will back up that process by continuing with a very active regional policy at national level in her Department?

Ms Hewitt: Yes, I can. I share my right hon. Friend's enthusiasm for devolving decisions as far as possible to the people whose lives they affect. I am pleased that, since the election, regional development agencies are now among the responsibilities of the Department of Trade and Industry. We are working closely with those agencies and with colleagues to ensure that we have the strong effective regional policy that we need throughout the country.

Competitiveness

10. **John Barrett** (Edinburgh, West): What steps the Government are taking to improve the competitiveness of British business. [9558]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): Improving the competitiveness of British business must be a partnership between all those involved in business and the Government. For the Government's part, we have created a stable economic environment in which business can prosper. We have low inflation and the lowest long-term interest rates for 35 years.

John Barrett: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he not agree that there have been a number of redundancies in our constituencies as a direct result of the economic impact of the terrorist attack on 11 September? For example, Grampian Foods in my constituency has laid off employees in the airline food industry. The Governments of other countries, such as the United States, have taken positive steps to support their airlines, so what action will this Government take to ensure that our industry can continue to compete on a level playing field?

Nigel Griffiths: No one should underestimate the events of 11 September, but no one should be in any doubt that, because of our economic policies, Britain is in a better position than other countries to weather any downturn. Steps have been taken to give us a business environment that has the lowest-ever corporation tax for small companies and the lowest starting rate in any major industrialised country. We have also reduced capital gains tax and introduced a host of other measures. Those steps have helped us to ensure that British businesses are in a better position than those in other countries to weather any downturn, to grow again and to compete in the world.

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): I am sure that my hon. Friend shares my view that price fixing and cartels are bad for competition in British business. However, does he share my suspicion that there is still a degree of price fixing in the British airline industry? That fact was confirmed to me only this week when I inquired about the standard fare between Heathrow and Glasgow and was told by British Airways that it was £162. When I phoned British Midland, its answer was somewhere between £161 and £163. Both airlines charge the exact same fare, so I encourage my hon. Friend in future legislation to strengthen competitiveness and to ensure that there is a proper investigation into what I believe to be price fixing in our domestic airline industry.

Nigel Griffiths: Of course, any price fixing is to be deplored. I hope that my hon. Friend will refer any evidence that he has to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): When my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) reminded the House that we had fallen from fourth place to 12th place in the competitiveness league, the Minister for Industry and Energy said that my hon. Friend was talking Britain down. The Minister added that he thought that we were doing pretty well. Can I tempt the Under-Secretary to agree with me that many in industry would say that that is a pretty complacent view?

Nigel Griffiths: My hon. Friend gave a robust and effective response. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman has come back for more, but let me give it to him. Competitive rankings are by their nature very volatile. *[Interruption.]* I note that Opposition Members laugh at the fact that the United Kingdom is ahead of Germany, France, Italy and Denmark on the growth competitiveness index. If the hon. Gentleman examines *The Economist* intelligence unit report, he will see that we have made the UK the most attractive business location in the world. Those are the facts, and I am surprised that he should be so brave as to raise such an embarrassing subject for the Conservative party.

Employment Rights

11. **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): What action is being taken by her Department to improve employment rights in the workplace. [9559]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Government have shown their commitment to minimum standards and fairness in the workplace with the introduction of the national minimum wage, paid holidays and many other measures. New rights to paid paternity and adoption leave, and enhancements to maternity rights, come in from 2003.

Mr. Luke: I know that my hon. Friend is very much aware of the great concern and uncertainty that is felt by many public sector workers about the arbitrary changes in working conditions before initial guarantee is given and the possible loss of pension rights in the transfer of an undertaking. Will my hon. Friend give an undertaking that following the consultation period the Department will welcome the proposals made at the TUC conference to strengthen the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981? Will she implement the recommendations as soon as possible once the consultation period ends in December?

Miss Johnson *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I should say to the House before the Minister replies that Members should not read from notes.

Miss Johnson: I know that my hon. Friend has a considerable and relevant background on these issues. I am grateful to him for bringing his expertise to the House, even though Opposition Members are mocking it. As he knows, the Government are consulting on reforms of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981. These reforms are designed to help the smooth management of any change by ensuring that employees know where they stand when a business changes hands.

We are proposing options for extending TUPE to occupational pensions, which my hon. Friend has mentioned. That would help to ensure that more employees have a basic minimum pension provision.

We want to ensure, too, that the liabilities in respect of employees are honoured by requiring transferrers to notify transferees of such liabilities. We want to clarify the position on when dismissals or changes to terms and conditions of employees who are involved in a transfer can be made. As my hon. Friend is aware, consultation ends on 15 December, so we are still awaiting the full consultation response.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 5 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill *(Lords)*.

Motion to approve the special education needs code of practice.

Motion to establish the Liaison Committee.

TUESDAY 6 NOVEMBER—Opposition Day [4th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The Crisis in the Government's Education and Life Long Learning Policies".

WEDNESDAY 7 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the International Development Bill *(Lords)*.

THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the Export Control Bill.

FRIDAY 9 NOVEMBER—Debate on drugs strategy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional Business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 12 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Animal Health Bill.

TUESDAY 13 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the British Overseas Territories Bill [Lords].

Motion to approve a money resolution on the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill.

WEDNESDAY 14 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the Football Disorder [Amendment] Bill.

THURSDAY 15 NOVEMBER—Motion to update the House sub judice rule.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at 4 o'clock.

FRIDAY 16 NOVEMBER—A debate on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Subject to be announced.

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business. May I ask him again—I hope that this is the last time that I have to do so—to tell us when we will have the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement? It would be helpful to the House and to those outside if we could have notification of that.

Before we come to the Second Reading of the Animal Health Bill on 12 November, will the Government clarify the position on the report on the assessment of hunting in foot and mouth areas? It strikes me as rather odd—or maybe it is not that odd—that a Minister is sitting on the report, presumably because its contents are not what the Government would wish to share with the House or anyone else. Given its relevance, may I have an undertaking from the Leader of the House that we shall know the contents of the document before Second Reading? Obviously, they will be highly relevant to it.

May we have an urgent statement, well in advance of Remembrance day on 11 November, on what is going on following the headline in today's *Daily Express*, of all newspapers, "The Cruel Betrayal of our Old War Heroes"? In the editorial, the *Daily Express*, of all newspapers, says:

> "But in a shameful example of red tape and bureaucratic pettiness, members of the Royal British Legion who were planning a traditional Remembrance Day in Berkshire have been banned from making their traditional march to church. A two-minute procession has been stopped because, under the Human Rights Act and the Road Traffic Act, the Legion would have had to apply for the road to be closed and provide signs a week in advance of their parade."

This would be laughable if the matter were not so serious. I demand that the Leader of the House arrange for the matter to be clarified and cleared up so that Remembrance day can be properly carried out throughout the country without being obstructed in a ridiculous way by the Human Rights Act 1998 and the attendant bureaucracy.

Mr. Cook: It is obvious that the right hon. Gentleman's period in office is not in any way mellowing him. I am heartily relieved.

First, there is the question of the pre-Budget statement. The right hon. Gentleman referred to it last week as the autumn statement, and I thought that I gave him the technically correct answer that we would have it in the autumn. Usually, the pre-Budget statement takes place at some time during this month. I do not expect that to vary.

The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that it is important that the report on hunting is assessed carefully. For more than 30 days there has been no instance of foot and mouth disease, and we want to ensure that any step that we take does not endanger our success in eradicating the disease. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to what the right hon. Gentleman said about the importance of the report's contents being known before the debate in a week's time.

As for the Royal British Legion, I take it that the right hon. Gentleman is referring to the incident at Boroughfield, which I was briefed on this morning. The House will be relieved to hear that there is no ban on the march. It has absolutely nothing to do with human rights. The police would be happy to co-operate if they were approached about road closures.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will my right hon. Friend find time to debate the important report that was produced by the joint aviation authorities in July, and published last month, on minimum aircraft seating standards? It is the first independent scientific report that states that seats in aircraft are too small for at least a quarter of the population, and that they are dangerous. The report recommends that seat spacing be increased immediately by at least 2.2 in.

I recognise the problems facing the aviation industry—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are laughing. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are to restore confidence in the industry among customers and passengers, we should guarantee their security and safety, and the health of passengers as well?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has raised the issue in a number of different ways over a period of time. I congratulate him on the vigilance with which he pursues it. As a frequent traveller I would welcome more space to accommodate both myself and my red box. I doubt whether 2.2 in would be enough to get the red box in beside me. I cannot promise a debate on the subject, but

[Mr. Cook]

I am sure that the relevant authorities have heard what my hon. Friend has said. I am sure that he will find other opportunities to repeat the point until they act.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): What progress is being made on proposals for the reform of the House of Lords? Does the Leader of the House recall putting his name to the Cook-Maclennan report before the 1997 election, which stated:

"The removal of the hereditary peers' right to vote is the first stage in a process of reform. Following their removal a joint committee of both houses should be established to bring forward detailed proposals on structure and functions for the later stages of reform within a time limited period. This body should produce recommendations for a democratic and representative second chamber."?

Is it now the Government's view that that has to be watered down so that it is even wetter than Wakeham? Will the Government produce a White Paper? It is reported that one will appear next week. If so, will it be put to a Joint Committee of all parties to consider before final proposals come forward?

May I also ask the right hon. Gentleman, as he did not get round to answering my question last week, about the timetable for the communications legislation relating to media regulation? Will there be a draft Bill? Will there be pre-legislative scrutiny? Will he confirm the statement made by Lord McIntosh in the House of Lords on Monday that a Joint Committee is being considered to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill?

Mr. Cook: On the hon. Gentleman's second point, we hope to produce the Bill in draft so that it can be considered for pre-legislative scrutiny. We are currently consulting on the best way in which that can be done, but a Joint Committee is obviously one of the options, and I understand that there is willingness in both Houses to proceed with such a Committee. We will take that on board. On the other matter, I can say to the House that a document will be produced in the near future. He will be pleased to hear that it is a consultation document, so it will be open to Members of both Houses and to members of the public, who are members of neither House, to express their views. I can say now, however, that it will be our intention to complete the work that we started in the previous Parliament and to remove hereditary peers from the House of Lords, ensuring that, for the first time, nobody is casting a vote in the legislature of Great Britain on the basis of heredity.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I thank my right hon. Friend for scheduling the money resolution for the Marine Conservation Bill. Can I apologise to him and to the Whips for my whinge last week that the Bill might be killed off last Friday? I urge him now to make all efforts to get the Bill through to its full completion, instead of allowing the matter to be one of presentation, in which the Bill merely goes into Committee and is killed there.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. The way in which he raised the matter last Thursday and what then happened on Friday shows the efficacy of business questions and what can happen as a result of them. On the question of how the Bill proceeds after the Committee stage, as he knows, the Government made it clear last Friday that we wanted the Bill to proceed and to be examined by the House in Committee. However, we cannot commit ourselves to the Bill unless some of our concerns are met. Those concerns are felt not only by the Government, but by a wide range of bodies. I hope that we can find a way forward and reach agreement.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the Leader of the House consider allowing a debate on prison reform? There are some Christian-based prison units called Kainos wings that have had very good results in rehabilitating prisoners, much along the lines of Government policy, which we probably agree with. Yet, inexplicably, these wings have been told to shut by the Prison Service. I suspect that that was an irrational reaction to Muslim opinion following the events of 11 September. I also suspect that it happened without the Home Secretary's knowledge and was done behind his back. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore allow a debate, so that this irrational decision stands a chance of being reversed?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue of prison reform, in which I have taken a close interest. Indeed, as a Back Bencher I once initiated a debate on the topic. I say to him that he makes a point that I am sure is of importance. I am sure also that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary would wish to hear his comments. We can get an answer to him more quickly than through a debate by inviting the Home Secretary to write to him.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the shock and outrage that was felt on some of these Benches when we saw what is effectively a carry-over motion for the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill? It was printed on the Vote yesterday and today. Will there be time on the Floor of the House to debate the motion, and will plenty of time be given so that some of us can set about sabotaging it? It is, after all, a wretched Bill and an attack on democracy. Can he also assure us that the votes will be unwhipped? We know that they are unwhipped in theory, but, in practice, they are whipped in the Lobby. After all, Mr. Speaker, we do not want a row, do we?

Mr. Cook: It is one of the first duties of the Leader of the House to try to avert as many rows as possible. My hon. Friend is commendably candid about his views on the Bill, which I know excites strong feelings. The question of timetabling the Bill is the prerogative of the Chairman of Ways and Means, not me, although it will not have escaped him that time is reserved for the Chairman of Ways and Means for the week after next. As to a vote, it must be a free one, and I can assure him that that will be our intention.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Can the Leader of the House confirm that we have not debated the economy in the House since a one-day debate on the Queen's Speech some time ago and that we are not scheduled to do so in the next two weeks? As the health

of the economy is central to so much of what the House wishes to achieve, can we have an earlier debate on it, certainly before the Christmas recess?

Mr. Cook: It certainly would be the wish of the Government that the whole House congratulate them on the fact that unemployment is below 1 million, on having the lowest inflation anywhere in Europe and on achieving a commendable high rate of growth, as well as on the fact that we are securing the lowest interest rates that we can remember on record. All those are very good achievements by the Government. If the Opposit ı wish us to debate them, I shall certainly commend that to my Cabinet and make sure that my colleagues there are aware that the Opposition are clamouring for more opportunities for us to demonstrate the sound economy that we have created.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware of early-day motion 127, which deals with the Disability Discrimination Act 1996 and the exemption of airlines from it?

[That this House regrets that airlines and airports are exempt from the Disability Discrimination Act 1996; calls upon the Government to remove their exempt status so that blind or partially-sighted people are able to fly with their guide dogs, as the 'Passport for Pets' scheme introduced in the last administration enables airlines and airports to register to take assistance animals only; and believes this will ensure that blind and partially-sighted travellers are not discriminated against.]

Will my right hon. Friend consider making time available for a debate on this very serious issue, which not only affects my constituents, but could seriously impact on the work of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. Plainly, we all want to improve the rights of disabled people wherever that is possible, and they must have fair access. I will convey his remarks to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and its relationship with the Department of Health, especially in relation to the drug beta interferon? He may be aware that NICE finally reported on beta interferon in August, after several years. The Department of Health is currently negotiating with the pharmaceutical companies on clinical trials of four different types of drugs. He will know—I see that he nods—that this an almost inhumane process, and our constituents in all parts of the country who suffer from multiple sclerosis are being put through it. Will he encourage somebody from the Department of Health to come to the House and make a statement? If he cannot do that, will he at the very least ensure that my written question, which has been tabled for priority answer on Monday, is answered on Monday by that Department?

Mr. Cook: I shall draw the Department's attention to the hon. Lady's question. The issue has been raised a number of times on Thursdays. The whole House will welcome the fact that progress is now being made. The Government are involved in discussions with the manufacturers to see whether we can find a cost-effective way of proceeding with clinical trials. That will provide us with a medical and financial perspective on whether the drug indeed offers a value remedy that can be prescribed with safety and confidence to those who suffer from multiple sclerosis.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I wonder whether my right hon. Friend has a reason for abandoning the process that was followed in the previous Parliament of allowing the Chairmen of all Select Committees to be represented on the Liaison Committee. It would appear from the Order Paper that, in future, there will be only one Chairman representing those Select Committees that have two Sub-Committees. Can he explain the reason for that, as it appears to disfranchise one of the Committees?

Mr. Cook: No Committee will be disfranchised; every Committee will be entitled to have its Chairman on the Liaison Committee. It is a matter for the Committees to choose whom their Chairmen may be. Of course, we changed the Standing Orders in June, in response to the report of the Liaison Committee, in which my hon. Friend played a distinguished part, which suggested that all Select Committees should have the right to appoint Sub-Committees. We have given that right to all the Committees. It is a matter for the House, but I would be surprised if it wished in those circumstances to provide a basis for the Liaison Committee on which the Chairmen of all Sub-Committees and all Committees should at all times be members.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Leader of the House accept that small shareholders in BT are very angry and resent the reported fact that the departing chairman, Sir Peter Bonfield, may receive a golden pay-off of more than £14 million? That is obscene and it is happening in spite of the fact that billions of pounds of shareholders' money was lost. Indeed, share values have collapsed during the period in which Sir Peter Bonfield has held that responsibility in BT. Will the right hon. Gentleman urgently find time to enable the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to introduce a Bill requiring shareholders to vote formally on individual directors' pay and pay-off packages, to prevent this scandalous pay-off, which is perceived as rewarding failure?

Mr. Cook: I believe the figure is £1.4 million, not £14 million, but it is still a considerable sum and the hon. Gentleman's point still stands. He will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has said that we intend to empower shareholders with the right to review the rewards of executives. I echo her observation that, at a time when workers are losing their jobs and shareholders are losing their money, we expect executives to share some of the pain.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on flood alleviation measures, so that we can consider what further funding could be made available to projects such as the Hatch End flood alleviation scheme in my constituency? It is being championed by the excellent local residents

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

association. Its completion is of considerable interest to my constituents and businesses in Hatch End affected by flooding last year.

Mr. Cook: We have considerably increased spending on flood protection, as a result of which more homes are protected—many more than two years ago. We shall ensure that that investment is made. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is willing to receive applications from the Environment Agency, and if it puts forward that particular proposal I am sure that it will be sympathetically received.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the right hon. Gentleman find time to have an early debate on the Government's use of the Crown's prerogative? Does he understand that there is considerable concern among hon. Members that the power to recall Parliament is vested in the Executive and not in the House, and that we are deploying troops for a substantial period without the House's authority being obtained on a substantive motion? Does he understand that motions on the Adjournment, although desirable and useful, are not a proper substitute for a substantive motion authorising such action?

Mr. Cook: I am very interested in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's views. I should like his confirmation that he expressed those views when the Government of whom he was a member repeatedly committed troops on a motion for the Adjournment. That is the long-standing basis on which the House has debated these affairs. I repeat what I said last week: whether or not there is a substantive motion, no one who has sat through the debates that we have had on this matter can be in any doubt about the will of the House and the overwhelming support from both sides for what we are doing.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on young people? The alienation of young people from the political system must be one of the greatest causes of concern. Other issues that affect young people include the provision of youth service facilities in our communities.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an important point. All hon. Members attach importance to ensuring that the health of our democracy is strong among young people as well as among the rest of the electorate. I cannot promise a debate on this subject in the near future, but my hon. Friend can continue to raise this important issue through the vehicles available to private Members.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry makes a statement at the Dispatch Box next week on the Aldous report, which her Department has not published? It refers to the affairs of the hon. Member for Coventry, North–West (Mr. Robinson), Hollis Industries and related Maxwell companies. It is essential that the report be published, and that the Secretary of State explain to the House why her predecessor did not make further inquiries, bearing in mind what the report is alleged to have said.

Mr. Cook: No, I shall not. Section 447 of the Companies Act 1985 was drafted by the Conservatives when they were in office. It explicitly provides that material provided in the course of an inquiry should remain confidential. The right hon. Gentleman might like to explain to the House why they included that provision in the Act if they now object to reports remaining confidential. My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is now the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, never saw that report. He was informed of the results of the inquiry, and there the matter rests.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on town and country planning? To be more precise, can we have a debate on the type of town and country planning administered by the Israeli Government on the west bank and Gaza? To this day, Palestinian homes are being bulldozed while illegal settlements are being established with encouragement from the Israeli Government. Such a debate would let the Palestinian people know that we are concerned about their welfare, and that we have them and their position at heart.

Mr. Cook: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend on the importance of the approach that she outlined. The Mitchell report recommended that there should be a ceasefire, and that it should be supported by confidence-building measures, which plainly must include respect for the homes of people who live in the territory administered by the Palestinian authority. We want to see a return to the peace negotiations. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been in the middle east in the past two days, and that is the message he is carrying.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The House will welcome the creation of the Liaison Committee and the motion next week to set it up. Will the Leader of the House explain why the motion in "Remaining Orders and Notices" creates the Committee in a new way? It adds new, admittedly distinguished, members who are not existing members of departmental and domestic Select Committees. Will he confirm that that debate will be restricted to the matter of the membership, and will not enable the House to discuss some of the "Shifting the Balance" issues from the report published in the previous Parliament? If in that debate we cannot discuss the future role of the Liaison Committee, will he find time for a further debate so that we can?

Mr. Cook: The terms of the motion are not entirely new: there is a precedent. In the past, Sir Terence Higgins was added to the membership of the Liaison Committee and was treated with respect and honour by that Committee. I have included one additional member—he is a senior Member and has served on the Liaison Committee before—as I believe that the Committee would benefit from his wisdom and experience. However, it is a matter for the House to decide when we debate the motion.

That debate will turn on the motion to set up the Liaison Committee. The wider matters from "Shifting the Balance", to which the hon. Gentleman referred, are being examined by the Modernisation Committee. I hope that, in the near future, it will produce a report which will enable us to debate all those issues.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Following my right hon. Friend's response to the serious and legitimate

question put by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), and in the light of the announcement of business for Tuesday 13 November, does my right hon. Friend recognise that he and I have had a deep interest in overseas territories for many years? Are we sure that it does the House of Commons any credit to have a day debating overseas territories rather than an amendable motion on whether there should be military action from 17 November and the beginning of Ramadan? That ought to be a matter of an affirmative resolution.

Mr. Cook: If I may say so, the Government have been punctilious in providing opportunities for the House to debate the coalition against international terrorism. Today will be the fifth full day of debate on the subject since the events of 11 September. We shall continue, when appropriate, to provide opportunities for the House to consider the Government's action and to make sure that we are taking every possible step to ensure that Osama bin Laden is brought to justice before he can strike again.

I strongly disagree with what my hon. Friend said about the British Overseas Territories Bill. It is an important measure and regarded as a matter of great significance throughout the overseas territories. I remind the House that it carries through the commitment that we made in the previous Parliament to extend British citizenship to those citizens of the overseas territories who want it. That commitment is very much welcomed in the overseas territories, and I hope that the House attaches importance to it.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Disturbing and serious claims were made in last Sunday's "Panorama" about this country's ability to withstand and cope with a chemical or a biological terrorist attack. Given the woefully inadequate response from the Deputy Prime Minister yesterday to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) about effective co-ordination between civil and military emergency co-ordinators, when will we have a proper debate on civil defence and emergency planning in the light of the current international situation, so that we can reassure an increasingly worried public?

Mr. Cook: I assure the hon. Gentleman that he will have many opportunities in the near future to raise those issues. It would be a competent matter to raise in today's debate, and in the three-day debate we shall be holding on the emergency anti-terrorism Bill. A civil defence Bill will also have to be considered by the House. There will be plenty of opportunities for the House to explore those issues. However, I hope that none of us will encourage alarmism or public dismay. We regularly practise contingency planning, and we carry out exercises with all those involved. We shall continue to do everything we can to ensure that we are ready to respond, but sometimes it is not wise to publish the full details of that response.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I inform the House that almost 70 Back Benchers wish to speak in the debate on the main business. I must therefore, cut business questions short.

Coalition Against International Terrorism

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

1 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I am grateful for the opportunity to set out once again the Government's position on international terrorism. It is wholly proper that I should do so again. The threat posed by Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network and our response to that threat are matters that the House should debate regularly. That we can and that we do are key differences between ourselves and the repressive regime that we are fighting in Afghanistan.

Yesterday, I returned from visiting Washington, where I had discussions with, among others, the United States Secretary for Defence, Donald Rumsfeld. We discussed the future direction of the campaign, how we can sustain its momentum and how we can strengthen the coalition.

I repeated again that the United Kingdom remains steadfast in its commitment to the campaign against international terrorism. Since 11 September, the United Kingdom has stood beside our closest ally, the United States. We will conduct this campaign together for as long as it takes. As the House is aware, many other nations stand with us and many others are making significant offers of military support.

From the outset, we have responded positively to the United States' requests for military assistance by allowing them to use the airbase at Diego Garcia, by firing our own Tomahawk cruise missiles and by providing air-to-air refuelling and reconnaissance aircraft. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence announced last Friday, we have significantly increased our contribution to the continuing military campaign. An amphibious task force, maritime patrol aircraft and transport aircraft have all joined the forces that we had already made available.

The United States has made no secret of how much it values our support. Donald Rumsfeld made that clear in our joint press conference on Tuesday. He repeated that the United States values our involvement in the planning and prosecution of the military campaign. It welcomes our particular expertise in a number of key capabilities and the considerable experience, talent and skill that our armed forces provide. We have long enjoyed a uniquely close relationship with the United States and the tragedy of 11 September has made that relationship closer still.

At the start of the campaign we set ourselves a number of campaign aims. Let me take this opportunity to restate them to the House. First, I shall deal with our wider campaign aims—those that we hope to achieve in the longer term. We aim to do everything possible to eliminate the threat posed by international terrorism, to deter states from supporting, harbouring, or acting complicitly with international terrorist groups, to reintegrate Afghanistan as a responsible member of the international community and to end its self-imposed isolation.

Secondly, I shall set out again the immediate aims of the action that we are undertaking in Afghanistan. We aim to bring Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda to account. We aim to prevent Bin Laden and al-Qaeda from posing a

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

continuing terrorist threat and we aim to ensure that Afghanistan verifiably ceases to harbour and sustain international terrorism and the associated terrorist training camps. Since Mullah Omar has not complied with the United States' ultimatum, we require sufficient change in the leadership there to ensure that Afghanistan's links to international terrorism are broken permanently.

It is important to remind ourselves that achieving those aims, particularly the longer-term aims, will not be possible by military means alone. The campaign will be fought on many fronts and by many different means. It will be fought with diplomacy, and we have already formed a strong coalition with nations of all religions from across the world. It will be fought with financial measures—we have frozen the bank accounts of terrorist paymasters all over the world. It will be fought with humanitarian aid—$700 million has already been pledged to house and feed the refugees in Pakistan. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development will say more about that later.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Does the right hon. Gentleman consider that his aim to require sufficient change in Afghanistan's leadership is a sufficient aim? Over 20 years of conflict and civil war in Afghanistan have led to the conditions in which terrorism has been allowed to breed. The country has the most barbaric Government, and has done for years, regardless of whether the leadership came from the Northern Alliance or elsewhere. We need to be more forthright in saying that we require that all the people of Afghanistan should have the right to decide who should rule them.

Mr. Hoon: That is why I expressed the aim in terms of securing a Government in Afghanistan who do not support and sustain international terrorism. The hon. Gentleman rightly points out that what follows from that is a stronger and more sustainable situation in Afghanistan; but our immediate aim is to secure a situation in which that country is not supporting al-Qaeda or other terrorist networks.

As I have said, we will bring about those aims in a number of ways, but my immediate responsibility is the military aspect of the campaign. The Ministry of Defence's contribution to meeting the campaign aims is focused on achieving three specific military objectives: to destroy the terrorist camps, to pressurise the Taliban regime to end its support for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda and to enable us to mount future operations in Afghanistan.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): Will my right hon. Friend tell us how many cluster bombs, delayed action bombs or Gator bombs have been dropped during the campaign, and to which of the military objectives those bombs have been directed?

Mr. Hoon: We have addressed five targets with cluster bombs so far. I shall deal with cluster bombs and their use later.

We know that many of those who carried out the terrorist attacks on 11 September were trained at camps in Afghanistan. Such training cannot be allowed to continue. That is why we have put those camps out of action. We must use military means to pressurise the Taliban regime to end its support for Osama bin Laden. They did not listen to our warnings and that is why we are now applying direct military pressure. It is because we need to maintain that pressure on the Taliban regime, using all appropriate military means at our disposal, that we must create the right conditions for future military operations in Afghanistan.

Our military objectives are being achieved.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Can my right hon. Friend give us an estimate of the number of civilian targets and international aid agency targets that have been hit by coalition forces? What estimate does he have of the number of civilian and military deaths in Afghanistan resulting from the campaign?

Mr. Hoon: Let me make it clear to my hon. Friend that there are no civilian targets. As I will make clear in due course, an enormous amount of effort is made to avoid civilian casualties. There are necessary risks involved in military operations, and although we go to great lengths to avoid civilian casualties, I recognise that that risk exists in a military conflict. It is not possible to give any precise figures about the number of civilian casualties, but I caution my hon. Friend and other hon. Members to avoid relying on anything that the Taliban regime says about the matter.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will my right hon. Friend remind the House of the number of civilian targets the terrorists hit in the United States on 11 September, how many innocent people were on the aeroplanes and how many innocent civilian targets the terrorists have hit over the past few years?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is a clear contrast between the appalling carnage witnessed in the United States on 11 September and the controlled, determined and precise way in which we are responding against appropriate military targets in Afghanistan.

I want to emphasise that our military objectives are being achieved. Since military action began on 7 October, nine terrorist training camps have been destroyed, including all those that were known to be in use when the campaign started. We have disrupted al-Qaeda's ability to train in the open, which will have restricted its ability to carry out further attacks. We have, therefore, achieved our first military objective, which is to destroy terrorist training camps. Of course, terrorist camps can be rebuilt and terrorists can hide and return later, so we continue to press home attacks on terrorist targets, including the caves where they hide.

Our second military objective is to pressurise the Taliban regime to end its support for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. We have attacked significant elements of their military installations. Nearly 40 Taliban military facilities have been attacked—all are damaged and many are destroyed. Taliban forces deployed in the field are being attacked. Significant amounts of armour, vehicles, equipment, and stores have been destroyed, including some 150 military vehicles and over 50 artillery pieces.

The focus of recent military action has shifted significantly towards attacking Taliban forces in the field, thereby aiding the Northern Alliance and others who are also fighting them. That is increasing pressure on the Taliban regime still further.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned armour-piercing ordnance. Can he tell us whether depleted uranium is now being used?

Mr. Hoon: It is not being used at present. As I said a moment ago, I shall return to the question of cluster bombs.

We have not yet achieved our second military objective. The Taliban regime is still supporting Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. We do, however, have good evidence that we are getting there. The Northern Alliance is growing in strength, with reports of some areas of local disaffection with the Taliban regime—its brutality, its barbarity and its hypocrisy. There are encouraging signs that the regime is now feeling the pressure acutely.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I apologise for not being present at the beginning of the right hon. Gentleman's speech. May I ask him a question connected with what he said about dealing with the Taliban's front-line forces? Can he give us any estimate of their numbers, and can he tell us how successful the campaign has been in dealing with them over the past few days?

Mr. Hoon: I think the hon. Gentleman will understand why I do not want to go into detail about the precise numbers, as far as we are aware of them. As I shall make clear in due course, however, a very determined attempt is under way to disrupt the front line, and to ensure that the Northern Alliance has every opportunity to take ground and to advance.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): If the training camps have been seriously damaged in military terms, and if Taliban airfields and other military installations have been hit, does that not provide an argument for putting the bombing on the back burner rather than escalating it with B52s? It is having a tremendous impact on the Islamic world, and we need its support for our objectives.

Mr. Hoon: I remind my hon. Friend that B52s have been part of the military campaign from the outset. What is different now is that they are targeting the Taliban front line. As for his suggestion of a pause in the bombing, it is important to maintain pressure on the Taliban regime and on al-Qaeda. A moment ago, I mentioned the possibility of terrorist training camps being rebuilt and reconstituted. We simply cannot afford such a development, which is why the military campaign must continue until we achieve the aims that we set out at the beginning.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Following the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), may I ask what assessment the Government have made of the likely effect in the Islamic and Arab world of bombing during Ramadan?

Mr. Hoon: I have made it clear that we have regard to sensitivities in the Islamic world in relation to a continuation of the military campaign during Ramadan. Equally, however, for reasons that I have just given, it is important to maintain the military pressure. It would not be militarily sensible to announce in advance our intentions for as long a period as Ramadan involves. I entirely understand why my hon. Friend has raised the issue, but although we have regard to those sensitivities, we also have a military campaign that we must prosecute successfully.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, in the Iran/Iraq war, Iran bombed Iraq and Iraq bombed Iran during Ramadan? Does he recall that the Egyptians and the Syrians deliberately launched the Yom Kippur war on Israel during Ramadan? Some of my hon. Friends seem to misunderstand the nature of Ramadan, which those of us who live among thousands of Muslim constituents may understand better.

Mr. Hoon: A number of further examples could be cited, but my right hon. Friend has made his point extremely well.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I apologise to the Secretary of State for not being here at the beginning, but may I take him back to what was said by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes)? Following his deeply unhelpful comments, will the right hon. Gentleman explain the difference between very precise surgical strikes against targets of high value, and strikes against targets of a purely military nature in areas where—I hesitate to use this phrase—collateral damage is much less likely?

Mr. Hoon: I will deal in due course with the kind of bombing that is likely to be an increasing feature of the campaign, but the targeting of military assets—fixed assets—has been largely completed in Afghanistan, and turning to the deployed military assets of the regime to facilitate an advance by the Northern Alliance is an entirely sensible military strategy.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that many Afghans who oppose the Taliban are criticising the action, saying that not enough has been done to attack the Taliban's front-line forces and calling for far more action against the Taliban military?

Mr. Hoon: That is now being addressed very emphatically and effectively.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): What the Deputy Prime Minister said yesterday made it far from clear whether the total removal of the Taliban was an objective in the campaign. Can the Secretary of State tell us whether there is any possibility that hostilities could cease and the Taliban could still exist, which would enable them to harbour terrorists in future?

Mr. Hoon: There is no possibility of the Taliban's continuing to exist if they intend to harbour future terrorists and allow terrorist training camps. As we have made clear all along, if the existing regime chooses to give up Osama bin Laden and his main associates and to abandon its support for terrorism, and allows us to verify

[Mr. Hoon]

that, the military action could end very quickly; but I see no sign of the regime's agreeing to those perfectly reasonable requests.

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): Does my right hon. Friend believe, and does the intelligence community believe, that bin Laden and his associates will themselves pause in their planning and activities during Ramadan? Has there been any statement from the Northern Alliance or the current Afghan Government that either will pause in their activities? Finally, when my right hon. Friend reaches the subject of targets, will he tell us whether the poppy fields in Afghanistan that cause so much drug-connected trouble throughout the world are a potential future target?

Mr. Hoon: It is certainly important to disrupt the Taliban's ability to sustain their operations, and their support for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. That disruption will continue in a variety of ways. I see no signs of a let-up in the Northern Alliance's efforts against the Taliban regime during Ramadan; nor indeed do I see any signs of international terrorism abandoning its efforts during that period.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hoon: I will give way one last time. I have given way rather a lot.

Donald Anderson: Ancillary to the military campaign is the campaign for hearts and minds. Bin Laden has been extremely skilful in exploiting modern techniques with mediaeval imagery, as Khomeini did in 1979. What are we doing to counter that? Are we going to recruit people from the private sector, as the United States has done, to put over the coalition's case?

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. It is important for us to get the case across. I can give one example of what we are doing: we have recently spent some time talking to the Arab media. I think it very important, certainly on the basis of my visits to the middle east, to get our case across to those who are influencing public opinion in the region, and that effort will continue.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife) *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: I will give way.

Mr. Campbell: I am grateful. Indeed, I am sure the whole House is grateful to the Secretary of State for being so generous.

May I return the right hon. Gentleman to the issue of the air campaign? Will he make it clear that there is no question of a separate air campaign and a separate ground campaign? We are embarking on military operations of which both air and ground operations are components. What we require is a fully integrated set of military operations. It is not possible to turn off the air campaign or turn on the ground campaign simply because of a particular date or time of the year.

Mr. Hoon: The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes a very good point, which I shall address in due course.

I was dealing with military objectives. On our third military objective, we have certainly created the conditions for future military operations in Afghanistan. Nine of the Taliban's airfields have been attacked and put out of action; their air force is effectively no more; their air defence and early warning systems have been wrecked. The coalition has air supremacy at medium and high altitude; coalition aircraft can fly lower and engage targets in the Taliban's front line. Ground troops can be deployed, as the United States proved in the raids on Kandahar nearly two weeks ago.

We never expected military action to be easy or to produce instant results. It will take time and it will take patience. Some people, perhaps, have become too ready in recent years to assume that military force will bring rapid and effortless success. They assume that the campaign in Afghanistan will be like those to expel Iraq from Kuwait or to drive Milosevic's forces out of Kosovo. There are, of course, some similarities. An obvious example is the early use of air power; its use to gain air superiority enables other operations to proceed with much lower risk than would otherwise be the case. Another comparison is the need to deploy and sustain forces far from their usual bases. Yet another example is the importance of wide international support. The Gulf conflict saw, as now, a great global coalition, standing against Saddam Hussein. The Kosovo campaign, too, although led by NATO, involved many countries from outside the Alliance.

There are, however, significant differences. In Kosovo, the enemy was a major and sophisticated standing army. For our forces to operate in safety required an intensive effort, much more so than we have seen over Afghanistan, to reduce the military capability and the power of the Yugoslav army. In Kosovo, the enemy was a modern state, albeit a badly governed one, but still a country with a relatively advanced infrastructure that was being used to support its military forces. There were, therefore, more targets, and they were more obvious.

Compare that with Afghanistan and the Taliban regime. Afghanistan has seen 22 years of almost continuous war. Much of its infrastructure was destroyed or damaged long before the first coalition bomb fell on 7 October. Neither al-Qaeda nor the Taliban have standing armies as we understand that term, so our approach must be different. Intelligence is always important in any conflict, but it is crucial in this one. We have to engage relatively small and often elusive targets. That is no easy task. Good intelligence, as ever, is essential.

A conventional military campaign aims to take control of specific territory; that was how we pursued our aims in the Gulf and Kosovo, but that is not how we will conduct the campaign in Afghanistan. We are fighting not a unified state, but fanatical terrorists and their obsessive supporters. At times, we may need to deploy forces within Afghanistan. At times, we will help Afghans opposed to the Taliban regime. Indeed, much of the current air campaign—80 per cent. or so—is directed against the Taliban front line with the Northern Alliance. Certainly, when the Taliban regime falls, we may need to help stabilise the situation in Afghanistan, but we do not need to focus on gaining ground to the same extent as in a conventional campaign.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way with his customary

generosity. A little earlier, he said that the Taliban could stop the campaign against them by yielding up bin Laden and, presumably, his closest associates. Has he thought how we should react if, when the campaign begins to press hard on the Taliban, they tried a move in which they announced that bin Laden and his closest associates had left the country, and if that were verified? Presumably, we would not just call off the campaign; we would still insist on proceeding until the rest of the network was destroyed.

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman has answered his own question. I listed a number of conditions that we would require to be met before the military campaign and the wider campaign against international terrorism could be suspended, as far as Afghanistan was concerned.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): My question arises from an earlier intervention. Will my right hon. Friend now kill the myth that the conflict will have some effect on the flow of heroin to this country and confirm what the United Nations has just said—that the Taliban have reduced their poppy cultivation by 91 per cent, but the Northern Alliance has increased its poppy cultivation threefold? A great deal of the heroin coming to this country comes from Burma, Pakistan and other countries. Whatever the outcome of the conflict, it will have no effect whatsoever on the flow of heroin into this country.

Mr. Hoon: I am afraid that I do not agree with my hon. Friend, and I caution him against relying on the argument that, somehow, the Taliban regime had reduced the supply of heroin. In fact, the Taliban regime prohibited others from producing heroin so that they could exploit substantial stockpiles of heroin. Indeed, they were seeking to raise the price to derive further cash from that appalling trade. So I do not accept that there would not be a significant disruption of the heroin trade; it would certainly prevent the regime from trading in other people's lives to sustain its own appalling activities.

It is not possible to try to predict precisely how long the military campaign will last. What I can say, and what we have always said, is that we are in this for the long haul. Our assignment last week of additional forces—forces that we can sustain and support for long periods—is a clear demonstration of our resolve to see this through to the end. The campaign will continue for as long as it takes to achieve the aims that I have set out.

There were clearly difficult times during the Kosovo campaign, but we did not falter then. Look at the result: Kosovar Albanians have been able to return home; the region is already showing signs of stability; and two years after the end of military activity, Slobodan Milosevic is now in court. We will pursue those responsible for the terrorist atrocities of 11 September with precisely the same vigour and for as long as it takes, until they are brought to account. To get there, we must be patient and determined.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the National Assembly for Wales on Tuesday that the only hope that the terrorists in Afghanistan have of victory is if we lack the will or the courage to take them on. They think that we will lose our nerve. They could not be more wrong. We will not lose our nerve, because those responsible for the attacks of 11 September must be brought to account. They cannot be allowed to get away with the murder of thousands of innocent people.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The Secretary of State will be aware that Save the Children, which has about 200 members of staff working in the area, has become aware that many children have become separated from their parents, which will not help to garner support for the coalition over there. Is he willing to hear representations from Save the Children on that issue so that the Government may be able to assist in reuniting those families?

Mr. Hoon: Of course, the Government are always willing to listen to sensible proposals, and I certainly welcome the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

Helen Southworth (Warrington, South): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that Save the Children says that, before 11 September, one quarter of Afghan children died before the age of five. Will he confirm that the Government are equally determined to resolve that problem, about which the Taliban did not give a damn?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; I do not think that I need comment further on her observation.

We must ensure that those responsible are never again able to carry out such attacks, which is why we are acting in self-defence. The events of 11 September demonstrated that Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network are entirely prepared to slaughter as many people as they can to pursue their perverted objectives. They have killed on a number of occasions, not simply 11 September. Left alone, they will do so again. We are right to take military action; we simply have no choice.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): My right hon. Friend rightly makes a great deal of bringing Osama bin Laden and his confederates to account. If bin Laden and/or his confederates were to be brought before a court of law—and mindful of the fact that Milosevic has been brought before an international court, as were the criminals of the Third Reich—what kind of court does he, as a lawyer, anticipate that that would be?

Mr. Hoon: If Osama bin Laden were surrendered to a court process, there is one available in the United States or, indeed, the United Kingdom. Osama bin Laden has committed clear and appalling criminal offences in the United States; were he to appear before a court, that is where he should appear. Frankly, the analogy with the Third Reich is not appropriate because there were no appropriate legal actions that could be brought against those responsible at the end of the second world war in the places where they had committed offences; that was the legal difficulty that the countries of the west faced then. Indeed, lawyers at the time argued that the Third Reich had not committed offences contrary to German law.

We are in a wholly different situation. Those responsible for the attacks on 11 September committed the offence of murder in the United States, and I have no hesitation in saying that, if they were surrendered to justice, that is where they should be tried.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I wish to ask the Secretary of State how he would resolve the following dilemma. If Osama

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

bin Laden were to come into United Kingdom jurisdiction, would we be able to surrender him to America, given the restrictions that we have adopted on not surrendering anyone to a country which has the death penalty?

Mr. Hoon: I would have no hesitation or difficulty about achieving that.

We know that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda can carry out these attacks only with the support of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. That is why they moved there some years ago. That is where they find a safe haven and the support that they need to carry out their terrorist atrocities.

We gave the Taliban regime the opportunity to end their support for al-Qaeda and to hand them over. We waited weeks before we began the military campaign, but the Taliban would not move. We were therefore forced to act. We always said that if they would not comply with our ultimatum, we would act to bring about sufficient change in the leadership of Afghanistan to ensure that their links to international terrorism are broken. That is what we are now doing. The Taliban could still comply, as I have said already. But unless they do, we will be forced to continue the military action that is now well under way.

It is important for those who would be critical of our action in Afghanistan to consider carefully what other course of action would achieve our aims. How else should we bring to account those responsible for the hijacking of the planes and the deliberate murder of thousands of ordinary people? How else should we act to prevent Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network from killing possibly thousands more American, British or European civilians? How else could we exercise our responsibility to the British people to defend them from the threat of fanatical terrorist attacks?

I would much prefer Osama bin Laden and his associates to give themselves up. I would prefer the Taliban to surrender the terrorists and close down the terrorist camps. I would certainly prefer not to have to send British forces into action. But these are not choices that we have. We must not forget that the threat posed to us by bin Laden, his associates and Taliban supporters is very, very, very real. We are determined to bring them to account. Our means of doing so grow stronger by the day.

The increase in the United Kingdom's contribution to the campaign is a clear indication of our resolve. The retention of a substantial naval presence in the region, including Royal Marines, ensures that we have in place a highly capable and flexible military force. Other forces based here in the United Kingdom are also at a high state of readiness. We are capable of deploying these forces quickly and of projecting fighting capability when this is required. We demonstrated this in both Sierra Leone and, more recently, in Macedonia.

Let me explain what immediate readiness means. It means that troops are at very short notice to move and that their equipment is in battle-ready condition. It does not imply necessarily that they will be committed to action immediately, but depending on the nature of the campaign, they may be. I have already explained that this is a different sort of campaign. As it proceeds, intelligence will bring to light opportunities to take action. Once a specific action has been identified, we will need to give our troops the necessary additional preparation and training required to carry it out. Let me emphasise that, acting always in accordance with international law, the coalition is ready to do everything required to achieve our objectives. That includes, where necessary, the use of cluster bombs.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): On the coalition action, will my right hon. Friend welcome today's news that Muslim forces from Turkey have been offered to the coalition to help with any ground force intervention?

Mr. Hoon: Certainly there is a determined effort to involve countries from around the world and the forces of different religions. We have already had offers of support from Islamic countries and I am most appreciative of them.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hoon: I must make progress, if my hon. Friend will forgive me.

Cluster bombs against certain targets are the best, most effective weapons that we have. Where that is the case, the coalition is entitled to use them; otherwise we could put any ground forces we might ultimately deploy at unnecessary risk. But we will not act in ways that are contrary to international law. I recognise that others will be concerned about so-called carpet bombing. This inaccurate and outmoded term gives the impression that the coalition is engaged in indiscriminate attacks.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: Let me make some progress.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The coalition makes carefully directed strikes against legitimate terrorist and military targets. That includes heavy bombers dropping long sticks of bombs against large area targets, such as terrorist training camps or Taliban forces deployed in the field. As with any target, we take enormous care to avoid risk to civilians. When long sticks are dropped, the safety margins are appropriately larger than those for single bombs, as the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) pointed out earlier.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): The Secretary of State will know that I have long campaigned against land mines and, indeed, opposed the use of cluster bombs in Kosovo and former Yugoslavia. I oppose them in this campaign too. The right hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell) pointed out that there were two components to our forces: air and land. Surely they will be put at risk by cluster bombs with a delayed ordnance capacity, as well as civilians. Even a just cause can be jeopardised by using unjust weapons such as cluster bombs.

Mr. Hoon: Cluster bombs are not land mines. They are not defined as land mines in the Ottawa convention, for which I know my hon. Friend rightly and effectively campaigned. It is necessary to make a clear judgment on

the threat to our forces. The threat to our land forces of dealing with armoured vehicles that will attack and kill them is far greater than any residual risk from cluster bombs. That is the difficult military judgment that must be taken. My overriding priority must be the safety of deployed British forces. No one in my position could stand up and say that we have not taken all effective means at our disposal to protect those forces.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Secretary of State has said that cluster bombs are not land mines, but they are in effect airborne land mines. *[Interruption.]* I ask hon. Members to listen. The cluster bombs used during the Kosovo war contained on average 147 bomblets. The failure rate for each cluster bomb was between 5 and 10 per cent., so for any cluster bomb dropped there are bomblets lying in the soil for months to come, ready to be picked up and to kill or maim civilians.

Mr. Hoon: These weapons are used against deployed military vehicles in areas where we are conducting a military campaign. I understand my hon. Friend's concern, but we must take the action necessary to defend our own deployed forces, should that eventuality arise. I could not stand here as Secretary of State for Defence and not take appropriate action to defend our forces going about what is ultimately a humanitarian operation.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: I must make further progress. I have given way a considerable number of times.

I am aware that right hon. and hon. Members are concerned about the risk of causing civilian casualties. Military action is, of course, never without risk, but we do everything we possibly can to avoid risks to innocent civilians. The claims of the Taliban regime must be treated with considerable scepticism. They have been completely unreliable in the past and there is no reason to believe what the Taliban are saying today.

We do not take lightly the decision to deploy forces. No Government would want to put United Kingdom military personnel in harm's way. But we must not forget why we are engaged in this campaign. We must not forget what happened on 11 September. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] We must not forget that if we do not act, Osama bin Laden and his supporters will continue to pose a threat to global stability and the lives of innocent people all over the world. We have no choice but to act, and to act decisively.

1.39 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): First, I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the Secretary of State and the House for failing to be present for the Secretary of State's opening remarks. I understand that he addressed issues that I wish to address, so he must forgive me if he has to go over the ground again. I apologise for that.

There may be any number of questions in our minds about the conduct of the Government's response to 11 September, but let there be no doubts whatever about what the principal response should be. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition spelled out in *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday, we share the Government's objectives and continue to support the military campaign to deliver them, because that is the right thing for everyone to do.

As the weeks since 11 September go by and those terrible events begin to recede in our minds, there can be no excuse for forgetfulness or wishful thinking. We must be absolutely clear on the need for continued resolve. We must face reality. Airline hijackings and death on such a scale cannot be treated as a one-off. Terrorism is not a chance event like a lightning strike. Those events were planned and executed to the finest detail for a purpose.

The enormity of the crimes is matched only by the enormity of their strategic significance. The most powerful country in the world—the United States—was subjected to a deliberate and calculated attack. It was a strategic strike. It was a military operation backed by people with strategic objectives, who not only killed thousands of people but created fear and paralysis far beyond the events themselves. They have caused massive economic dislocation. Now that they have seen the effects of their evil, and given that they still possess the means and the motivation, what is to prevent them from striking again and again unless we act?

On 29 October, United States Attorney-General John Ashcroft announced that there may be additional terrorist attacks in the United States and against its interests elsewhere over the next week. I understand that that announcement was based on very strong intelligence indications. The risk remains, not just in America but here in our country, against our citizens in our cities. What is more, if we fail to act, there will be yet more serious consequences.

The United States has been the ultimate guarantor of global security and stability since the end of the second world war. That guarantee has depended on the absolute certainty that the United States, backed by its allies, would defend itself. We in Europe have been the most obvious beneficiaries of that guarantee.

As Henry Kissinger pointed out in his lecture to the Centre for Policy Studies in London last night, if the United States fails the test now, after the most devastating attack on its territory in its history, the whole structure of post-war global security will collapse. That is what is at stake.

All around the world, there are tensions and potential flashpoints where ethnic and border disputes can flare up and where the slenderest threads of deterrence hold the forces of chaos in check. Unless the United States and its allies prevail over the terrorist aggressors in Afghanistan, aggressors everywhere will be given a green light, and they will be aggressors who care nothing for civilian casualties or whether they use cluster bombs.

Western democracies do not like fighting wars. We find it grotesque to weigh the balance of argument on the basis of that awful phrase "collateral damage". We grieve for every death among innocent people caught in a war that is not of their choosing, but we must be prepared to face that choice.

Our enemies are people without scruple who hope to exploit civilised values as a key weakness. Now is the time to stand up for our values, not to be weak and surrender them. That is why we welcome the Prime Minister's speech to the Welsh Assembly on Tuesday, in which he unambiguously reiterated the fundamental purpose of the military campaign in Afghanistan. It is

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

crucial that we keep explaining, as the right hon. Gentleman has done, the absolute and vital connection between the security of people leading their daily lives and the continued prosecution of the military campaign. The Government have clearly found some difficulties with that in recent days.

Our constituents and their children appreciate the real threat of terrorism. We can trust them to understand that reality. Since 11 September, which of us has not imagined how the worst could happen? We think of our families and our children. It is far harder to watch the bombing on television every night and make a rational connection with the safety and security of our lives—indeed, unless they are properly explained, the war planes and the mushroom clouds of smoke from bombs exploding in deserts and on hillsides thousands of miles away can reinforce a growing sense of unease.

In leading our people through that, I urge Ministers not to flannel them. People naturally want to see that the bombing will lead to progress, but we should not give false reassurance when there is as yet none to give. Attempts to sweeten or dilute the message lead to confusion. People want the facts of the situation. They do not want spin. The debate about whether the Royal Marines are ready was not helpful. Ministers cannot complain about press speculation when all the briefings and public statements about a possible deployment of thousands of troops leading up to last Friday's announcement seemed designed to create that speculation.

Once again, I urge the Secretary of State to question the wisdom of using field commanders for the political task of backing up what he says and reassuring the public back home about the direction of the campaign. I urge the Government to reconsider their media strategy.

Mr. Hoon: Where is the evidence for the hon. Gentleman's assertion?

Mr. Jenkin: My assertion about what?

Mr. Hoon: About the use of field commanders to back some political campaign. Quite simply, that has never been done, and I should be grateful to know why the hon. Gentleman makes that allegation.

Mr. Jenkin: I have nothing against Brigadier Lane or Admiral Burnell-Nugent, but it is clear that they have been authorised to give briefings. Brigadier Lane was interviewed on the "Today" programme. Those political messages would be better put across by Ministers, not military commanders in the field.

Mr. Hoon: Given that the admiral, in particular, was briefing in the context of an exercise, is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Government should forbid senior military commanders from appearing on the radio or giving interviews?

Mr. Jenkin: They do not appear without the Secretary of State's permission, and I certainly do not think that Brigadier Lane would have appeared on the "Today" programme without the Secretary of State knowing about it. If that is part of the right hon. Gentleman's campaign to reassure the British public, it should not be: he should ensure that the primary objective is that the public are not confused by conflicting messages. I shall not tire the House by going through those again.

Mr. Kaufman: May I give the hon. Gentleman a piece of advice? During the Gulf crisis and the Gulf war, when I led for the Opposition, as a supporter of the rule of law, I looked for points of agreement with the Government. I did not niggle over points of disagreement. My advice is this: if he and his leader continue in that way, they will not win support in the country. They will arouse contempt.

Mr. Jenkin: I opened by making it absolutely clear where and how deeply we support the Government's objectives, and the Government should realise that. The right hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State have shown a little over-sensitivity on this point. If they think that the presentation over the past week has been absolutely perfect, they live in a different world from the rest of us. I know that they do not think that that is true.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I intend to carry on with my speech.

I do not believe that the majority of the British public feel that they have to know so many details of the debate about military preparations. They would hate the idea that Ministers were feeding speculation that might help the enemy and even put the lives of British service men at risk. We are not talking about managing the media for the usual domestic political agenda. Our adage should be, "less is more." The less the Government say about our plans, the more confident people are likely to be that the right decisions are being taken.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I will give way to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle).

Mr. Kilfoyle: A few moments ago the hon. Gentleman said that he would prefer the Government to deal in facts and not spin. Does he not therefore welcome the briefings given by Brigadier Lane and his colleagues? Surely he is getting the facts.

Mr. Jenkin: I do not want to drag the House through this again, but clearly there were disagreements. There were conflicts between what the Brigadier and Ministers were saying. Points of information given by the Chief of the Defence Staff did not accord with what Brigadier Lane had said. Unless we can clarify the messages, we will not give the British people the confidence that British forces deserve before they go into action.

The Prime Minister is right to clarify our objectives. The Government must also clarify their military aim. At the time of the previous debate on the subject on 16 October, the Government reassuringly produced a formidable document entitled, "Defeating International Terrorism: Campaign Objectives". It includes the four immediate objectives that have been extensively rehearsed. We support those objectives and we support the bombing campaign as a first step towards achieving them.

We also agree with the Secretary of State that there is plenty of evidence to show that the bombing campaign is effective. It is degrading Taliban and al-Qaeda military assets. It is reducing the terrorists' ability to continue to operate and sending a clear signal to other terrorist organisations and the states that may harbour them that the west will act decisively against terrorism.

The Government's objectives reflect their overall policy and that of the United States Government, however. They are grand strategic objectives to be achieved by political, diplomatic and military means. They do not constitute achievable military aims. That, too, seems to be a source of some confusion. Apart from the appearance of the Deputy Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box yesterday, which I confess I had rather discounted, it seemed to be becoming clear from United States and British Government statements that a simpler military aim was being distilled from the broader strategy—namely, the removal of the Taliban Government.

When I asked the Secretary of State about that aim on Monday, he replied

> "Yes, I can give that confirmation."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 615.]

If there was any doubt left, on Tuesday, the Prime Minister said

> "Our objectives are clear: to close down the al-Qa'ida Network, bring UBL and his associates to justice and because the Taliban regime have chosen to side with al-Qa'ida, to remove them."

Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to clarify that it is the objective of the Government and the alliance to remove the Taliban Government?

Mr. Hoon: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was absent from the Chamber when I dealt with that matter. I made it clear that the purpose of the campaign—I set out the wider aims and the military aims—is to create a situation in Afghanistan where there is a Government who no longer harbour, sustain and support terrorism. That has always been and continues to be the aim.

Mr. Jenkin: That is a softer line than the one the Prime Minister took in his speech on Tuesday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Pathetic."] It is not pathetic. The Prime Minister said that it was the objective to remove the Taliban Government.

Donald Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman in a moment. If the alliance adopts that as its first and principal aim, I can assure the Secretary of State that the Government will have our fullest support. It is hard to see how al-Qaeda can be tackled effectively and bin Laden driven from his hiding places, or how we can begin to resolve the mounting humanitarian crisis, unless we remove the main obstacle to all those things, which is the Taliban. When I wrote those words, I did so with the thought that the Government's objective was to remove the Taliban. I still think that that probably should be the objective. We will support the Government in the use of whatever conventional military force is necessary to achieve that aim.

Donald Anderson: The hon. Gentleman says that he supports the big picture and the Government's objectives, but surely he is descending into a sort of mediaeval textual analysis of minor points of difference, which cannot be helpful in the big campaign. He is also being unrealistic and is failing to see the problems of coalition building, as elements of this disparate coalition have different views on whether some elements of the Taliban can be incorporated in a post-Taliban Government. Surely he is being unhelpful. We must keep the coalition going as it is at present, even though there may be certain ambiguities.

Mr. Jenkin: There are more than ambiguities, but I will let the point rest there.

I reiterate what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday. Removing the Taliban does not conflict with our humanitarian policy—it is the humanitarian policy. No arrangements can be made with a Government who had already created a dire refugee crisis before 11 September and who regularly hijack what little aid can get into the country to feed their troops.

Mr. Robathan: I raised this issue with the Secretary of State, but felt that his answer was not as full as it might have been. Surely it is the conditions in which the Taliban have thrived that must be ended. The last 20-odd years of conflict and civil war have led to those conditions and have resulted not only in refugees and humanitarian disaster but in disaster for the 50 per cent. of the Afghanistan people who are female as well as for all the neighbouring states. We must put an end to that Government and allow the people of Afghanistan the right to choose their own Government.

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend is right. We must be prepared for a long campaign. It would be wrong to suggest that there is unlimited time, however. We need to prove the real value of the air campaign. That is only likely to become apparent when we move to the next stage of military operations, as both the Gulf and Kosovo military campaigns demonstrated.

I do not invite speculation about the nature of the next phase of the military campaign. Ministers will have our support if they continue to provide the Americans with whatever military support they may request and that we can afford them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I will give way to the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien).

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for having the courtesy to give way. The Leader of the Opposition gained much credit throughout the country for his unequivocal support for the Government in the war against terrorism. However, in what was widely perceived in the media as a wobble by an inexperienced new leader, the right hon. Gentleman seemed yesterday to set conditions for supporting the Government, as the hon. Gentleman has done today. Will he now reiterate on behalf of the Opposition that the Conservative party gives unequivocal and unconditional support to the Government in their fight against terrorism?

Mr. Jenkin: Yes, and—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] That yes means that we will continue to be Her Majesty's

[Mr. Jenkin]

loyal Opposition, playing the role that the British people expect us to play in a democratic Parliament, asking the questions that they expect us to ask and holding the Government to account for the conduct of that campaign.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Does my hon. Friend agree that on the Opposition Benches there has been nothing but staunch, if thinking, support for the Government's objectives, compared with the ragbag of rebels and dissenters that we have seen on the Labour Back Benches?

Mr. Jenkin: I am tempted to agree with my hon. Friend, but dwelling on such criticisms might be unhelpful.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Surely the one truly important message that should come out of the House today is that the House of Commons—with very few exceptions in any quarter—wholeheartedly supports the Government in their determination to defeat terrorism.

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend is right. Nothing that I have said today detracts from that view.

The public rightly sense the dangers of a lengthening conflict. May I reassure the Government that the Opposition are not about to set any deadlines? However, the longer this part of the conflict continues and the longer the Taliban remain in power, the less effective the coalition appears to be and the greater is the threat to the political and military credibility of the alliance. That will also tend to obscure the wider issues presented by the threat of international terrorism that we must be ready to face.

There is no need to rehearse here the list of states that we know actively sustain international terrorist organisations. We must also address the underlying factors that give rise to such organisations: for example, the need to rebuild nations such as Afghanistan on the basis of a proper, legally constituted Government whose primary interests are stability and security and who show respect for basic human rights and for the territorial integrity of their neighbours. That is the agenda that the Prime Minister is rightly seeking to address on his visit to Syria, Saudi Arabia and Israel, and we wish him every success.

All these wider efforts will come to naught unless we are prepared to follow through the military action that we have started. The Taliban and al-Qaeda are the sworn enemies of every Member of this House. We know that up to 50,000 people have been through the al-Qaeda training camps. We know that they have the will to destroy us and everything that we value most highly. As the Prime Minister said in his first statement to the House following 11 September:

"We know that they would, if they could, go further and use chemical, biological, or even nuclear weapons of mass destruction."—[*Official Report*, 14 September 2001; Vol 372, c.606.]

If there is a vote tonight, we will join Ministers and their supporters in the Lobby. Every Member of this House should use this opportunity to demonstrate once again their support for the Government's determination to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda before they get the opportunity to carry out further atrocities on innocent people. The Government are entitled to that support. That is how Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition see our duty. Every member of our armed services is ready to do their duty. The very least that we can do is to back them with the determination and clarity that they are entitled to expect.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches applies from now until the end of the debate.

2.2 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I did not endeavour to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or that of Mr. Speaker during the earlier debates on this extremely serious matter because I wanted to speak with the aid agencies and assess the humanitarian aspects of the crisis. I now want to address my remarks to that issue.

If there is a Division tonight, I shall support the Government because the arguments have led overwhelmingly to the conclusion, consistent with the view of the majority of the British people, that what the Government are doing reflects what the British people expect from a responsible Government.

I do not want to become involved in the war of words about news management between the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. However, the media's influence on public opinion is important. With the greatest respect to the hon. Member for North Essex, if there is a problem regarding news management—in fairness, perhaps there is—the media and the press have their responsibilities as well. It is probably better coming from me as a Back Bencher, speaking for myself alone, if I say that not only do the media have rights, which we are seeking to defend, they have responsibilities. They may from time to time want to address themselves to those responsibilities.

On Monday I listened to the "Today" programme on Radio 4 for about two hours. To the programme's credit, it ended with a brief discussion on that very matter. One of the contributors in the studio was Colonel John Hughes Wilson, formerly of the Defence Intelligence Service. He quoted Lawrence of Arabia's words:

"News management—the press—is the most important weapon of war."

It may be, but if it is, and given the complexities that we are facing, when the media choose whom they want to interview they should remember that a large number of people from the 90-odd nations that support the coalition come from Muslim communities. Perhaps we could hear from them from time to time.

On the diplomatic side, I strongly welcome what the Prime Minister has been doing during the past few days, particularly in seeking to influence Israel and Palestine. We all know that that is really at the heart of a solution to these problems.

Let me mention two countries, Pakistan and India, which Parliament holds in high regard, and the contribution of which they are capable. There are, of course, sensitivities—both countries are nuclear powers. However, on the diplomatic side it is right that we

continue to press for fruitful negotiations on Kashmir, given the friction that there is, the three wars that have already taken place between those two nations and the enormous pressure on both in the current crisis. We want to be even-handed. India has 130 million Muslims, the largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia.

I come now to the humanitarian challenge in Afghanistan. For more than 20 years, Afghanistan has been in the grip of a huge humanitarian crisis. There has been conflict; for the past three years there has been drought. There were many problems with refugees before 11 September. Some 1.5 million Afghan refugees have settled in Iran and 2 million in Pakistan. Today, the United Nations' projected figure for displaced or stranded people—among the most vulnerable of human beings—is around 7.5 million. That is a remarkable challenge.

Famine and diseases such as malaria are increasing; and infant mortality is also increasing on a huge scale. I believe that everyone in the House wants to respond passionately to that challenge. We know of the big demands on the medical centres. We know, too—I say this with some pride—that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has led in dealing with these problems. Of the EU contribution, 19 per cent.—nearly a fifth—came from us. That was well beyond what might be expected on a per capita basis.

I have listened, as have other right hon. and hon. Members, to the important views of the aid agencies, which for years, not just for the past few weeks and months, have been at the front line in trying to deal with the problems. I know that they are not unanimous in their view about, for example, whether there should be a pause in the war. Some, such as Oxfam, and others that speak from its perspective, take the view that that should take place. They tell us in all candour that the delivery of food by air is not reaching those whom it is meant to reach, and sometimes the food packages are confused with land mines. They tell us in all candour that they are suspicious of cluster bombs.

Other aid agencies make the point that for many years, not just in recent weeks, the Taliban's harassments, their looting and seizing of trucks, their objection to women working for the aid agencies even as they bring succour, and their threatening with execution people who use telephones to give their appraisal of the situation, do not make it easy for the Government or those involved in the coalition to deliver the essential humanitarian aid—food, medicine and the rest—that we are determined to deliver. It is precisely the humanitarian crisis that convinces me that our diplomatic, military and intelligence activities simply have to succeed. They cannot be seen to fail.

The efforts against terrorism and the provision of proper humanitarian relief rely on the possession of at least one other airport or some other secure method of bringing vital supplies to at least substantial parts of Afghanistan. That would be an enormous success story. I accept that we would have to work with the Northern Alliance to achieve it, but if we could take the key northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif we could open vital supply routes into Afghanistan. That does mean force, but in the circumstances, consistent with every effort to ensure that civilians are protected, it is not an ignoble objective. I sincerely believe that it is the only choice.

Beyond that—on this, I conclude, Mr. Deputy Speaker—we look forward—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. You will have to conclude. I call Mr. Keetch.

2.12 pm

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I, too, shall be brief because I know that many right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak. I apologise for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge). She has to deal with a personal matter. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) will make a speech should he catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the initiative that the Prime Minister is undertaking in the middle east. It has been suggested that American foreign policy and the situation in the middle east somehow justify the appalling attacks of 11 September. That is ludicrous. Nothing can justify what happened, but it is true to say that the situation in the middle east has an important role to play in finally winning the war against terrorism. We support what the Prime Minister is doing today, especially his efforts in Israel.

We meet here again today to discuss this war. We have never liked using the word "war"—we do not believe that we are at war—but the word is being used and I accept its use. We said from day one that we would support military action that was targeted, proportionate and within international law. We have always made it clear that we believe, and I know that the Government also believe, that the military campaign is just one aspect of the overall campaign that needs to be fought. On that military campaign, we again say that we support our armed forces. We must do all that we can to protect them. They go into action—if they have to do so—with our complete support.

Like many others, including the Secretary of State for Defence, I recently visited Oman. I found our forces there—as I find our forces wherever I see them—in good spirits. I had concerns about several items and I am glad that they have been dealt with. I am especially pleased about the new rifle that the Minister of State for Defence told us will be made available to them.

I want to tell the House about my correspondence with one of the marines whom I met—a young Muslim. He and his parents have written to me welcoming the visits that have been made. That Muslim marine knows—as we all know—that the action being taken and to be taken is in no way a war against Islam. It is worth repeating that the action that is being taken is against terrorism wherever it may be found.

That action is not only military in nature: it involves diplomacy and financial measures, as well as intelligence work about which we may never know. It also includes humanitarian aid. I seek several assurances about the humanitarian project.

I am delighted that no one in the House, in the Government or in the US Administration is prepared to ignore the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. However, it must be admitted that there was a humanitarian disaster there before 11 September—we all know that. We must continue to make every effort to get humanitarian aid into Afghanistan, especially with the approach of winter. If history has shown us one thing,

[Mr. Paul Keetch]

it is that the fight against terrorism is likely to be a long one. We must not forget that for many people in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran time is pressing.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Does my hon. Friend recognise the anxiety of many of my constituents that the humanitarian and human rights situation of the Afghan people will improve only if there is the prospect of a stable regime to replace the current one? Does he understand their worry that even if the Taliban regime were to fall tomorrow or next week, unless it is replaced with something better, we shall have created a humanitarian situation that is no better and may even be worse as the land falls into the hands of competing warlords? Does he agree that we need far more emphasis on what will come next, rather than merely focusing on what we want to get rid of at present?

Mr. Keetch: My hon. Friend is right. It is true that any replacement regime, which will have to attract international support, cannot simply be formed, for example, by the Northern Alliance. To have any chance of success in Afghanistan, the regime will have to be representative of all the various communities and tribes in that country. We in the international community must work to ensure that.

Joan Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman repeats what many hon. Members have said about the range of people who should be involved in a post-Taliban Government. Will he make it explicit that that must include women, who have been greatest victims of the Taliban regime?

Mr. Keetch: I make that absolutely explicit. The treatment of women by the Taliban regime is appalling. Any replacement regime must understand that the human rights of all members of society in Afghanistan must be upheld.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Keetch: Yes, but this is the last time.

Mr. Turner: Does the hon. Gentleman not understand that there is a great distinction between the appalling behaviour of the Taliban regime and the traditional behaviour of many Muslim communities? To attempt to impose western values on Muslim communities and nations that have a secure and sensible way of governing themselves is exactly the way to lose their support.

Mr. Keetch: I certainly would not suggest to any nation that we should impose targets or quotas, but the hon. Gentleman must understand that the way in which women have been treated in recent years in Afghanistan is very different from the way in which they used to be treated there. Formerly, they were regarded as valued members of their society. I want to see that again. I have visited Muslim societies where women have that right—a point that bears repetition.

May I put a question to the Secretary of State for International Development through the Under-Secretary of State for Defence who is sitting on the Treasury Bench? The Secretary of State for Defence mentioned that $700 million of aid has been pledged during the war so far. How much of that has actually been delivered? It has been suggested that although it is easy to pledge money, actually to give it is a slightly different thing.

Will the Under-Secretary tell us whether it has been suggested that some of the non-fighting members of the coalition might use some of their military assets to speed up the delivery of aid to the area? That would go some way to alleviate the crisis that might shortly be upon us.

On cluster bombs, Liberal Democrats have to part company to a degree with others. We believe that targeted and proportionate military action is acceptable, but we also have to accept that the use of cluster bombs has a wider international and diplomatic consequence. In its excellent report on the Kosovo crisis, the Select Committee on Defence considered the use of cluster bombs and said:

> "At the very least, their reputation as an indiscriminate weapon risks international condemnation, undermining popular support for an action."

Patrick Mercer: I bow to the hon. Gentleman's considerable defence experience, but we both understand that a palpable confusion exists between mines and cluster bombs. They are not the same, and that difference must be made clear if we are not to have one hand tied behind our backs.

Mr. Keetch: There is a difference between land mines and cluster bombs, and that is understood in the report that I quote and I understand it, too. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me a few minutes, I shall expand the argument and answer some of his concerns.

We believe that the concerns on the diplomatic front about the use of such weapons are very real. So real does the Ministry of Defence believe them to be that it has now written to every Member of Parliament to give its defence of those weapons. We believe that a sizeable proportion of the bomblets dropped clearly fail to go off. The Secretary of State for Defence suggested that the figure is 5 per cent. The Select Committee thinks that the percentage is higher—perhaps between 8 and 12 per cent.—and, of course, some non-governmental organisations believe it to be higher than that. Given the failure rate of some of those submunitions, which can cause civilian casualties and casualties to our own forces who may occupy the ground, the use of that ordnance seems to be folly, and it should be reconsidered.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: Following on from the previous intervention, does the hon. Gentleman understand that, as acknowledged by a Pentagon spokesman in *The New York Times* of 11 October, the bombs being dropped on Afghanistan are, in fact, Gator bombs—a form of cluster bomb with wires extending between each bomb? They are activated indiscriminately by a tripwire mechanism and are similar to mines.

Mr. Keetch: I do understand that, and I can understand that there may be occasions on which the military use of cluster bombs should be allowed. We certainly would not withdraw them from the British Army's order of battle, but because of the concerns about them in other nations and in this country, we do not believe that they should be used in this conflict.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that if he were the Secretary of

State for Defence and his senior officers at the MOD advised him that it was in the interests of protecting the lives of British service men and women to use cluster bombs in certain circumstances in Afghanistan, he would say no and put the lives of our service men and women at risk?

Mr. Keetch: The hon. Gentleman must understand that if using such weapons results in a much wider breakdown in the international coalition, that could have more consequences for the protection of our services than not using them. I shall not second-guess what I would do if I were in that position, although I look forward to being in that position, but currently in this campaign the use of cluster bombs is wrong.

On the calls for a pause for Ramadan, which the Secretary of State has discussed, I entirely agree with the comments of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and, indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife. It has been suggested that if we were to pause for Ramadan or some other event, somehow humanitarian aid would suddenly flow. I see no evidence that that is really the case. To cease air strikes could possibly allow the Taliban to regroup and reassemble their forces, and it could possibly allow al-Qaeda to plan and execute another horrific terrorist attack. Therefore, we believe that to pause, or to announce a pause for an event that is coming up in over two weeks would be wrong. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton was right to say that history shows that Ramadan has never necessarily meant a pause in military action. At this stage, therefore, we do not support a pause.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Keetch: I must try to make some progress because many hon. Members wish to speak.

I come to the home front, if we may call it that. The safeguarding of the lives of our constituents must be the principal activity of Her Majesty's Government. I want to know whether they will reassess the calls by some people, including my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley), for a newly appointed Cabinet-rank Minister to deal with home security. We must ensure that every possible provision is in place to secure the lives of our citizens.

It is clear that there is some confusion about who would control a terrorist event in this country. Would it be the Home Office, local government or indeed the devolved Assemblies? It is clear that there is some concern. I therefore believe that we should consider following the example of the United States and appoint a Cabinet-level person who would be responsible for co-ordinating homeland defence. I believe that the Territorial Army would have a vital role in that. I am glad that the Government are trying to improve the way in which the TA is organised.

It is clear that the war is now undergoing a different tempo and that the combined land and air campaign is changing its movement. We in the House must support that. We have made it clear from the start that we support targeted, proportionate action. Our view has not changed. Others may have changed their position, but we have not. If our armed forces go into action, they do so with our support. We pray for their safe return home. We have the best armed forces in the world. Again, that will be proven.

2.26 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I have not attempted to speak in the House during the campaign, other than to make interventions on various Ministers. I stand here today with a heavy heart because I feel that we are facing an enormous humanitarian crisis.

For the past two weeks, we on the Select Committee on International Development have listened to various people from aid agencies, some of whom have been inside Afghanistan as recently as two weeks ago, some of whom have been expelled, but all of whom have particular knowledge of the situation there. They knew that there was a drought before 11 September, and they warned of its consequences. Since then, it has been made much more difficult to deliver not just food to that country, but tents, clothing and other supplies. They say that there is a two-week window of opportunity before it is too late for hundreds of thousands of people in Afghanistan.

I am not happy to stand here and say that 100,000 children may die unless we can get that aid to them in time, but that is what the United Nations Children's Fund has told us: 100,000 children could die in that country. Therefore, we all have a great responsibility to ensure that not only the military objectives but the diplomatic and humanitarian objectives are met, as other colleagues have said. I do not believe that the humanitarian objective is being met at the moment, although at the beginning of the campaign we were told that humanitarian, diplomatic and military efforts would run in parallel and would be mutually supportive. Obviously, that is not happening with regard to the humanitarian situation.

It is not the fault of the people who are waging the war, because it is a complex situation. The Taliban previously attacked aid agencies and imprisoned people who worked for them. They did not allow them to work with women. They did not allow many of the things that we expect aid agencies to do in a country. That was before the bombing started. Now that it is under way, we must take notice of the warnings coming from aid agencies across the board, from Islamic Relief to Oxfam, Christian Aid and Care International.

Two weeks running, we have heard those agencies giving evidence to our Committee. They are not so concerned about the people on the borders who are trying to become or are already refugees, because there is usually somebody to look after them. They are concerned about the displaced people inside Afghanistan. Hundreds of thousands of people were already displaced before the war started but have become even more so. Many have fled in terror to the borders or to friends and relatives out in the country.

There are estimated to be about 2 million displaced people inside Afghanistan. The difficulty will be to reach those people once the snows start. The aid agencies have different views on how to get the food into the country. A lot of figures are bandied about, but one important statistic is that people are getting only 19 per cent. of the food that they need. Whatever we say about metric tonnes, 19 per cent. is clear enough to everybody.

People are underfed. Many are already suffering from malnourishment, exhaustion and fear. Women are particularly vulnerable. Thousands are already war

[Ann Clwyd]

widows and have to fend for themselves. Dropping food parcels from the air may have to continue as a last resort, but it means that the healthy and the strong can run to get the food, while the weak, the vulnerable and the children cannot.

I am told that truck drivers are reluctant to drive food trucks in Afghanistan. They are afraid of looting, of being attacked and of bombing, because they do not know when it will happen. However, there are donkeys and carts and other ways of getting food to people, and that has to be done before the snows come.

I cannot stress strongly enough that we have a responsibility to deal with the humanitarian crisis, which the aid agencies believe is of gigantic proportions and may become a bigger catastrophe than anything seen before. I am sure that none of us wants that to happen, so we must call on our own Government and on the others involved in the action to find a mechanism to ensure that the humanitarian problem is addressed, and soon, so that at least we can hold up our heads and say that we did what we could. Whatever happens during the military action, we must not allow hundreds of thousands of Afghans to starve, but unless the humanitarian crisis is addressed now, that is what will happen.

2.34 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) speaks with passion, knowledge and commitment on the humanitarian aspect of the conflict with Afghanistan. I know of no military engagement in which there has been such a strong humanitarian element. The precision with which munitions are delivered has been weighed to take into account the humanitarian concerns that she expressed.

Looking around the Chamber, I can see a great number of poppies. The majority of, if not all, Members of the House will go to their war memorial on Remembrance Sunday and bow their head in remembrance of those who, in two world wars and other conflicts, have given their lives in the cause of freedom. We will remember the massive loss of life that occurred, for example, on the Somme. Faulks's book "Birdsong" reminded us that, on day one, 40,000 were killed. We will remember them, and we shall not forget their sacrifice. They were fighting for freedom, democracy and the things that we hold near and dear. That is why we have to engage, again, in military activity against terrorism—in this case, against al-Qaeda. Its members are not democrats and they are not answerable to anyone. They showed not a hint of compassion in the action that they took on 11 September.

Lest we forget that, I inform the House that, last night, I signed a passport application for a family friend. I asked the young man where he had lost his passport and he told me that it was at the bottom of the World Trade Centre. That brings home in a very personal way exactly what happened on 11 September. My former private secretary in the Treasury, Dermot Finch—a good lad from Clitheroe—escaped and was led from an annexe to the World Trade Centre after the second plane hit. He is still traumatised by the awfulness of that experience. It is those parts of the kaleidoscope of images that underpin my conviction that the action that we are taking is correct.

My constituency contains the headquarters of BAE Systems, which makes the majority of our military aircraft, and we understand what conflict is about. We provide the equipment to reinforce our armed forces to do a remarkable job. The Canberra PR9 flew 50 years ago and it is still flying in this conflict, providing aerial photographs and intelligence for our forces. All the nuclear fuel in the country is manufactured in my constituency, and if we do not contain terrorism, my constituents will be abundantly aware of the danger of an attack on that plant. In some way, we are all connected with the battle; we cannot ignore it.

Last night, some Members had the privilege of listening to Benjamin Netanyahu. Whatever they might think of his conduct as Prime Minister of Israel and whatever their views of the conflict there, they cannot have been other than struck by his message of passion and experience. He described what it is like to live in a country that is permanently engaged in a terrorist conflict and he observed that his country is a democracy that sits in a sea of non-democratic countries, many of which have given comfort and succour to terrorists. His assessment of the 11th was chilling. He said that we had received a wake-up call from hell and that we could either do something about it or press the snooze button—chilling and telling words from someone who has had to deal with the real-world effects of terrorism. I agree that we have to do something, which is why I support the action that has been taken.

There has been some discussion about the clarity of our purpose and whether we have explained our strategy. The Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) responded to such comments, but one of the problems that we face is that there are too many media, too much comment, too many conflicting views and too many difficult messages for ordinary members of the public to take on board. Too many retired generals and army experts pump out their version of what is going on. If there has been a lack of clarity, it is because the media are crowded with observations.

This is a difficult conflict; it is a different conflict. In his remarkable address to Congress, President Bush reminded us of that when he said:

> "Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success."

The one word that has perhaps not been emphasised so far in our discussions is "patience". We have to be patient and allow time for different military approaches to be tried to see whether they can successfully deal with a resourceful, clever and financially well resourced opponent who could strike anywhere at any time. To do nothing is not an option, which is why I believe that the action that has been taken so far is correct.

I have written to the chairmen of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the British-American Parliamentary Group asking whether they would seriously consider organising programmes of activities and visits to and from their member countries so that Members of Parliament may play their part in improving dialogue and understanding of the issues that underpin the fight against terrorism. It is only by learning and by conversation that we can make our contribution and understand the conflict.

Anyone who has any doubts about the purpose and intention of our actions to date should read the chilling article on the front page of today's edition of *The Times*. The facts of what the Taliban did to someone who chose to stand and fight against them constitute the most brutal

report that I have ever read. The person involved was amputated to the extent of becoming a complete cripple yet still being alive to tell the story. The article shows that these are not people to be trifled with; these are people who must be dealt with. If that means massive military power in the first instance, so be it.

I have respect for those who challenge and question what we are doing. Mr. Matthew Parris writes with perception and clarity about our affairs in this place. Last Saturday, he wrote a challenging article about the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States and our position in the conflict. Whatever we think about Matthew Parris's analysis and whatever we think about those who have doubts, as democrats we must respond to their concerns to ensure that the clarity of vision and purpose to which the majority subscribe is not deflected. Above all, we should not forget, as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said, the word "humanitarian". If we do not deal effectively with the Taliban, we shall have ignored the humanitarian aspects of why we are at war in Afghanistan.

2.42 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) made a powerful speech about the humanitarian crisis. We should all listen carefully to and read what she says. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) spoke about the big picture, and I shall seek to follow that. In doing so, I shall build on the points that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made to the Welsh Assembly on Tuesday. He had two themes: first, remember; secondly, be patient.

We must remember why the conflict is happening—because of the atrocity of 11 September. We should remember 11 September and also the two United Nations Security Council resolutions that provide us with ample justification in international law. We should remember also the way in which bin Laden has exulted in the deaths that were caused on 11 September. He has made blood-curdling threats about his readiness to use even worse weapons, be they biological, chemical or even possibly nuclear. These are the things that we must remember when people may be inclined to wobble as we get into the three-week syndrome of saying, "Tragically, there have been some civilian deaths. Tragically, there have been certain mistakes." The big picture is that of 11 September, international justification and the continuing threat that we must bear in mind.

The second theme of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was the need to be patient. Clearly there are problems as the campaign progresses. I re-read de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America", where he questions whether a democracy can continue a foreign policy consistently for any length of time.

When we read our press and see the debates of retired generals on how they would wage the war, alongside the tragic pictures of individual citizens in Afghanistan who have lost their children, there are many temptations to wobble. However, let us remember what happened in Kosovo. Yes, the circumstances were different, but the bombing lasted for 78 days, the refugees have now returned and Milosevic is before the International Court of Justice at The Hague. Yes, it is worth while viewing what is now happening in its proper perspective of 11 September, as well as remembering the theme of patience. I believe that our goals are clear and that if we wobble now, it will be tantamount to giving a form of victory to bin Laden and his associates.

My next point is this: where are we now domestically and internationally? I want to raise three issues of detail. First, in the past few days questions have been asked about the small number of British Muslims who are going to fight in Afghanistan. I should preface my comments on the matter by saying how much I welcome the statements of the many responsible Muslim leaders in Britain who have made it clear that bin Laden does not speak for the Muslim community. I welcome also the statement by Muslim parliamentarians on 18 October, in which they made it clear that taking military action and countering terrorism are essential.

There is encouraging poll evidence in *The Daily Telegraph* showing that the British people, with their usual good sense, are not allowing the conflict to damage their relations with British Muslim citizens. Clearly, however, some British Muslims are leaving the country to fight abroad against our own service men. No doubt, the numbers reported in the press are exaggerated, but even if there is only a handful of such individuals, we need to take the matter seriously and ask how our law is equipped to deal with the problem. Of course, there must a due process of law—but which law? The Foreign Enlistment Act 1870 is not relevant, as it deals with states and not non-state parties. We may have to consider updating it. I suspect that the Terrorism Act 2000 may not be wholly appropriate because of the question whether the Taliban are a terrorist organisation. We need to consider the Green Paper on mercenaries that the Government are about to publish. Indeed, they have been about to publish it for the past two years.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: May I draw to the right hon. Gentleman's attention the most excellent letter in today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph* by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier)? He commends use of the Treason Act 1351, which Lord Rooker suggested in the other place the Government were prepared to deploy.

Donald Anderson: We need to look at the whole battery of statute law that is available, not least in terms of passports, which are a matter for the Crown prerogative. However, there are two clear points: a clear and serious warning must be given to those who are tempted to go abroad; and statements are needed from leaders in the Muslim community telling people that they support the UK in this crisis or at least that they are ready to deter young people who are tempted to go abroad.

Secondly, on airline security, I want to make one point. Wearing a professional hat, in the past I have seen opportunities given for organised crime, drug running and so on because of lax recruitment of cleaners in aircraft at our airports. We must consider very carefully the recruitment of people who can go airside in our airports and procedures must be tightened.

I want to mention one final related matter: foreign students at British universities taking knowledge and expertise back to their countries that may be used against our interests, especially in respect of techniques for using weapons of mass destruction. How do we deal with the problem? We know, for example, that the woman who

[Donald Anderson]

leads the biological weapons programme in Iraq was educated at the university of East Anglia. Of those who were involved in the atrocities in the United States, many were educated in the west. They do not come to the west to learn mediaeval English literature.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Donald Anderson: No. I understand that there is no injury time.

We welcome the enormous benefits derived from the diversity of different cultures, but there should be rigorous checks on students in certain disciplines who come from sensitive countries.

The coalition is holding at the international level. I admire the Prime Minister for his energy on his various visits. We need to be clear about our war aims. We do not know how long the campaign will last. In the fight against terrorism in general it will be a continuing campaign, because terrorism will go on for as long as there are disaffected people who are prepared to kill the innocent for their political ends. All we can usefully do is to try to reduce the water in which the terrorists thrive. That means addressing the problems of poverty, and dealing with the hot spots such as the middle east that give aid and succour to terrorists.

We must be one step ahead of the terrorists. They are unlikely to use the same technique again as they used against the World Trade Centre. They may use other forms of asymmetric warfare, such as crop spraying and biological or chemical weapons. We need the very closest international co-operation across the board to ensure that we are one step ahead of the terrorists, because there will be greater numbers of casualties if we do not stand in their way.

2.51 pm

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): The whole House listened with great respect to the speech of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). We are all concerned about the humanitarian tragedy that is unfolding in Afghanistan. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), I want to draw back from that terrible tragedy and talk briefly about the wider picture.

One of the Prime Minister's famous remarks was that we should be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. That is also appropriate for dealing with the terrible problem of international terrorism. There is no question that we should be tough on the act of terrorism, but for two reasons. First, we have acted toughly, although with restraint, and we must continue to do so. If we show any sign of wobbling, it will send entirely the wrong message: that we are not committed to making the appropriate response.

Secondly, I am afraid that there are more terrorist acts to come. The appalling atrocity of 11 September was a much worse version of other terrorist acts that preceded it over a number of years. Chilling as it may be, we hope that the next act that inevitably will be committed is not even worse than what happened on 11 September. We must face the possibly of such acts wherever and by whomever they may be perpetrated. It would be totally irresponsible of any Government—whether it be the United States or the UK Government—to be supine in the face of such activity. It is our first duty to protect our citizens, and I am glad that the Government have acted fully and responsibly.

Every rational and caring human being should understand the criticisms and limitations of the bombing. It is clearly not doing much to unearth the whereabouts of Mr. bin Laden. There is a considerable danger that it alienates moderate opinion. We have seen how important that is, and the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition about hearts and minds were entirely appropriate. This is a crucial issue, and I was disappointed that some Labour Members took on my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the shadow Secretary of State for Defence. I am glad that he referred to hearts and minds. Hon. Members should have a united view. We support the Government on the importance of winning hearts and minds.

Perhaps even more important than dealing with the act of terrorism is dealing with its causes. It is difficult for a white, middle-aged Englishman in this day and age to get into the minds of fanatical terrorists from an extreme Muslim sect, but one must try to find out what motivates them.

The events of 11 September were an act of terror against the United States by an extreme Muslim sect. The hatred of America has been driven by the fact that, over the years, there has been American support for the state of Israel, troops have been present at bases in Saudi Arabia in particular and there have been clumsy and mistaken attempts at diplomacy, culminating in disappointment and distrust in the Arab lands. Also, it may be that America is seen as a symbol of the west's materialism.

There is clearly much truth in those charges. The west has not been wholly even-handed on the Israeli-Palestinian problems. Israel is occupying—

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Is the hon. Gentleman disagreeing with the remarks of his Front-Bench spokesman that the United States has been the guarantor of international security for the past 50 years? Is he suggesting that United States foreign policy over the past 50 years may have contributed to the growth of terrorism in recent years?

Mr. Horam: If the hon. Gentleman were to listen to my remarks, he would discover that I am trying to be even-handed. I am saying that we should consider, from an Arab terrorist's point of view, what blame we may have to accept. However right we might think we are, such terrorists feel that we must take the blame for some things that have occurred in the post-war period. Equally, there are things that the Arab and Muslim worlds need to look at honestly and begin to accept that some of their actions may have contributed to the terrible situation we now face.

Presumably, Arab terrorists adopt a fanatical and extreme version of the Islamic faith, which itself is posited on a strict and puritanical view of the world and a regard for the poor. In fact, those extremists see the leaders of their own countries as having given in to the materialistic

values of the western world against the theism of the Islamic faith. They see a society that tolerates poverty and has not done enough to eradicate it. That is particularly true of Saudi Arabia.

As I have said, I have considerable sympathy with the views expressed by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley on the humanitarian tragedy in Afghanistan, but the real epicentre of all this may well be Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. It was significant that a Saudi prince said recently that it was surprising that the planes were not flown into a skyscraper in Saudi Arabia rather than New York. In the mind of an Islamic extremist, those princes in Saudi Arabia are just as much the enemy as the citizens of New York.

Mr. Kilfoyle *rose—*

Mr. Horam: I will not give way because I have only a little time left.

All that is compounded by the oil situation, the historic ties between America and Saudi Arabia and the huge wealth that has come from all that. There has been a sort of Faustian deal between the leaders of Saudi Arabia and the extremists in their country. The provision of help for such extremists is how the leaders have attempted to keep themselves in power, and it has been highly dangerous

We support the leaders of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and so on because, whatever their faults, they are not extremists. I feel, however, that just as we have a responsibility to look at how we have conducted our diplomacy in the Arab world, they have a responsibility to look at how they conduct their Governments. I think that, however carefully and tactfully we may go about it, we have an obligation to try to make them realise that, even if they do not go as far as democracy—I do not think that there will be much democracy in the Arab, or the Muslim, world—they should examine their societies and see how they can conjure up an atmosphere that would at least diminish the possibility of fanaticism breeding in the terrible way in which it has bred over the past few years, producing atrocities such as those of 11 September.

3.1 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): References have been made this afternoon to the Prime Minister's visit to the middle east. My own view is that my right hon. Friend was right to go there, because it was necessary for him to expose himself to the sheer brutal starkness of emotions in the region and, indeed, to the double standards evinced by leaders in that region.

Yesterday the President of Syria attacked the bombings in Afghanistan, and spoke of the loss of life there; yet his father was responsible for massacring 10,000 people at Homs, in his own country. Today the Prime Minister has had the dubious experience of meeting the Prime Minister of Israel, a war criminal who was condemned by the Kahan commission's judicial inquiry into the Sabra and Shatila massacre in which 800 people were killed. The commission ordered him to be dismissed from the Israeli Government.

My right hon. Friend was then due to visit Gaza to meet Yasser Arafat, himself a former terrorist who, in a supremely and dramatically foolish act, rejected Barak's historic offer last autumn and who, to a considerable degree, is responsible for the fact that Sharon is Israel's Prime Minister today. Many of us—including me—who have wanted a Palestinian state, and still want one, view with horror the fact that Mr. Arafat presides over a regime that conducts public executions, among other things.

The sheer bitterness of the past is shown by the fact that today people in Gaza have marched on the 84th anniversary of the Balfour declaration—as if they did not have a great deal more to think about than the 84th anniversary of a document handed to a man, Chaim Weizmann, who as it happens lived in my constituency.

All those things show that whatever the outrage—whether it is the outrage of the attack on the World Trade Centre in September, or the outrage of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait—everything comes back to the existence of Israel. Let us be clear about the hypocrisy involved. Bin Laden does not care one jot for the Palestinians. Neither does Saddam Hussein; neither do the Syrians. When I visited Syria, as I did on two occasions as shadow Foreign Secretary, their loathing of Arafat emanated from their very being.

What these extremists—these murderers—do is exploit the plight of the Palestinians as a cause round which they can rally, some sincerely and some certainly not. They would like to destroy the state of Israel if they could, but they know they cannot, so they do their best to disrupt it. Too many Israeli leaders, sad to say, play into their hands. They demand the world's sympathy, but themselves behave like bullies. The great Israeli novelist Amos Oz said on behalf of the Israelis:

> "Our sufferings have granted us immunity papers, as it were . . . After what all those dirty goyim have done to us, none of them is entitled to preach morality to us. We, on the other hand, have carte blanche, because we were victims and have suffered so much. Once a victim, always a victim, and victimhood entitles its owners to a moral exemption."

That, unfortunately, is what the right in Israel—not the left—exploit. As a result, under Sharon's regime, more Israelis have been killed by terrorists within the pre-1967 borders than in any other period—plus, of course, 700 Palestinians, overwhelmingly civilians; that includes state assassinations. At the end of that brutal response by Sharon, an ending to the violence is no nearer—in fact, it is further away—and there is no progress whatever in finding the murderer of Rehavam Zeevi. It has therefore been a waste of time. There has also been terrible loss of life and the kind of destruction that we have seen in Bethlehem, which is an outrage. If such action were conducted against Muslim or Jewish holy places, it would be regarded as an outrage.

There has to be a choice for Israel. The Israeli regime regards that choice as being between the danger of its destruction—which has been an immensely serious concern ever since the state of Israel was set up in 1948—and the sterility of not being destroyed. There are alternatives; there is simply not a choice between the extremist Arab wish to eliminate the state of Israel and the belief of right-wing Israelis that it is their job to fight back, regardless of the effect both on the lives on innocent people and the world. If the Israelis are not going to look for a third way, my own view is that there is no justification for a Nobel peace prize winner like Shimon Peres humiliating himself by sitting in a Cabinet alongside the likes of Sharon and Zeevi, whose murder, of course, was abominable, but whose views were unspeakable; he wanted to chase all Arabs, by force if necessary, out of

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

Israel. The United States and Britain must therefore offer the Palestinians, whose approach has been equally inexcusable, and the Israelis a stark choice; either they make a meaningful peace and get on with it right away or they lose the aid and military assistance that the west is giving them.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) talked about Mr. Netanyahu. I cannot share the right hon. Gentleman's regard for him; the only thing that can be said for him is that he is not as bad as Sharon. People like Netanyahu and Sharon say, "Don't get at us, we're an independent country. We've a right to pursue our own policies." Okay, we should tell the Palestinians and Israelis, "Be independent if you want, but be completely independent of western economic and military aid." I suggest that we offer that choice, and I do so as a Jew and as somebody who has been a Zionist all his life, and remains a Zionist: as somebody who was brought up as a Zionist and has close ties to the state of Israel. I also do so as the first Front-Bench Member to support the establishment of a Palestinian state, which I still support.

I must tell my right hon. Friends, the American authorities, the Israelis and the Palestinians that we have lost too many opportunities for peace in the middle east; it is sad that this too has become an opportunity, but it is an opportunity nevertheless and we must not lose it.

3.9 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I agree with every word of the speech by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman); I also agree strongly with what my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) said. I shall not go over that ground, as I have only 10 minutes.

The Prime Minister deserves enormous credit for helping to put together the international coalition against terrorism after 11 September. He deserves even more praise, if the newspaper reports are to be believed, for having tried to dissuade the Americans from acting precipitately. This week he was right to narrow down the war aims and to make clear exactly what our objectives are, now that the air campaign is under way. However, I am concerned at one aspect of the Prime Minister's handling of the situation. The rhetoric from George Bush, such as

> "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists",

was understandable immediately after the crisis, although unhelpful. Some of the Prime Minister's rhetoric is most unhelpful. Indeed, it will make it more difficult to secure western objectives. If he persists with it, it could prejudice both United Kingdom and western foreign policy, and even our security.

I should like to make several suggestions to the Government on the conduct of the diplomacy and handling of Muslim opinion over the next few crucial weeks. At the heart of the west's strategy is a dilemma: while military activity in Afghanistan may succeed in eliminating al-Qaeda in an organised form, at the same time it may generate sympathies in parts of the Muslim world which could make terrorism more likely. Worse, it could destabilise Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and make it more difficult to protect western interests there. It could make a settlement in Palestine even more difficult to reach. That crisis has been the source of so much of the sympathy for terrorism, however misguided it is.

The truth is that we are not engaged in a war on terrorism. Inasmuch as the language of war is appropriate, the outcome will be decided by a battle for the hearts and minds of Muslim opinion. Are we confident that our action in Afghanistan, particularly if it becomes prolonged, will not create the conditions for more extremism? That is the heart of the matter.

The Prime Minister, among others, was right to urge the Americans not to succumb to the pressure of public opinion for early action. But public opinion now may be right to argue that if the intervention becomes too prolonged, it may not be in the west's long term interests. I should like briefly to suggest some ways to put in train several diplomatic initiatives to assuage Muslim concerns about our intentions and to give us a bigger window of opportunity for action.

First, we need to make it clear that we have no intention of establishing an indefinite and permanent military presence in Afghanistan, still less an occupation, and we need to say so. Secondly, we should be negotiating with Afghanistan's neighbours to secure agreement that once the terrorist networks are removed, there will be no interference by her neighbours or us in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Cambodia provides a precedent. We should say that loudly now. Thirdly, we need to set out in detail what we are prepared to do to assist the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan in terms of money and resources. We have not yet heard that package described accurately or with numbers. Fourthly, we should apply some more realism to an earlier stated objective of the Prime Minister, which was to create a "broadly based Government" in Afghanistan. By that I think we should mean only any government structure capable of expelling, and willing to expel, bin Laden and the terrorist networks. We do not mean that we are intending to construct a western style democracy in Afghanistan. Fifthly, we need to lead public opinion so that people grasp that when western leaders talk of an indefinite war against terrorism, they do not mean indefinite action in Afghanistan. That just worries public opinion at home and Muslim opinion abroad and at home. The purpose of the military action is, I hope, limited to closing down the terrorist networks harboured by the Taliban, as the Prime Minister has made clear. It is not the precursor to an endless deployment of military force against as yet unspecified threats. Nor is it our purpose to extend the war aims to Iraq.

The plain fact is that, ghastly though the prospect may be, terrorism is likely to remain with us, as is the war against drugs and crime. I fervently hope that at least the campaign against bin Laden and his groups can be won. I support the Government in their efforts to try to win it, although I realise that it will be difficult.

In the time that remains, I want to discuss my concerns about the Government's rhetoric. There is a growing contradiction between what the Prime Minister does and what he says. That contradiction, if sustained, could erode the credibility of British foreign policy. On the one hand, he has rightly played a crucial role in forming the coalition against terrorism, bringing together international society and drawing together all states in a coalition that rejects terrorism. On the other, he has called for a new international order.

The coalition that we are building is a coalition to uphold international legitimacy—the legitimacy that derives from the notion that only states have the right to use force in international society. Terrorists are revolutionaries—outlaws—in international society. That legitimacy is sustained by the principle that states should not interfere in other states' affairs. In that sense, the coalition that we are building is a coalition of the existing order.

We are forming a coalition against terrorism with states with whose human rights records we disagree and which, in some respects, we find repugnant, but it is a coalition of the current international order, not some putative one. But the trouble is that the Prime Minister's call for a new world order conflicts directly with that coalition building. In that new order, he has asserted the primacy of his and of western values. Of course I agree with him about those values, but he has suggested not just making a rhetorical case for his values, but intervening in other states.

The Prime Minister wants much greater intervention around the world to impose our notion of justice and freedom. He says that globalisation means that anyone's internal conflict may affect everybody and that that justifies interference, even military intervention. It is worth quoting exactly what he said at Brighton:

"This is a fight for freedom. And I want to make it a fight for justice too . . . justice to bring those same values of democracy and freedom to people around the world. And I mean freedom, not only in the narrow sense of personal liberty but in the broader sense of each individual having the economic and social freedom to develop their potential to the full . . . the starving, the wretched, the dispossessed, the ignorant, those living in wanton squalor, from the deserts of North Africa to the slums of Gaza, to the mountain ranges of Afghanistan: they are our cause."

In case we had not thoroughly got the message, he continued, "The kaleidoscope"—he means of the international order—

"has been shaken. The pieces are in flux . . . Before they [settle] let us reorder this world around us."

That new international order is to be an order based on our values, secured by western economic, diplomatic and, in some cases, military strength. The great danger of such talk is that, to the ears of leaders of many countries in the world and particularly to the very ears that the west has been bending in the name of the coalition against terrorism, that will sound very unappealing—even threatening to the stability of their societies.

We are saying, "Either adopt western values or we may be round to see you." We are saying that we carry sticks as well as carrots. Let me make my position clear: the west can and should be a huge force for good in the world. I share the Prime Minister's values, but if the west goes beyond persuasion, and acts of humanitarian intervention, and tries to reconstruct a new world order in its image, many countries in Africa, the middle east and elsewhere around the world that do not share our values will feel threatened. If we do that, we will be treading the path towards not a new international order, but a new international anarchy, for we have neither the military capacity nor the political will to make western values the values of the whole globe.

Now of all times, when we need to deploy military force in an effort to bring greater security to our citizens, is not the moment to shake up the kaleidoscope further. It is not the moment to frighten the leaders of other countries who do not share our values. Commenting on the Prime Minister's speeches, *The Economist* said:

"The only plausible explanation of Mr. Blair's planet transforming is that 'the poor man has let the war against terrorism go to his head.'"

Over the top perhaps, but I fervently hope that he puts away his dangerous messianic rhetoric.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes.

3.19 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie). I was fascinated by his speech and I will certainly re-read it tomorrow. It was well worth listening to.

In recent weeks, the Prime Minister has repeatedly told us that the war against Osama bin Laden and the Taliban is not about religion or Islam, but solely about terrorism. Such historical and theological ignorance does a grave disservice to us all.

Consider for a moment three recent and indisputable facts. The first is Mohammed Atta's last will and testament, in which he informed us that if he flew a plane into the twin towers, Allah would provide him with 72 virgins for the purpose of sexual congress in paradise. Secondly, shortly after the appalling atrocity on the twin towers had been committed, quite the nastiest and silliest response came from Islamic fanatics and evangelical American Christians. The Reverend Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson told us that the attack on the towers was God's vengeance on America, which had become a country of pagans, gays and lesbians, secular courts and secular schools, and of people who believe in civil liberties. For their part, fanatical Islamic clerics—some of them in the United Kingdom and some of them close to the area that I represent—expressed joy at the attacks. Thirdly, last Sunday, a group of murderous Muslims entered St. Dominic's church at Bahawalpur and killed 16 Christians—mostly women and children—and one Muslim guard.

More generally, the Islamic world seems to be in a state of denial. Our Prime Minister cannot confront the issue because, publicly at any rate, it does not suit him to do so. Denial, as I define it, consists of the failure of the people of the Islamic world to come to terms with modernity and to accept the true nature of what is going on. Denial is part of the deliberate and wrong-headed moves to separate Islam from modernity on the part of those ruling elites who govern theocratic and autocratic countries and, more dangerously, on the part of Muslim clerics around the globe, including some in Britain.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sedgemore: I am sorry, but I only have 10 minutes.

One result of that separatism is a refusal to engage in democracy, or to acknowledge human rights and rights for women in particular. One distinguished person who is in denial is Imran Khan, who on television last week refused to accept the evidence that Osama bin Laden is a terrorist, despite the fact—and ignoring everything about

[Mr. Sedgemore]

the acts against the two towers—that he must know that bin Laden issued a fatwa in 1998 calling for the killing of American civilians and that he recently had a video sent around the globe to incite Muslims to mass murder. If that is not terrorism, then the year that I spent studying the subject was clearly in vain. It is more likely, however, that it was Imran Khan's education at expensive schools in the United Kingdom that was in vain.

The reasons behind the separatist tendencies in modern Islamic thought are difficult to understand. I do not have the Koran at my bedside like the Prime Minister, but after a 30-year gap I am reading chunks of it again. Far from supporting separation, Islamic tradition holds that there have been 128,000 prophets—I will not list them all—including Moses and Jesus as well as Mohammed. Islamic tradition also holds that there have been 104 revealed books, the four most important of which are the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel and the Koran itself.

The desire for separateness on the part of many teachers of Islam seems to defy both the Islamic traditions and such coherence as the religion has. How can hatred be created out of such holy and common roots? Why has Islam produced so many theocratic and autocratic states? Is it the power and control of clerics rather than God, faith, prayer, fasting, charity and pilgrimage that hold the worldwide ummah together? How is it that the so-called purest Islamic state, Afghanistan, is also the poorest and the most despotic?

By refusing even to address those questions, President Bush and our Prime Minister are not only ignoring fundamental issues but allowing confusion to fester and spread. Yes, they are right to say that we must get bin Laden, destroy his networks of terrorism and bring down the Taliban who have succoured him. Yes, we need to look at the role of others in succouring terrorism, including the house of Saud, which spawned and took no action against the Saudi Arabians who make up the majority of the terrorists thus far directly implicated in the attack on the twin towers. Are we going to defend the house of Saud or support dissenters who might wish to bring it down?

War makes cowards of us all. Perhaps the Prime Minister is right to call on us to be resolute when things go wrong. However, doing so would be easier if we knew the endgame, and if there were more clarity about the political, military, diplomatic and humanitarian aims, as well as progress in the conduct of the war. The Prime Minister was probably wrong to suggest that a serious humanitarian programme could be run in parallel with the bombing. The impossibility of it may even be dawning on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development.

Ironically, the arrest of Osama bin Laden could ultimately be achieved only by a more judicial approach of a kind that President Bush and the Prime Minister have so far spurned. Today's heresies are often tomorrow's truths.

Sometimes—I say this in the friendliest spirit—the Prime Minister gives us the impression that the last place on earth he would go for advice is the Chamber of the House of Commons. He may not be listening, but I will say this. First, he should tell the Home Secretary that in the aftermath of 11 September it becomes more, not less, incumbent on us to protect our liberties and that detaining innocent people without trial for indefinite periods is not on. Measures to protect religions whose absurdities and hatreds are part of the problem rather than the solution are not acceptable.

Secondly, I believe that the Prime Minister should devote more of his personal attention to the problem of supplying and distributing humanitarian aid, and give more help to the Secretary of State for International Development—although she may not thank me for saying so.

Thirdly, the Prime Minister should stop being so damned preachy about the alleged moral superiority of this backward, fractious island of ours off the coast of north-west Europe, whose culture sometimes seems close to irreversible decline. He should realise that not everyone wants to be British, thank God.

Finally, my right hon. Friend should accept that the British people, not to mention Parliament, expect him and the allies to improve their performance significantly if Operation Enduring Freedom is to succeed. In that regard, those pathetic and autocratic Ministers who seek to blacken the characters of those who challenge the war aims by likening them to the appeasers of Hitler should, in my view, be sacked. If this is to be a fight for democracy, as I believe, we should begin by reinforcing our belief in democracy in this Chamber.

3.28 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I apologise for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge). A family medical emergency is keeping her away from the Chamber, although she greatly wishes that she could be present.

In the brief time available to me, I want to concentrate on the middle east. Before I do so, I have a number of observations about cluster bombs and the humanitarian effort. I accept that cluster bombs are not illegal in international law. I also accept that for some military purposes they are extremely effective. However, there is no disguising the revulsion with which they are regarded by many people in the United Kingdom. A Government anxious to maintain a domestic coalition of support would be wise to heed that expression of public opinion. And a Government anxious to maintain an international coalition of support would be wise to do the same.

I cannot believe that the success of the military action in Afghanistan stands or falls on the use of cluster bombs on targets in or near areas of civilian population. It may well be that, in arguing that the use of cluster bombs should be inhibited, one is responding to a political or humanitarian imperative but it is sometimes worth giving up a military capability where the benefits of the political advantage that would be created are so substantial as to outweigh any military advantage that might be discarded.

Let me come to the humanitarian element. I said on 16 October in the House, and it is worth repeating:

> "Our moral authority for military action will be severely undermined if we do not fulfil our moral obligation to provide humanitarian relief."—[*Official Report*, 16 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 1073.]

We must do that in practical ways. We should make a bargain with Pakistan and Iran to the effect that if they open their borders to allow unlimited access to refugees, the international coalition will pay all that is necessary to feed, clothe and house those who take refuge there.

We should continue to explore the possibility of safe corridors for the transport of humanitarian assistance. Leaving aside the military and political objective of the capture of Mazar-i-Sharif and its airport, we should accept that there is a humanitarian priority in the capture of that town owing to its potential contribution to the humanitarian effort and the access that it will give to Uzbekistan, from where aid could be provided by road.

I was much taken—as, I suspect, were many hon. Members—by the speech of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who is no longer in his place. He speaks on the middle east with rare authority and, as a member of the Jewish community, no doubt with a considerable amount of courage. He was right when he said that the Prime Minister was right to go to the middle east. On that rather uncomfortable visit, the Prime Minister must surely have learned that the difficulty of achieving a settlement in the middle east is equalled only by the urgency of doing so. That effort cannot be postponed. It must be commenced now. It should operate in parallel with the military action in Afghanistan, because no diplomatic task is more urgent for sustaining the coalition than a demonstration of wholehearted commitment on the part of the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States to endeavouring to achieve a settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Such an effort is required to provide an antidote to the well-founded scepticism demonstrated throughout the middle east, born of decades of disappointment, and, in the past decade, of disappointment of the promise offered after the Gulf war, which took form in the Madrid conference and later in the Oslo agreement.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I am subject, like everyone else, to the 10-minute limit. The hon. Lady may have some sympathy with my next point. Israel has an unequivocal legal right to peaceful existence within secure borders, free from attack or the threat of attack.

What I am about to say next may not please the hon. Lady. Among Palestinians, the scepticism to which I have referred is made all the more acute by the Israeli Government's continuing policy of the expansion of settlements. The Prime Minister says that the Palestinians are entitled to justice, land and a viable state, but how can that be if the policy of settlements is allowed to proceed unhindered? The settlements are illegal at international law. No one in the House denies it. Successive Foreign Secretaries have said so outside the House and at the Dispatch Box.

We assert the primacy of international law as the justification for our military action in Afghanistan. Is it any wonder that we have mountains to climb in persuading many in the middle east of the justice of our cause when they look round at the daily breach of that same law in the occupied territories?

May I suggest two immediate steps—two initiatives that the Government could take? First, we should call upon the Israeli Government, when Mr. Sharon comes to this country in a week or two's time, to freeze the settlements. There would be absolutely no prejudice to the security of Israel if that policy were adopted.

Secondly, we should say to Governments such as the Syrian Government, with whom the Prime Minister spent a rather uncomfortable period yesterday, "We call on you to give no support to any organisation which opposes by the use of the gun or the bullet a peaceful settlement in the middle east." No prejudice whatever would attach to those countries claiming to favour the Palestinian cause if they were to adopt such a policy.

It is overwhelmingly clear that there is a need to break the logjam. There is a need for courage. As I was reflecting before I began these few remarks, we have seen that courage in the middle east already: Begin, Sadat, Rabin, King Hussein, Mubarak. Some of them paid for their courage with their lives, but it has been demonstrated, on so many frustrating occasions, that there is the opportunity for progress, if only the circumstances are favourable and courage is available.

We need that courage again, but on this occasion, when there is a burden and an obligation on the United States in particular, there must be a sense of commitment that will ensure that the courage of those in the communities will be supported by a guarantee—if not in legal or military terms, at least in political terms—on any settlement that may be reached.

Mr. Sharon said that there was a risk that we might treat Israel like Czechoslovakia. If Czechoslovakia had had a patron of quite such power and influence and such financial capability as Israel has in the United States, I very much doubt that Czechoslovakia would have disappeared in 1938.

We have a huge opportunity to rise from the extraordinary circumstances of 11 September. If we raise expectation and do not fulfil it, things will be worse than they were before. We have a huge chance, but a huge obligation to go with it. Let us hope that we have the courage to make sure that we exercise both.

3.38 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I do not seek to patronise the many Members who have already spoken, but I have never heard so many thoughtful and well-researched speeches. Dangerous precedents are being created in the House. I do not propose to follow those speeches in either their preparation or their thoughtfulness.

I agreed with much that was said, although not with the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie), who criticised the Prime Minister for daring to have a vision. Frankly, the status quo is a bloody awful place. We are witnessing an awful thing and, given my right hon. Friend's knowledge of the first world war and the disaster of expecting people to return to the same slums that they had fought to eliminate, surely it is right that a conflict such as this should raise the vision of the participants. If at the end of this conflict we still have the same world as when we entered it, we shall perhaps have failed miserably.

The 11 September seems an age—many lifetimes—away. Much has changed during a short period. After the near universal sadness at the catastrophe there has been some peeling away of support, yet those who argue for homogeneity in the legislature ignore history. If we read the debates that were held in this place during the American war of independence, we find that they were riven by difference. That was true of debates on many 19th century wars—although some of those wars were

[Mr. Bruce George]

seen as too unimportant even to recall Parliament. However, most wars were epitomised by catastrophe and eventual victory, followed by major inquiries revealing the sources of the disasters, which were far worse than anything that I have observed in recent years.

In the first world war, the second world war, Suez, the Falklands, the Gulf, Bosnia, Kosovo, and even in the limited deployment to Sierra Leone, dissent did not reign supreme, but it existed. That is why ours is a democratic legislature. I cannot say that I agree with those who have dissented from what the Government are doing, because I believe that the Government and the American Government have behaved and acted correctly, with the support of international law, the endorsement of the United Nations Security Council and under the Washington treaty of 1949. The response has been proportionate and, despite the mistakes that have clearly been made, the Government deserve support. The fact that some people are not prepared to offer that support is regrettable, but it is inevitable and in no way to be condemned, and I would never do so.

This debate is well informed. Some hon. Members may not yet have seen the Library briefing paper that was produced this morning—the second edition of its report on Operation Enduring Freedom—and I invite my colleagues to read it very quickly.

The Prime Minister has tirelessly endeavoured to seek to sustain if not consensus, then substantial support in the House. We meet regularly, and an enormous amount of information is available to us—not the full amount. I would not want all the information because someone would be on his mobile phone to Pakistan pretty damn quickly and that would not necessarily be in the interests of our armed forces.

I understand that the Prime Minister is meeting the consultative assembly in Saudi Arabia, which probably has about as much power as we do, so I hope that he finds the experience useful. In fact, the Consultative Assembly in Kuwait has more power than we do, so perhaps we should seek advice on the way in which it operates.

Only time will tell whether the Prime Minister was well advised to go to Syria, but he certainly could not be accused of ducking a difficult fight. It must have been infinitely worse than the worst of all Prime Minister's Question Times, which he must now look forward to with some relish in the light of what he experienced yesterday. However, it must have been deeply galling to be lectured to by a state that the United States considers a terrorist state, and galling to be lectured to by someone in whose nation the traditions of democracy are at best shallow and recent—even that is not an adequate description.

For the Prime Minister to go to Israel—a country to which he has said some rather harsh words—shows how courageous he has been, but it will be an uphill task to convince many in the Arab world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) has said, many Muslims are in total denial. All the evidence has not been presented to us, but what has should be sufficient for most people to determine the source of the terrorist acts and that of potential terrorist acts.

When the United States operated on the principle of self-defence, it was clear that more terrorist acts were envisaged and that more would take place. If this is an attempt—I hope that it will be successful—to prevent such acts of terrorism from being perpetrated on anyone's territory, then that is clearly the objective. When people say that the objectives have not been presented, I wonder what television and radio programmes they have listened to, or participated in, because the Government have given ample expression to the goals of the United States and its supporters.

I do not regard what the Leader of the Opposition wrote yesterday as being substantial dissent; it was dissent on the margins of the argument. Frankly, the support that the Opposition have given to the Government in this conflict is rather greater than the support it ostensibly gave in the Kosovan crisis, which was initially all rhetoric and then almost all criticism. I support and applaud what the Leader of the Opposition is seeking to do and, generally speaking, has done.

It is critical that we sustain, if not consensus, which is not possible, at least substantial support. Some people will read *Hansard*. There will be people watching this debate elsewhere than in the Public Gallery and looking to see whether there is a vote this evening. Although I repeat that people have the right to go into a different Lobby from the overwhelming majority of Members of Parliament, people will notice and draw conclusions that hon. Members who dissent from the Government's view may not wish them to draw.

I have the privilege of representing a large number of Muslims: Pakistanis, Kashmiris who are Pakistanis, Indians and Bangladeshis. The overwhelming majority are—I will not say supporting what the Government are doing—keeping their heads down, which is sensible because race relations are in some form of balance at the moment, if not stability. I fear that things could happen that could be damaging and set race relations back for many years, if not a generation.

I am not trying to be apocalyptic. People will dissent. People can march, write to their Members of Parliament and talk among themselves, but I hope that the elders, if they have any influence—I suspect that it is declining, just like that of the Whips in this place—will express their views to younger members who are subject to influence. Going off and fighting a war against fellow Brits will not earn the respect or enthusiasm of the rest of the population. If they come back limbless, not everyone will be happy if they claim industrial injury benefit. They have a choice to make. I would not expect them to be so incorporated in British society that they are not able to wear any clothes they wish to wear and follow any religion they wish to follow, but there are some obligations, and I think that the overwhelming majority of the Muslim population are more than aware of that.

There are two elements to what Parliament is doing. One is what we are doing here in plenary, making powerful speeches, but more important is what is being done, or should be being done, in Select Committee. The Select Committee on Defence, which I am proud at long last to chair, is doing a lot.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The right hon. Gentleman's time is up.

3.47 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am delighted to follow the Chairman of my Committee, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). He has been a

distinguished member of the Defence Committee for many years. I agree with what he said about a number of contributions this afternoon, particularly those of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). However, I hope that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch has a quick getaway car available because I have no doubt that his Chief Whip will want to have words with him ere long.

I was slightly disappointed by the attitude of the Secretary of State for Defence. It seemed from what he said that, unless we utter platitudinous remarks or wholehearted support for the Government, we are seeking to undermine the Government's stand in this extremely difficult and important conflict. The thought-provoking contributions by a number of hon. Members have shown that it is possible to support the Government, but nevertheless to question their overall stance. We have a duty to do so. Our constituents may be required as members of Her Majesty's armed forces to go into battle on our behalf. It is entirely right and proper that we should be able to call the Government to account and not be accused of seeking to undermine their efforts.

I do support the Government in what they are trying to do. I do support the Prime Minister. As the right hon. Member for Walsall, South has made clear, so does my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. We on the Conservative Benches support the Government. However, there are difficulties.

The Government face serious dilemmas in achieving the military objectives. The events of 11 September were not timed to best advantage from the point of view of prosecuting the perpetrators who reside in Afghanistan. Ramadan and the approaching winter present difficulties. I used to work for a bank called European Arab bank, so I have experience of the Arab world. As we are seeking to build, and need to build, a coalition with the Arabs, we need to be sensitive to their religion, just as I wish that they were as sensitive to my religion as we are encouraged by them to be towards theirs.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton was absolutely right. We need to be able to prosecute the military campaign to its logical conclusion, but we must understand the sensitivities of the Arab world. It is important, if we are to maintain not only the coalition but the support of public opinion in the United Kingdom, that the momentum be maintained. If people feel that this is being dragged out while we sit here, at risk in our own country, not taking any real action to bring the perpetrators to book, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain support.

As the Secretary of State said, as far as we can determine, the al-Qaeda network has been largely flattened and we are now going against the Taliban ground forces. There will come a time when we have eliminated all their military assets and will be left with the need to remove the Taliban Government. The Prime Minister said unequivocally in the Welsh Assembly that it was the Government's intention to remove the Taliban regime, and I hope that the Minister will confirm that.

We must be under no illusions, however: when we remove the Taliban regime there will have to be something else in its place, and that something will not be achieved by means of universal suffrage in Afghanistan. It will have to be imposed. To achieve that will require the co-operation of a wide range of people, which is no mean undertaking. We should be mindful of the difficulties that the Government and the coalition partners will face in achieving the objective so forcefully declared by the Prime Minister.

We run the risk of engaging our troops in a lengthy battle to maintain in place whatever Government we impose in Kabul. Those are the risks that I perceive. It may be that Ministers have the answers and can further enlighten the House.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): There is no suggestion of the coalition imposing a Government in Afghanistan. The people would never accept an externally imposed Government. Ambassador Brahimi, on behalf of Kofi Annan, is consulting all the different ethnic groups and leaders who do not support the Taliban—that is, most of the people in Afghanistan—to get a transitional Government with the approval of the bulk of the people there.

Mr. Howarth: I am partly reassured by the Secretary of State's intervention, but unless she intends to have universal suffrage in Afghanistan, it will be a form of imposition. The coalition forces are going to change the Government there, and however it is brought about there will be some form of imposed Government. Clearly, there are risks. We could end up with British and American troops supporting the universally approved Government of Afghanistan and being shot at by both sides.

My next concern is the defence of the homeland. Much reference has been made to the attitude of Muslims in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. I reiterate that we all believe that this is not a war against Islam. However, it is not a war against international terrorism as such. It is a specific conflict against a specific threat and a specific enemy—Islamic fundamentalist extremists. Unless we accept that, we are, to an extent, deluding ourselves.

I welcome the fact that clerics in Luton, in particular, have denounced those young men who wish to go to fight against our troops who are seeking to rid the people of Afghanistan of the terrorists and the Taliban. If those young men return to the United Kingdom, they should be charged with treason under the Treason Act 1351 or any other measure that is to hand. One cannot enjoy the privileges of being a citizen of this country and a subject of Her Majesty if one goes out to shoot Her Majesty's armed forces who are seeking to uphold the security of the British people and to defend British interests.

I understand that leading Muslim clerics have a divided loyalty. They are conscientious Muslims and they owe an allegiance in that regard. However, they are also subjects of Her Majesty and they must ensure that that is their No. 1 loyalty. They must also proclaim that message to their followers.

I wish to pay a short tribute to the mayor of Rushmoor in my constituency. Charles Choudhary is a good Conservative councillor who comes from Kashmir. He has been an outstanding member of the Muslim community and an outstanding civic leader. When he held a civic service in Aldershot, he held it at the Royal Garrison church. That was a fine move on his part to demonstrate the need for reconciliation.

[Mr. Howarth]

The Government face great dilemmas as we stand poised to risk engaging our troops in ground action. Although the Government have our overwhelming support, they must be mindful that, when we ask questions or even have the temerity to criticise, we do so only in the spirit of trying to be helpful. We do not wish to undermine their resolve to defeat this insidious and outrageous form of terrorism.

3.57 pm

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): It is almost four weeks since the United States and its allies commenced military action in Afghanistan, and the initial concern among Members on both sides of the House was that the United States' response would be indiscriminate. That has not been the case. Although there has been inexcusable imprecision in some of the bombing, the response, in the main, has been proportionate and measured. As far as I am aware, it has been in accordance with international law and the resolutions of the United Nations.

Like most wars, one day this war will end. I hope that that will be sooner rather than later, but in the meantime we are dealing with a wide and perhaps rather shaky coalition. I hope that members of the coalition, including the Arab states, will sit down somewhere to try to analyse slowly and painfully the background that led to the horrors of 11 September.

There is no need to waste time trying to discover why the leaders of al-Qaeda plotted their evil deeds or why the perpetrators carried them out. They were evil deeds carried out by evil men, and there is no justification or excuse for them. Terrorist groups, however, are like armies: they need foot soldiers and those soldiers need to be recruited. Therefore, we should at least try to find out why so many young men apparently wish to march behind the flag of such a disruptive, nihilistic and, ultimately, doomed project.

Such a meeting is probably a forlorn hope, but if we ever hold one, western countries should concede at the outset that among the leaders of Islam there is a deep fear that western capitalism—if I may so describe it—worships no God but materialism and that it will destroy their religion, faith and communities. As they see it, global capitalism is already destroying Christianity in the west. They perceive a western society without religion and without morality, in which family life is disintegrating and law and order is collapsing. Perhaps they see only what they want to see; perhaps they want to see only the bad and not the good. However, I do not think that we can say honestly that their fears can be dismissed as being entirely without foundation.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has considerable knowledge of the middle east and I cannot speak about it with the same authority. Sadly, the conflict in the middle east must be a powerful recruiting sergeant for the foot soldiers of terrorism.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Denzil Davies: No. I am sorry, but I do not have the time to do so.

The United States is perceived as the great Satan. There is a rather simplistic conviction, in my view, that if the United States were to withdraw its support from Israel the conflict in the middle east would end. I do not believe that the United States or the European states could withdraw from that part of the world—the historical, cultural and religious pressures are probably too great.

It is fair to say that previous United States Presidents—President Carter some time ago, and President Clinton—worked hard to try to establish some form of even-handed settlement in the middle east. Mr. bin Laden and his associates were not and are not concerned about that. Nevertheless, a just, durable and even-handed peace in the middle east would be a major impediment for the recruiting agents of terrorism.

If I dare mention it, there is religion. I believe that all great religions must try to evolve and adapt to meet changing times and changing circumstances. The trick is to do so without destroying core beliefs and values. Some would argue that Christianity has almost adapted and evolved itself out of existence, but if religions do not adapt and evolve they wither and die.

Some would assert that, in what I might call the evolution stakes, Christianity has had a number of advantages over some of the other great religions purely because of the time and the place from which it came. It had to struggle at birth with Greek history, Greek culture and Greek philosophy. That may have led to compromises and different attitudes.

Christianity has two holy books, and the second is very different in essence and in nature from the first. From an early time its books have been translated, probably into more languages than the holy books of most other religions. Some would say that translation itself becomes an act of adaptation as the translator tries to struggle with the different concepts of the different countries whose language he or she is seeking to use.

Some would say that those advantages helped Christianity to try to adapt. Followers of Islam have said to me, or would say, that many do not accept that the factors to which I have referred are advantages. Even if they did accept that there have been advantages, I think that they would rightly and legitimately point out that despite the so-called advantages the most terrible atrocities have been carried out in the name of Christianity, and by supposedly Christian countries. Nevertheless, I think that, objectively, it is fair to say that over the years the factors that I have mentioned, and possibly others, have gradually ameliorated Christian intolerance and, in some instances, Christian fanaticism.

If the meeting that I described is still in existence, and if the chairman has not been thrown out of the window, I might finally mention democracy. Is it a coincidence that almost all the Arab member states of the somewhat loose and shaky coalition have authoritarian, if I might use a fairly benign word, and not democratic Governments? If countries in the middle east could move towards not necessarily a western form of democracy but some form of democratic representation, they would provide young men and, probably more importantly, young women with a diversity of outlets for their energies, idealism and skills. Some countries, including Bahrain, are already trying to move towards some form of representative democracy. Again, such an outcome would be one of the best bulwarks against the recruiting agents of terrorism. I do

not know whether the United States would be comfortable with a democratic Saudi Arabia or whether the west would be prepared to accept an elected Islamic fundamentalist middle eastern state. The transition to democracy might be very shaky and difficult, but in the longer term everybody would still agree that a movement towards democracy in those countries would create more stability and make for more stable change.

Finally, military action is, alas, necessary to defeat the terrorism of 11 September, but it will not be sufficient in itself. Somehow, somewhere, the members of the coalition must get together to exchange views and ideas and to give and take criticism. No country, community or religion has a monopoly on wisdom. I believe that we need the common wisdom of humanity to create the conditions that are necessary to try to ensure that 11 September never happens again.

4.6 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I, first, make it plain that Plaid Cymru, the party of Wales, and the Scottish National party condemn utterly international terrorism and agree entirely with the aim of the international coalition to bring bin Laden to justice? Obviously, no one could ever allow the events of 11 September to pass without some action.

Some three weeks ago, mine was the first political party to call for a stop to the bombing of Afghanistan. A few hon. Members from other parties joined our cause of stopping the bombardment that was putting the lives of innocent civilians at risk. We were then described as appeasers. Today, it seems that the situation has changed. It is now apparently right, or at least legitimate, that we should hold that view. There seems also to have been a change of opinion outside Government. A poll in yesterday's edition of *The Guardian* showed that 54 per cent. of those questioned wanted the bombing to be stopped on humanitarian grounds. One wonders whether the change of the Government view is coincidental with that poll.

At the outset of the crisis, the British and United States Governments stated that there was a need for military, diplomatic and humanitarian action. Unfortunately, it seems to many of us that action on the military front has at times been indiscriminate and is becoming more so, and that the humanitarian front is completely ineffective. The military objectives for the campaign have been rather vague, perhaps of necessity, and the tactics used have sometimes been questionable. Abdul Haq, the former mujaheddin commander who was recently murdered, said not long ago in *The Scotsman:*

> "Before the attacks started, the Taleban's people were very nervous, and their support in the population was very low. Everyone was afraid. But once the bombing started, people began to say, Well, it's not so bad. We have known worse. We can stand it."

A few days after the first bomb was dropped on Afghanistan, an American military general was reported as saying:

> "Afghanistan is not target rich at this moment in time".

Yet the bombing continues at an increased rate. One has to ask why. In the article to which I have already referred, Haq also said:

> "The best thing would be for the US to work for a united political solution involving all the Afghan groups. Otherwise, there will be an encouragement of deep divisions between different groups, backed by different countries and affecting the whole region."

I think that that is fairly obvious by now, but it seems that there has been a switch at least in emphasis and objective. Although the objectives have always been vague, the ultimate goal is, rightly, to get rid of Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network. It seems that the emphasis has moved and is now on overthrowing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. We accept that there is a strong link between the Taliban and Osama bin Laden, but the Taliban are not the major threat: they are part of the terrorist network.

It was reported in the press at the beginning of the week that the American Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, admitted that looking for bin Laden was

> "like looking for a needle in a haystack",

and that we will be lucky to catch him. Does not that lead us to question exactly what is being targeted in Afghanistan?

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Llwyd: I am sorry, I have no time.

Some people have referred to a second Vietnam, and I do not know whether that is helpful.

Mr. Robathan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you clarify whether, if a speaker takes an intervention, that time is added on?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is a discretionary power, and it has been used in this debate.

Mr. Llwyd: I am grateful for that, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that many hon. Members want to take part in the debate.

By using such terminology, we endorse the volatile climate throughout the western world that bin Laden is trying to create, and may help him to achieve his objectives of making us more aggressive towards nations that we do not understand, putting doubts in people's minds and inciting racial hatred among the paranoid and xenophobic minorities in our communities.

Osama bin Laden has succeeded in portraying the action as a war of faith. I think that is wrong, but he is apparently succeeding in that view. Hitherto, the west has not been successful in convincing people that this is a conflict with terrorism. By definition, terrorism is elusive: it has no permanent geographic base, no permanent leadership, not all terrorist groups have the same reason for being and the definition of terrorism is not clear.

Osama bin Laden is and must remain the target of any military action, and if further action is to be taken it must be properly targeted at destroying the al-Qaeda network, with bin Laden as its leader. He is the personification of this terrorism, but he is elusive, and finding him will be very difficult. He and the al-Qaeda network must be made to pay for the attacks on 11 September, not the innocent civilians of Afghanistan, who are certainly not the aggressors.

As reported in *The Times* last week and confirmed today, cluster bombs are being used. One civilian a week is killed in Kosovo and one a month in Laos—30 years after they were dropped on the Ho Chi Minh trail. Those bombs are designed to massacre anything within 100 ft.

[Mr. Llwyd]

I endorse the eloquent comments of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) on cluster bombs. Those so-called dumb bombs do not automatically detonate. They are a threat to civilians in Afghanistan, and will remain a threat for many years to come. As for the semantic debate about whether they are land mines, 10 per cent. of the bomblets do not detonate on impact. About 15 per bomb do not explode, and the failure rate of cluster bombs reaching their targets can be as high as 50 per cent. They are pretty indiscriminate. They are bright yellow, so they attract children, who pick them up with horrific consequences. By using those weapons, we are definitely putting at risk the lives of thousands of people, not just now but in the future. We are unleashing weapons over Afghanistan that will blight communities for a long time to come.

During last week's statement, the Secretary of State for International Development said that she would come back to me on the subject of cluster bombs. I am sure that she will refer to them when she winds up the debate. We must question whether such weapons are appropriate in the action being taken in Afghanistan. If military action is to be targeted as we expect, the use of such indiscriminate weapons cannot be justified.

According to *The Times* last week, United Nations mine clearing officials in Pakistan have been begging the United States Government for ordnance details, flight paths and bomb footprints to help them to rescue people following an attack on the village of Shaker Qala, which was full of bright yellow bomblets.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mary Robinson, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Islamic Relief, ActionAid, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and Tearfund have all called for the bombing to be stopped. They noted that from the outset there has been a huge humanitarian problem, which is getting worse.

Pressures are mounting. With the onset of winter, harsh weather conditions and snow there is thought to be about a fortnight left to deliver the aid to where it should be. The World Food Programme has estimated that it needs $700 million in aid for the next six months alone, and we know that much more investment will be needed in the long run to rebuild Afghanistan. That view is also shared by Islamic Relief.

Kofi Annan has called the crisis in Afghanistan the worst humanitarian crisis in the world at the moment. My party, Plaid Cymru, and the Scottish National party reiterate their calls for the Government to stop the bombing and to refrain from allowing the use of cluster bombs and Gator mines.

I hope that the Government will publish a strategy for the delivery of humanitarian aid as soon as possible. The Secretary of State for International Development confirmed the other day that she would do so. A total of 100,000 Afghan children are in danger of dying during the winter. The scale of the unfolding tragedy, exacerbated by the imminent onset of winter, requires the international community and the authorities in Afghanistan to place humanitarian needs at the centre of all plans and activities to resolve the wider crisis. Failure to do so will be to sit back and allow one of the worst catastrophes in human history. It will appear to some to be a ghastly and grotesque Old Testament reply to the atrocities of 11 September.

4.16 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) has done the House a great service by bringing to its attention the moving article in *The Scotsman* by the late Abdul Haq. I commend it to Ministers. It was written only a short time before he was brutally murdered. He made a powerful plea for an end to the bombing.

I have one observation and one question for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. I commend her for sitting here throughout the debate. It is said time and again that bombing was a success in the former Yugoslavia and that it brought down Mr. Milosevic. That is twisted history. It was not bombing that brought down Milosevic; in fact, it strengthened him. Milosevic was brought to his knees because the rug was pulled from under him by the Russian high command in Moscow. It was the withdrawal of Russian support that brought about the current situation in former Yugoslavia, which is by no means satisfactory—ask the Macedonians.

I want to ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about Iran. She has taken an interest in the refugee problem in eastern Iran. There are 2 million refugees in the area of Mashhad and eastern Iran. The Iranian Government have complained bitterly and understandably that 3,000 of their customs officers have been murdered by drug-running elements related to the Taliban. The Shia in Iran have no time for the Taliban—they greatly dislike them. At the same time, they tell the west, time and again, "For heaven's sake, stop the bombing because it strengthens rather than weakens the Taliban." People who might have imploded the Taliban—

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Iranian Government dislike the Taliban regime greatly because they persecute the Shia within Afghanistan. I am not aware, however, that they have called for an end to the bombing. They have criticised the injuries to civilians and the loss of the Red Cross warehouse, but they want the Taliban regime to be overthrown.

Mr. Dalyell: I have been active about Iran because I went there four years ago. Last Monday, I was invited by the Iranian ambassador in London to meet him alone. I imagine that he was speaking for the Iranian Government and the Iranian authorities—he is an extremely intelligent senior diplomat—and he was against the bombings. A matter of fact such as that can be checked—

Clare Short: I will do so.

Mr. Dalyell: I hope so, because I would like an answer.

I think that more attention should be paid to guidance from the Iranian Government. There are between 80 million and 90 million Iranians on the borders, and I think that their opinions should be listened to.

4.20 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): No one who has been following recent events in Afghanistan can have failed to be moved by the scenes of utter destruction and human misery there. Poverty and illiteracy in Afghanistan are not new, but unquestionably have been exacerbated by those recent events.

It may suit some commentators to suggest that the condition of Afghanistan is a result of the present Taliban regime, but that is not entirely true. We must recognise that the west, in abandoning Afghanistan in the period following the end of the Soviet occupation, in a real sense gave rise to—or at least contributed to—the problems we now face.

The defeat and withdrawal of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent washing of hands by America and the United Kingdom, left a power vacuum—a vacuum filled by many members of what is now the Northern Alliance. We are all fully cognisant of what happened then. The ensuing civil war was bloody, and there were faults on all sides. People turned to the Taliban in desperation, as a last hope—as a group that could stop the bloodshed and rebuild a country riven by war.

The problem is that the Taliban, at least the worst parts of it, allowed rogue elements to operate freely. In the absence of western influence, bin Laden and al-Qaeda were allowed to flourish under their protection. And it was not only al-Qaeda; I have recently heard bin Laden described as a sort of venture capitalist of terrorism, and if we consider the groups with which al-Qaeda or bin Laden himself has links we begin to see the scale of the problem.

I am thinking of groups such as Abu Sayyaf in the southern Philippines, and Al Gama'i al-Islamiyya, whose former senior member, Rifa'i Taha Musa, appeared on a video with bin Laden last year threatening retaliation against the United States. Then there is Harakat al-Mujahidin, whose new leader, Farooq Kashmiri, has been linked to bin Laden and who allegedly operates training camps in eastern Afghanistan. There is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, another organisation with militant bases in Afghanistan; and there is one of the closest known associates of al-Qaeda, Al Jihad, the Egyptian Islamic group whose original jihad was responsible for the 1981 assassination of President Sadat.

Again and again, we see the same countries cropping up—countries suspected of harbouring, nurturing or turning a blind eye to such terrorist organisations. Syria, Iran, Libya, Iraq and even Saudi Arabia: the list is all too familiar, and may make uncomfortable reading. Those countries, however, now have an opportunity to forge new relationships and alliances in the campaign against terrorism, and the Prime Minister is surely right to try to bring them into the fold. Some such alliances may well be long-lasting, and could change the international scene significantly.

What I am endeavouring to illustrate is that the tentacles spreading out from bin Laden—the many-headed Hydra, as he has been described—are myriad. That is why removing him and al-Qaeda must be a priority.

The Prime Minister is on record as saying that the eradication of the Taliban regime is a legitimate objective; the Defence Secretary reconfirmed that this afternoon, and was right to do so. However, with what does he envisage replacing the Taliban? There are moderate elements in the Taliban—Taliban for reasons of expediency—that will have a useful role to play in any future Government of that country. I know that that was the view of the late commander Abdul Haq, of whom we have already heard this afternoon. His execution by the Taliban was a real loss. The west was afforded the opportunity to support Abdul Haq, who was pressing a policy that, had it worked, would have resulted in a power-sharing Government in Kabul made up of all elements ranging from the Northern Alliance to former Taliban members and, of course, to the Pashtuns, under the former king.

Now, because of Abdul Haq's death, the situation is more complicated. It is surely right that the coalition has effectively halted the Northern Alliance from advancing on Kabul alone, but we need to know what is planned, particularly with winter approaching. Members who have soldiers based in their constituencies—there can be few of us without a strong local military connection, such as in my constituency where we have a Royal Marines training camp at Lympstone—including my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), wish to know what the clear aims and objectives are before the troops go in.

I agree with those who say that that will be a long process, but that does not mean that the aims cannot be clear from the outset. Unfortunately, there is a creeping feeling that, having started bombing, the Americans do not know what to do next. They cannot entirely be blamed as they are in something of a predicament, but the bombing cannot continue indefinitely. There is growing evidence that it is already hardening moderate Afghan opinion against the coalition. Domestically, we are beginning to hear the traditional muttering of Labour Members expressing discontent about the bombing; not far beneath the veneer of new Labour beats the heart of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and unilateralism.

We are therefore calling for clarification—not for operationally sensitive information, obviously—of what we hope to achieve before we commit British ground troops. The alliances that we make now are critical and will be the key to the post-Taliban Afghanistan. We cannot expect to rid the world of terrorism in one go; that is the work of decades. Indeed, it is the first real challenge of the 21st century. However, we can make a start, and we must do so in post-Taliban Afghanistan, a country which we must not abandon again. We must show the Afghan people this time that there is an alternative way and eventually encourage all those displaced Afghans in Pakistan, Iran and elsewhere to return home. We must help to rebuild the infrastructure of that country.

It is encouraging that the United Nations Special Representative Mr. Brahimi and President Musharraf of Pakistan agreed on Tuesday that the unity of Afghanistan and its territorial integrity must be preserved. There have been calls, not least from Government Members last week and from the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) this afternoon, for women to be included in any new Government. I remind the House that we are talking about a backward Muslim country; we cannot insist on imposing our own liberal views on it, however right we deem them to be.

Mr. Kaufman *rose—*

Mr. Swire: May I continue? I am just winding up my speech.

Of course, the rights of women must be respected in a post-Taliban Afghanistan, and that can come through education and organisations such as Learning for Life, a United Kingdom-registered charity which started educating mainly Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the early

[Mr. Swire]

1990s. Learning for Life has been working closely with Pakistan's national rural support programme and helps to run over 160 schools in Pakistan, bringing primary schooling to young girls otherwise denied even a rudimentary education. Organisations like that, with their unparalleled experience, can play a major part in helping to emancipate women in tomorrow's Afghanistan.

Our challenge in a post-war Afghanistan is to help bring that country and its inhabitants, regardless of gender or ethnic background, into the 21st century. If we succeed, we can make Afghanistan a no-go area for terrorists in future.

4.30 pm

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath): I shall talk about the impact of the events of 11 September on British Muslims. Like the Secretary of State, more than 40 per cent. of my constituents are British Muslims.

I wish to make it clear from the start that I support the actions of the international coalition. I do not say that with any joy. I do not like our country being involved in a war. But, I regret to say, there is no alternative. International terrorism is a threat to us all and if we do not combat it, it will kill us.

The overwhelming majority of British Muslims unreservedly condemn the atrocities of 11 September, not least because nearly 300 Muslims were killed. My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) gave us his opinion of his constituents' attitude and he described his Muslim constituents as keeping their heads down. He is right. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) described them as being in denial, but I am not sure about that. My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South has the correct interpretation. The vast majority of Muslims are keeping their heads down because they fear the consequences for race relations. Unfortunately, now is a time when the vast majority of moderate Muslims need to stand up and be counted. They have to reclaim their religion, which has been hijacked by small fanatical groups, who have contorted and twisted the teachings of Islam.

All of us who represent multicultural communities know stories about a minority of clerics who preach fire and brimstone versions of the Koran at Friday prayers. The vast majority of Muslims know that those contorted versions are untrue. Unfortunately, until now, they have tended to opt for the quiet life. Rather than confront, cause a row or have an argument, they have said that such clerics are talking nonsense and thought that if they ignore them, the clerics will go away. Sadly, that option no longer exists.

These fire and brimstone sermons preached by some unscrupulous clerics have had a huge effect on a number of impressionable young Muslims. Because the older members of the community have chosen not to confront those who twist and contort the Koran, some impressionable young ones have believed that what is being said represents what the Koran says. Those of us who represent multicultural constituencies all know that what I am saying is, regrettably, true.

The option no longer exists for the overwhelming majority of Muslims to keep their heads down. They must stand up and reclaim their religion. They must confront those people who, in my judgment, have hijacked it. If they do not, the great danger is that the vast majority of the non-Muslim population will judge the entire Muslim population and the entire Muslim community by the actions of the fanatics who carried out the outrages of 11 September.

I want to make one more point. I have given my opinion on how the Muslim community has to reclaim its religion and not allow it to be hijacked. However, there are international issues that are of great concern to the Muslim community in this country. There is no relationship between the atrocities of 11 September and what I am about to say, but we must recognise that Palestine and Kashmir are crucial to the British Muslim community.

What is more, when we are discussing Palestine and Kashmir, we are discussing just causes. The right of self-determination for the Kashmiri people is a just cause. The right of the Palestinian people to have their own state, as our Prime Minister recently said, is also a just cause. Unless those international issues are addressed by the international community, they will continue to fester and to be a breeding ground for terrorists who want to use them for carrying out the activities that resulted in the atrocities of 11 September.

4.37 pm

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Like the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George)—*[Interruption.]* I am afraid that I cannot help having a bad cold. All that was available a few moments ago, at the last minute, was a bit of Members' toilet roll. I apologise for that humorous interruption, particularly to the Secretary of State.

I return to the right hon. Member for Walsall, South, which is where I started. He referred to the quality of the speeches and the fact that a common thread has crisscrossed the House today in appreciation of the situation that this country faces. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) described the experience of listening to a former Israeli Prime Minister and talking to someone who had lived with terrorism each day. We would not have to go far from this building while remaining in the United Kingdom to talk to close on 2 million people who have lived with the trauma of terrorism each day for 30 years. Many Members of the House and of the other place have first-hand experience of the trauma of terrorism as it affected their lives and their constituents.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) spoke for a lot of people from the Jewish community in this country and many, many others when he talked with great sincerity and great depth about the truisms that apply to the situation in Israel and Palestine, and the clamour in the mind of any just-thinking person for a Palestinian homeland. Even if that were accomplished tomorrow, the likes of bin Laden and al-Qaeda, and for that matter the regime in Afghanistan, would not go away, nor would the acts of terrorism stop.

There are words in the English language that can accurately describe how people must feel about what happened on 11 September, but the events defy description for most reasonable people. The people who perpetrated those acts were evil. They did not do it for religious reasons. They did it out of sheer evil and because it was a way to get what they wanted, which was to impose their will on other people.

The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) asked who was to blame. The one thing that is certain is that the 6,000 people who died in New York were blameless. They did not play any part in the cause of their deaths. They did not incite an act of such vicious terrorism.

The Prime Minister has been right to restate the aims and to say why we are in the coalition fighting this battle. The title of today's debate is the "Coalition Against International Terrorism" and I hope that the fight does not begin and end in Afghanistan. This war must surely go way beyond the bounds of the present problem. We need some commitment and vision from our Government. They must explain where they believe we are going in the campaign against world terrorism. Surely it will not end with the capture or death of bin Laden. It will not end when the Taliban cease to rule Afghanistan. It will not end just by bombing the training bases there out of existence. It goes much further than that.

As a nation, we are surely adult enough to know that in any conflict or war it will be impossible to avoid the suffering of innocent people. No military commander engaged in the coalition's effort against terrorism ever set out to harm or bomb innocent people. Mistakes happen. The authorities in Afghanistan have sited sensitive military equipment and even their own bases close to vulnerable civilians. They have done so deliberately to incite the sort of press coverage that we have seen in the past 10 days.

The Prime Minister has said on a number of occasions that once we start this war we must ensure that we are able to finish it. In the past month, many hon. Members have insisted on knowing the endgame. No one who has given what has gone on in the past 50 years any thought can believe that the Government can come up with a magic remedy and explain to the House today what the endgame really is. That would be impossible.

In the past three weeks, not a day has gone by when I have not received at least a couple of letters from constituents who are rightly concerned about the humanitarian situation. Many of those people were writing to me about the plight of the people of Afghanistan before the bombing started. Where was the concern of the Afghan Government for what was happening? Where was the help from the Saudis, Kuwaitis and the Gulf states for the 25 per cent. of all children who died in Afghanistan before reaching the age of five? Most of the aid was generated in the United States, the United Kingdom and European Union states.

The Americans are not fighting Islam and it is a myth to suggest that they are. Every time hon. Members mention Islam in the same breath as bin Laden, they give credence to the suggestion that this fight is based on religious grounds. It is not; it is a fight against evil and against those who will kill people without thinking and will do so again and again.

Of course we should respect the rights of Muslims and their religious festivals. Ramadan is an important festival. The terrorists will not recognise it, however, and when it has suited them, Arab states have chosen not to recognise it as they waged war either on each other or against the state of Israel, as many hon. Members have said. We have to be realistic. A month's respite from the activities of the coalition will allow the Afghan forces of evil and others to re-arm, re-equip and re-establish themselves in other locations.

We must naturally respect the Muslim faith, but this is not a battle against Muslims. It is a battle against evil people who continue to perpetrate crimes and are planning crimes now, probably even against this very building. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) spoke of the need for the Muslim people whom he represents to stand up and be counted. I agree entirely. Many have done so and continue to do so. Many of the young Muslims whom I represent have made it clear that they distance themselves from what has gone on. They are proud to be associated with this country and want to continue to be part of the multicultural cocktail of which we are so proud. They should not be tarred with the awful brush of the evil perpetrators of crime. We should distance ourselves from justifying the likes of bin Laden and his cronies by linking them with the word of the Islamic faith—the Koran—or with Muslim rights.

Bin Laden is not winning the propaganda battle, or if he is, it is only among the cronies who support his evilness. I do not meet people who want to see replicas of the atrocities of 11 September. No one I have spoken to, who has written to me or criticised what I have said publicly has said that they were pleased at what happened or would like to see it repeated. The propaganda battle that we must win is about doing this for the right reason—to rid the world of people who will take others' lives without a care in the world.

We must do all we can to help the countries involved, not just during this crisis and for a few months afterwards, but for as long as it takes. The hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) spoke about rebuilding the infrastructure of Afghanistan. It is hard to imagine what that means in a country like Afghanistan. How do we put something back together that has taken 20-odd years to destroy? I went to Grozny—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

4.47 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), I hope that the Government will listen to what I have to say. I know something about the Islamic world and have spent the best part of 10 years warning in this Chamber about the rising tide, the rising radicalism and the Islamicisation of the Muslim world and the terrible clash that would result. My warnings were not much listened to before; I hope that after 11 September they are being listened to more.

Let me respond to a number of difficult and troublesome comments made during the debate. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) should not ask British Muslims to choose between Her Majesty and their religion, for they will not do it. They will put nothing in front of their religion. They will not put Her Majesty in front of their religion any more than I would put Her Majesty in front of mine. It is an unrealistic and unfair demand.

I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who has left the Chamber, that no one in this country should be told to keep their heads down during a period of national debate and soul-searching such as this. I appreciate that he may not have meant it in quite the way it sounded, but it sounded very bad.

[Mr. George Galloway]

I deplore the comments of the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) about foreign students at Britain's universities. I am married to a biologist—a scientist—who took her PhD at Glasgow university. She is a Palestinian with an Arab name, so I am acutely sensitive to this point. Foreign students in this country, whatever subjects they study in British universities, should not be made to feel uneasy or put under a searchlight, as the comments of the right hon. Member for Swansea, East seemed to imply.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), a former Minister indeed, seemed to think that any Parliament anywhere should be required to give unequivocal and unconditional support to the Government. That might be the kind of Parliament that Osama bin Laden would have in mind; it is not this kind of Parliament. The only thing more depressing than the demand of the former Minister that Parliament should show unequivocal, unconditional support for the Government was the rapid surrender to it by the spokesman for what he himself described as the loyal Opposition.

I shall vote against the Government this evening, albeit on a procedural motion, because I believe that a substantive motion should be on the table to allow hon. Members to table reasoned amendments and the House to express deliberate judgment on the aims and conduct of the war.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Galloway: I do not have time. I believe that some of my hon. Friends and some Opposition Members will join us in the Lobby and that a substantial number of hon. Members will abstain. We and the abstainers will only grow in number in the days to come.

There is a fantastic dislocation between the atmosphere in the Chamber and the atmosphere outside in the country, and still more in the wider world. One would not think, listening to the Secretary of State for Defence, that more than half the population of this country want the bombing to stop now so that humanitarian aid can flood in. One would not know, listening to some of my colleagues who often lecture us about feminism, that more than half the women in Britain are demanding an end to the war. One would not know, listening to the Liberal Democrat spokespeople, that more than half the Liberal voters in the country are demanding an end to the war. One would not know, listening to some Labour Members, that millions—if the opinion polls are right, some 12 million to 14 million people—in this country were demanding an end to the war, or that millions of them were Labour voters.

One certainly would not know from some hon. Members who represent constituencies with substantial Muslim populations that there was great unease and opposition to the war in our country. One would not know that the campaign was going disastrously around the world. One would not know that it is scarcely possible for an American politician to set foot in the Arab countries. Our Prime Minister has to go as what *The Wall Street Journal* unkindly described as "the American ambassador" to those countries.

When our Prime Minister goes to Arab countries, he receives short shrift from the leaders whom he meets. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said, countries such as Iran are unequivocally against the bombing. Syria lectured the Prime Minister yesterday against bombing. If anyone here thinks that public opinion in the Arab world is with them, they are living in cloud cuckoo land.

I have the benefit of watching Arab television, listening to the phone-in programmes and reading the Arab press. If Members of Parliament think that they have the support of the Islamic world—1.3 billion people strong—they are living in cloud cuckoo land.

Our new friend General Musharraf promised his people at the outset that the campaign would be short, sharp and targeted. The fact that it is neither short nor sharp is the reason why it is now a dagger pointed at his heart. Everyone in Pakistan knows it. More than 90 per cent. of the people of Pakistan are demanding that their Government desist from co-operating in the savage bombardment of Afghanistan. That is a fact. The Secretary of State for International Development may think that General Musharraf is secure in his post. I do not know anyone else who thinks that the self-appointed president of Pakistan is in any way secure.

Sharp? B52s, sticks of bombs, carpet bombing—is that sharp? We saw just how accurate the targeted, laser-guided weapons were. Now we have moved to carpet bombing from B52s. We are told that the bombing is of military positions, as if the military lines in Afghanistan were somehow wholly separate from the villages and towns in which people lived, not to mention from the displaced people in Afghanistan.

Sharp? Cluster bombs? I never thought I would hear Labour spokespeople defending cluster bombs. Is the military struggle with the Taliban so finely poised that we cannot eschew the use of cluster bombs? I watched the Secretary of State for International Development on the beach at Brighton—done up in her mine-clearing suit—weeping about the victims of land mines. She knows that in so far as cluster bombs are not land mines they are worse than land mines, because land mines at least are mapped—land mines dropped from aeroplanes are by definition unmappable.

I only have time to deal with a couple of additional points. The aims of a campaign such as this cannot be separated from its likely outcome. Members who wish it to be restricted to Afghanistan are fooling themselves: this war is going to be extended to other countries. If they do not want that to happen, they must join us now. If they do not want the Northern Alliance, they must join us. The Northern Alliance are the people who destroyed and beggared Afghanistan in the first place, whose mediaeval obscurantism put the women in chains, destroyed the towns and cities, took the women out of the universities, hanged the former President Najibullah from a lamp-post—they put his penis in his mouth and left him hanging to rot. That is the Northern Alliance—your new best friends whom you hope to put into power.

My last point is this: we want this war stopped during Ramadan—not out of respect for the Muslims, but because it would give the Government a chance, without losing face, to send a message to the Islamic world that they are going to pause during the holy month of Ramadan; that they are going to consider how the project

has gone so far; that they are going to consult more widely; that they are going to try diplomacy; that they are going to try legal means and political means during that pause in the war; and that, above all, they are going to flood the country with humanitarian assistance—food and kindness—which will do far more to win the masses of Afghanistan to their cause than bombing them from B52s and bombing them with cluster bombs will ever do.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Speaker has imposed a time limit of 10 minutes, but I can see that a considerable number of Members still hope to contribute. Perhaps if Members could curtail their remarks, even more of them may catch my eye.

4.37 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) spoke with great passion and some knowledge of the Arab world, but he also spoke with inaccuracy and from a position with which I cannot agree.

One inaccuracy is about Najibullah. In fact he was the president of the amalgamation—the coalition that made up the Northern Alliance—and was hanged by the Taliban. Secondly, land mines are not neatly marked "Achtung Minen!". I am a trustee of a land mine clearance charity with 1,200 local employees in Afghanistan; they go through the ground bit by bit, trying to clear mines—whether they were laid by Soviets, Afghans or whoever. The mines are not neatly marked.

As regards President Musharraf, he was indeed self-appointed in a coup, but I happen to know that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin has spent a great deal of time in Baghdad, where he called Tariq Aziz "my good friend". Can he tell the House—not now, because I shall not accept an intervention from him—who appointed Saddam Hussein but Saddam Hussein himself, for whom the hon. Gentleman has spoken up so loudly and clearly in the past?

I shall turn back to the subject in hand: the international coalition against terrorism. I particularly want to associate myself with the excellent speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). It would be pointless to repeat what he said, but I stress that it is essential that we react to what happened on 11 September. It is no good merely criticising from the sidelines in the way that we have just heard. If we do not act—if the west does not act—the same thing will happen again. Next time, it may be London, or Glasgow, or Birmingham.

The idea that we could reason with al-Qaeda is ludicrous. That organisation's aim is, as we understand it, to destroy the United States of America. Is there any negotiation on that from an American point of view? I think not. There can be none.

I should like briefly to consider four points—the aim of the coalition, the humanitarian actions, news management and how the crisis affects the United Kingdom. First, we must stick to our aims—that is why we have them—but we could be a little clearer. On the fourth immediate objective, the Secretary of State for Defence said that we would require

"sufficient change in the leadership of Afghanistan to ensure that their links to international terrorism are broken."

We have to go further and, as the Prime Minister has said, the Taliban have to be removed because, while they control Afghanistan, the barbaric civil war will continue; it is a breeding ground for terrorism.

The headline story on the front page of *The Times* today, which I commend to the House, was the most awful tale of barbarism, brutality and injustice. The regime acts in a horrific way, contrary to all international law and agreements and certainly not to the benefit of its people—in particular, its women and children.

We should not aim to impose a Government—that should not be our business. There may not be universal suffrage with voters' lists, but that does not mean that the people of Afghanistan, even if they are not on voters' lists, cannot say who they want to have as their leader or their Government. We should aim to allow all the people of Afghanistan, including the 50 per cent. who have to dress in the fearful burka, to have some say in a Government whom they accept. Of course, that is not easy. I have no idea whether it may involve the king, a Loya Jirga or a constitutional commission, but that should be our aim. We should not allow a barbaric, mediaeval regime to succeed or last. We certainly do not want to go back to civil war.

Lastly, on our aims, we should remember what happened in 1991, when people said, "You must not go on into Baghdad." We did not need to impose a Government on Baghdad, but we allowed Saddam Hussein to survive, because we did not cut off his republican guard. By allowing him to survive, we have had to put up with another 10 years of instability and terrorism in the middle east.

I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for International Development for what she has said about the humanitarian aid effort. She is quite right. We should know that there will be hardship, possibly disaster, this winter, even if we stop bombing now. In about two weeks' time, the snows will have descended and those in the mountains will have insufficient food. It will be awful and we must help the World Food Programme and others as far as we can, but the best solution for the poor, benighted Afghans is a successful conclusion to the war—for their sakes, not ours.

We must give as much as necessary to the subsequent reconstruction. We must be magnanimous in victory and use our influence over our Northern Alliance allies—if that is what they are—because they do not have a good record of behaviour in the past, and they are certainly not the Blue Berets of the UN. They are former mujaheddin, and anyone who has read the stories of that time knows that the mujaheddin could be very barbaric towards their captives.

A huge effort will be required by the whole world—the western world, in particular—but it may help with the hearts and minds that have been mentioned. Whatever happens, we must not forget Afghanistan, as we did in the past. When the cold war ended, we left those who had been sitting in refugee camps for 10 years to sit for another 10 or 12 years in ghastly camps in the dust in Pakistan.

I visited my first refugee camp, near Peshawar, in 1985. I visited another one with the International Development Committee in 1999. The former was run by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the latter by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

but whoever runs the camps, they must be controlled by those who pay for them. I need not remind the House of the dreadful situation outside Goma and other places in the Congo in 1994, when the UN was actually delivering food aid and other things to the Hutu Interahamwe, who had fled from the massacres that they had committed in Rwanda.

There is little proper education in the Afghan refugee camps. Frankly, they are like a bit of backward Afghanistan. The women are subjugated and segregated, and madrassars may or may not flourish. They provide a breeding ground for discontent and extremism. When we have camps in future, we must have no Taliban in control; it is very easy for the camps to be under such control. There must be no weapons. There must be no conscription into armies by the Taliban, Northern Alliance or whoever. There must be proper education and skills training for all. There must be good health care, especially for women. There must be good food, and seeds, and whatever is necessary, and those camps must be open for women, who should not be subjugated there. No one will ever accuse me of being a feminist, but it is outrageous that 50 per cent. of the population of Afghanistan, many of them educated people, should be subjugated as they are at present.

Finally, let me refer to the relationship between international terrorism and events in the United Kingdom. Perhaps the Secretary of State will answer a question on something about which I have been thinking for some weeks. Apart, thankfully, from a great difference in degree and scale, what exactly is the difference between the murderous attack on the World Trade Centre, and the attacks on the NatWest tower, now tower 42, in February 1993 and on Canary wharf in February 1996, both of which killed people and caused enormous damage? Will the Government pursue all the people who committed and assisted in those dreadful attacks on the two tallest buildings in London with the same vigour as they are pursuing the perpetrators of the attack on the tallest building in New York?

5.6 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I support the Government's action to fight international terrorism. That means support for the military action, support for the strong attempts to destroy terrorist bases and networks, making great effort to minimise civilian casualties, and support for the action to break up international terrorist networks, which are passing both cash and information around the world with the sole objective of carrying out unacceptable terrorism. The work of the Chancellor of the Exchequer should be welcomed and praised in that respect. He is making efforts on the international scene to ensure that those networks are destroyed.

That campaign is difficult and will be long lasting, but it is essential that we recognise the uniquely lethal nature of current international terrorism. It knows no borders, it knows no boundaries. Its aim is to maximise the mass killing of civilians as a religious imperative, bringing personal salvation—activities fuelled by hatred. It might be as well to note the statement in the official Palestinian Authority daily published on the morning of 11 September this year:

"these suicide bombers are the salt of the earth, the engines of history".

The suicide bombers to whom that publication referred on that fatal morning were the suicide bombers who had been attacking and killing the civilians of Israel.

We have taken a significant step forward in meeting the international threat of terrorism with the passing of United Nations Security Council resolution 1373 on 28 September. That resolution stressed the importance of states not perpetuating terrorism themselves, and not directing or organising the targeting of civilians with the aim of mass destruction. This country has an important position in taking that forward. We are chairing the committee that will be in charge of implementing the resolution. It gives us in this country a continuing important role in dealing with that major issue.

We, and indeed the international community, must also face the fact that Iran and Syria are the sponsors of terrorism that fuels major conflicts, including ones that have been referred to today. They fund and support groups such as Hamas. Indeed, in May 2000 a new headquarters for Hamas was opened in Damascus. Iran and Syria also support Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—groups dedicated to wrecking any possible chance for peace in the middle east and bent on the destruction and elimination of Israel.

Let us remember what the former Hezbollah leader, Hussein Massawi, said:

"We are not fighting so the enemy will offer us something. We are fighting to wipe out the enemy."

I urge all those who believe that the heart of the conflict and the savage international terrorism that we now face is something to do with finding a just solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians to take heed of what is happening around them: the terrorist groups funded by, among others, Iran and Syria are dedicated to the destruction of peace and the destruction of Israel, and after that they will carry on to destroy more and more.

It is essential that we have a just peace in the middle east and that we see Israel and Palestine as independent states, living in peace, side by side in agreed secure boundaries. I want to see Jerusalem a shared capital. I want to see the end of settlements. I want to see land exchange and a solution to the refugee problem, to include the resettlement of refugees and compensation. I want to see the realisation of the vision propounded by Shimon Peres, that most courageous Israeli leader, in his book "The New Middle East", published in about 1994. He spoke about a vision of economic co-operation throughout the middle east, with Israel and Palestine, and other Arab states, working together.

When Barak made his proposals for a solution to the conflict only a year ago, and then later at Taba, it was the Palestinians who, regrettably, foolishly, rejected them.

Let us never forget, too, that the first suicide bombing in Israel happened on 6 April 1994—nothing to do with either Mr. Netanyahu or Mr. Sharon, neither of whom I hold any brief for. That attack, in which eight people were killed on a bus in Afula, was Hamas's attempt to wreck the peace process then under way. That group, plus others, went on to kill hundreds more people, hoping to continue to wreck the possibility of peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The name of Mr. Atta is familiar to us. He is known to us as the pilot who flew the plane into the World Trade Centre, murdering thousands of people. The name is

known in Israel, too, because in the 1980s this same Mr. Atta killed people by throwing a bomb at civilians on a bus. He was arrested, but Israel was then persuaded to release him as a gesture of good will as part of peace negotiations. The persuasion came from President Reagan. We all know what Mr. Atta went on to do.

I raise these points not because I believe that the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians is the cause of what we witnessed as thousands of people were murdered in New York and Washington, but because many Members have suggested that it is at the heart of the conflict. It is not. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be resolved—I have explained how that might happen—and I hope that pressure can be brought to bear on both sides to bring everyone back to the negotiating table to seek peace along the lines that I have outlined.

The threat that all of us—whatever our religion, ethnic identity or country—face is the threat from international terrorists who know no boundaries and no mercy. I listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) and I realise the strength of the opposition to those who seek peace. I realise the depth of their hatred against most of the world, and I believe that we should redouble our efforts to fight international terrorism while recognising that that will bring difficulties and that, inevitably, innocent civilians may be killed. Our target, however, is the terrorists and the breaking of international military, financial and intelligence and information networks.

The fight will be long and hard, but it is a fight for humanity. If we do not win it, we will find that the terrorists who planned and executed their deadly deeds in September of this year will simply work out new plans and gather and improve their access to biological, chemical and nuclear weapons as they devise their new crimes against the whole of humanity.

5.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this important and timely debate.

Just five weeks before the terrible events of 11 September, I chaired a meeting on the 107th floor of the World Trade Centre in New York. I saw the images on television of the towers crumbling with such an horrific loss of life. As one can imagine, it was a very humbling and reflective experience for me.

As President Bush, in his address to a joint session of Congress on 20 September, said:

"the enemies of freedom committed an act of war".

It was an act of war against every free nation and, equally, an act of war against all those in the Islamic world who believe in peace. To that end, it was absolutely correct for NATO to invoke article 5, recognising that an attack on the United States is also an attack on the rest of us.

It is the duty of every citizen in this country to stand by the campaign against terrorism that is designed to bring those capable of committing such terrible crimes to some form of justice. Those attacks could have been directed at any western freedom-loving nation, including the United Kingdom. That is why we must remain resolute.

I would, however, like to focus my comments on the humanitarian aspects of the war against terrorism. It is through many of the humanitarian issues arising from the war—particularly those that relate to the behaviour and the attitude of the Taliban towards their people—that the arguments for military action are most apparent.

The level of humanitarian need in Afghanistan is highlighted by the United Nations website. Under the somewhat dispassionate title "Crisis at a glance", it points out that 7.5 million Afghans may need aid to survive. Nearly 20 per cent. of those in need are children under the age of five and, since 11 September, tens of thousands of Afghans have fled to Pakistan in search of safety and assistance. Some 100,000 families inside Afghanistan may be cut off from aid when snow blocks the roads later this winter. That is certainly a serious and disturbing scenario.

The number of people who need aid in Afghanistan amounts to nearly a third of its population of slightly more than 25 million. That is a chilling statistic. Our response will mean the difference between a nation that can survive post-Taliban and a nation that is so destitute and starving that the path to recovery could be insurmountable.

That said, we must not let such shocking figures result in knee-jerk reactions that can only lead to a loss of focus on the task at hand. Governments and charitable organisations that are already undertaking invaluable work in attempting to alleviate the humanitarian crisis must be supported wholeheartedly and encouraged in their efforts.

Those who call for a pause in the bombing risk putting in place a strategy that would do much more harm than good. Of course we must show compassion. We must take responsibility for helping ordinary, decent and peaceful people in their time of need. When 60,000 families are entirely dependent on the World Food Programme for their food, there is a blatant need for our intervention. However, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition commented in *The Daily Telegraph* only yesterday, the Taliban disruption of aid efforts dates back to before the military action commenced. Fundamentally, most aid efforts are seriously curtailed. The regime that we are fighting actively prevents and blocks aid reaching those who most need it.

The most urgent and the most humanitarian action that we can take is to continue the military action until the Taliban are disabled and removed from power in Afghanistan for good. Until that regime is removed, there will be a need—it may not be extinguished for years to come—for risky aid missions to Afghanistan. Those will fail continually as the Taliban steal the produce for their soldiers and redirect medical supplies away from the sick and needy.

That does not mean that we should forget the estimated 6 million people who are still in Afghanistan and who desperately need aid to suryive. These are people who do not have the resources or the ability to escape across the Afghan borders. Hundreds of thousands of them will be cut off from food and aid by snow and winter conditions in the weeks to come. Winter in Afghanistan is extremely harsh. There must be an emphasis where possible on bolstering supplies for those areas that may well find themselves isolated and impoverished through bad weather.

The World Food Programme is finding ways of bypassing Taliban blocks. However, with a lack of trucks, fuel and local knowledge, there is understandably an incredibly difficult task ahead. Taliban obstruction tactics

[Mr. Andrew Rosindell]

may not let the World Food Programme's target of 52,000 tonnes of aid through into Afghanistan. While the Taliban remain in government, all the support necessary must be put into ensuring that aid can be delivered when the opportunity to do so unhindered presents itself.

It is those Afghans who have not managed to escape, especially those in the northern hunger belts where food levels are critically low, who must receive our most urgent attention. However, food supplies must not be our only concern. The Taliban regime can only be described as backward. The Taliban run a country contrary to the principles and beliefs that the vast majority of civilised countries hold sacred. For example, there is the situation of women.

Continued and focused military action to remove the Taliban and to reconstruct Afghanistan as a respected nation will bring greater recognition of the rights that we take for granted. Of course, our primary focus must be to defeat the terrorists. We must block the ability of those who seek to commit further atrocities to carry them out.

Those who harbour terrorists are also harbouring intolerance. They starve their people not only of food, but of basic equality. If the Taliban continue to rule in Afghanistan, not only will we have no guarantee that they will cease to give protection and a home to terrorists, but the humanitarian crisis will only worsen as thousands try to leave the country for a better life elsewhere, only to be persecuted for wanting what we take for granted.

This war is about standing up for democracy and for people who live in freedom and safety. The Taliban's support for and protection of terrorists is undoubtedly interwoven with their appalling domestic record. It is logical that a regime that does not care for its citizens will never care for the citizens of other nations. We must continue to prove that we have compassion for the Afghan people. That can occur only through achieving their liberation. Material aid is essential, but the removal of the Taliban will aid the people of Afghanistan far more in the long term. It can be achieved only through staying on course and continuing to stand together with the United States of America and the rest of the coalition determined and resolute in our aims. Those aims include delivering a future for the innocent people of Afghanistan. That is how we can best aid them and it is our true humanitarian mission.

5.26 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I am very pleased indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, to have the chance to speak in this very important debate.

The events of 11 September were a crime against humanity. Nobody on either side of the House doubts that action must be taken in the long and short term, and that it must be diplomatic, legal, military and political. The question being debated in the House this afternoon is whether the current short-term military strategy in which we are engaged is the right one. Even as we meet today, public opinion in this country is turning against the bombing. Colleagues will ignore public opinion at their peril. It is turning against the bombing not because people are wobbling, as some Ministers rather patronisingly assert, or because people have forgotten 11 September, which is the other patronising assertion.

Nobody will ever forget where they were when they first saw the pictures of those aeroplanes flying into the twin towers with the consequent horrific loss of life. Just as the mushroom clouds over Hiroshima have for ever been the image of death and destruction in the 20th century, I believe that those images of planes flying into the twin towers will be the image of death and devastation that symbolises the 21st century. No one has forgotten 11 September. Still less is public opinion turning against the bombing because the public lack moral fibre, as has also been asserted. It is turning against the bombing for precisely the opposite reason. It is the innate moral sense of the British public that is leading them increasingly to ask questions of this particular military strategy. Some of us in the House believe that it is our duty to come here, ask these questions and hold the Government to account.

Some colleagues who support the bombing cling to the notion of precision targeting. Some of them appear to believe that war can be like a video game and that technology can reduce civilian deaths to some marginal percentage. I urge those colleagues who are so quick to talk about precision bombing and new technology when some of us quote the figures of civilian casualties to look at the reports that were published in the aftermath of Kosovo on the actual accuracy of those bombs, as opposed to the accuracy that was claimed at the time.

An article in *Flight International* in August last year referred to a Ministry of Defence operational analysis that said that only 40 per cent. of the bombs dropped by the RAF in Kosovo hit their targets. Colleagues cannot comfort themselves with the notion of precision targeting that somehow drains warfare of its blood, its horror and its sacrifice.

Colleagues should be left in no doubt about the fact that a cluster bomb that falls to the ground with many of its bomblets unexploded is as brutal and as much a threat to civilian life as any land mine. Is the battle in Afghanistan so in the balance and in such a precarious position that we have to use weapons that have been condemned all over the world? I urge colleagues to consider the horror of yellow cluster bombs being lodged in the ground, and children and young people running to pick them up because they are the same colour as the humanitarian food parcels of which colleagues are so proud. I hope that we hear a little less about precision targeting and make a closer study of the accuracy of the bombing during the war in Kosovo.

I have a word to say to the tendency in the House of Commons that I would describe as "cluster bombs for feminism." It will be of no comfort to the women of Afghanistan to hear the protestations and concern about their civil rights when thousands of them have died from a war that may continue through the winter into the spring. Many thousands more will die as a result of the humanitarian disaster, which all the aid agencies, without exception, have said will happen if there is no pause in the bombing.

Any military action that is part of a long-term, complex political and diplomatic initiative to rid the world of the scourge of terrorism must be politically sustainable. I remind colleagues that, as a consequence of the bombing campaign, which is only a few weeks old, there have been riots in northern Nigeria and Indonesia, and that 70 per cent. of the population of Pakistan are against the bombing. In Europe, people are beginning to express their

concern about the bombing in *Le Monde* and other journals. I do not believe that a bombing campaign—accompanied by a rising tide of civilian casualties—that lasts through the winter into the spring, which is the earliest there can be a proper ground war, is sustainable in the eyes of the public. If it is not sustainable in public opinion, it is not politically sustainable and it runs the risk of undermining the political and diplomatic objectives that colleagues profess to hold.

I cannot speak for Muslims in other constituencies, but if colleagues continue to assert against the evidence of their own eyes that the Muslim community in this country supports and is happy about the bombing, they will be leading themselves into error. Of course the Muslim community deplores the events of 11 September and shares the world's horror, but it is deeply unhappy about the bombing. Colleagues must take cognisance of that fact.

Time is against us, so my final point is about the humanitarian crisis. I repeat that every aid agency has asked for a pause. We have 20 days to save millions of people in Afghanistan from starvation. Colleagues should beware of mixing up the humanitarian mission with the political mission. What the aid agencies are frightened of—more than the bombing—is that they are seen to be partisan. Aid agencies that are seen to be on one side in a war can no longer effectively carry out their mission. Mixing up the humanitarian rhetoric with the military rhetoric will make the job of the aid agencies very much harder in the long term.

The events of 11 September were a crime against humanity and no one will forget where they were when they saw the pictures on television. The British public, however, are turning against the bombing and, what is more, whatever their views on that strategy, they cannot understand how British troops might become involved in what everyone accepts will be the most difficult and dangerous ground war in our lifetime without a vote in the House of Commons. That is why, I, with some of my colleagues, will vote against the bombing if we have the chance to do so later today.

5.35 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): It seems to be my lot to speak shortly after the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway). He always speaks with enormous skill and persuasive powers, but again, he was inaccurate. I level the same accusation at the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). We must make sure that we understand the use of cluster bombs. They are directed at airfields, area targets and specific targets such as armoured vehicles. They are not land mines and they are not designed to attack personnel.

Also, the term "carpet bombing" is not accurate. *[Interruption.]* We seem to have another aerial weapon. Our carpet has indeed been bombed!

Everything that is now being done is designed to shatter the cohesion and morale of our enemies in Afghanistan. People will get hurt, including those who are not directly involved. War is a dirty business and soldiers, civilians and the innocent may be injured. We have only to ask the relatives of the 6,000 people whose graves are in the centre of New York and Washington.

The Secretary of State for Defence said earlier that additional troops have now been committed and that we can sustain and support them over a long period. He said that that is a clear indication of our resolve.

Last week, I spent some time in Oman with members of the Select Committee on Defence talking to troops on Exercise Saif Sareea 2. It was clear that they were expecting to be committed for a further operation. I spent some time with the officers of the headquarters of Third Commando brigade. There were two quotations that were causing them some trouble. The House will be familiar with the first, because it has oft been quoted, but that will not stop me doing it again.

"When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains

And the women come out to cut up what remains

Just roll to your rifle and blow out your brains

An' go to your Gawd like a soldier."

Those Royal Marines had no doubt that the fight facing them would be particularly difficult.

The second quote, which they found even more contentious, is from Colin Powell when he was faced with the commitment of troops to the Balkans some years ago. He said:

"We do deserts, not mountains."

Both those quotations were giving the brigade commander and his staff considerable cause to think.

How does one decide whether that senior commander should have been "used"—as was suggested earlier—to make a political point? Let us think what is involved. The Third Commando brigade has been on exercise in hostile and difficult conditions for several weeks. It is only 60 per cent. manned and is short of one third of its combat power. It is under-recruited by a platoon—what the Royal Marines would call a troop—in each company. The commander of that brigade must now regroup. He must draw troops from two different commandos, 40 and 45, into a single cohesive unit. He must give them support weapons, artillery, sappers and the like. He must also winnow out the mountain leaders from his troops throughout the brigade. No wonder, then, he says he is not yet sure about his specific targets. He is not yet sure what specific training he will be asked to carry out; he is not sure about his tasks, his rules of engagement, or the operational command and control of his unit.

Those are all legitimate military points of view. Let us not be too harsh on the commander; but let us understand that what he says is very different from what the Secretary of State for Defence would suggest—that the troops are ready for immediate action. They are not, and they cannot be.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): By drawing attention to the supposed inadequacies of the forces he describes, is the hon. Gentleman not giving them as much "support" as my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott)?

Patrick Mercer: Absolutely not. We need to give our forces some breathing space. They need time to be ready. Let me add that any coalition war will encounter difficulties when one nation is leading and another is trying to follow. These men have our full support, but we need to understand what is going on.

Whatever gesture we are making, 200 men—a rifle company group—are not enough to be a

"clear indication of our resolve".

[Patrick Mercer]

We can generate at least a brigade. I believe that we must generate a brigade, and I would like to see preparations for the training of the rest of our armed forces for the long haul that the Government tell us lies ahead. I see no indications of that now.

I spent some time talking to a warrant officer in the Royal Marines, who told me, "I have been in the Royal Marines for 18 years, and I have two years left to serve. During those 18 years I have spent most of my time fighting terrorism. I have seen comrades killed in Northern Ireland, and I have protected Kurds in Iraq. I believe in this cause, and I know that my men will do whatever you ask us to. I ask just one thing: do not require us to go with one arm tied behind our backs. Let us go with our gloves off, ready to do the job, and we will do it for you."

We have the finest troops in the world, and I believe that a vote tonight must be a vote in support of that warrant officer and those men who are ready to put their lives on the line for this country and for freedom.

5.43 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I want to deal with some of the criticisms of the coalition's actions in Afghanistan. In doing so, I do not suggest that people do not have genuine and heartfelt concerns about what is going on—they have, and they deserve to be answered. I shall begin the task of answering them in the short time available to me.

The first criticism of the coalition's actions relates to the very basis of the action in Afghanistan. Shortly after the events of 11 September, the chairman of Charter 88 wrote:

"Declaring 'war' on terrorism is the worst possible response . . . True security will come from international co-operation based on equality, justice and the rule of law, through which conflicts can be resolved by peaceful means."

I do not know whether, seven weeks on, Mr. Alexander still holds that view, but it is profoundly wrong. The fact is that al-Qaeda poses a clear and present danger to us. What it did on 11 September—there now seems to be no dispute about its involvement—is, by its own account, part of an on-going terrorist campaign, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan have given succour to al-Qaeda. The Taliban were given an ultimatum to deliver bin Laden, but they refused, hence the military action. To think that we can deal with such groups through

"international co-operation based on equality, justice and the rule of law"

is to misunderstand what we are up against. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on Tuesday:

"We have a group of people in Afghanistan who are sworn enemies of everything the civilised world stands for, who have killed once on a vast scale and will kill again unless stopped. They can't be negotiated with."

Far from undermining the rule of law, as Mr. Alexander suggested, our action is in accordance with it. Article 51 of the United Nations charter gives nations an inherent right to individual or collective self-defence in the event of an armed attack; that right runs alongside the right of self-defence in customary international law.

There can be no question, in this instance, but that there was an armed attack. The response of the UN Security Council in 1998 to the east African embassy bombings, and on 12 September this year in Security Council resolution 1368, recognised that states have duties to suppress acts of international terrorism and that that is essential to the maintenance of international peace and security. Most significantly, UN Security Council resolution 1373 was passed on 28 September; in it, the council, acting under chapter VII of the charter, imposes on states duties to refrain from supporting terrorists, to deny them safe havens, to prevent them from using their territories and to bring them to justice. Afghanistan is therefore clearly in breach of international law. Far from taking the law into its own hands—an accusation made by Mr. Alexander—the international coalition is acting to uphold it.

Another fallacy propounded by the critics concerns the means. Even if, the argument runs in its simplest form, we must act against terrorism, we should not bomb Afghanistan. I have already said that the action against Afghanistan is both necessary and legal. Some critics of the bombing seem to be suggesting that the coalition is somehow trying to colonise Afghanistan; others that the bombing is targeting Afghan civilians; and others that it is creating a humanitarian crisis. None of those strands of criticism is valid. Given the history of the Afghan wars in the 19th century and the Russian invasion in the last century, to carry out the first charge would be extremely foolish. The aim is to remove the Taliban regime with a view to allowing all Afghans to retake control of their country.

The bombing is certainly not targeting civilians. As in the Kosovo campaign, the attacks have aimed, first, to destroy air cover and air defence; secondly, to interdict, as far as possible, the operation of command and control facilities; and, thirdly, to attack military camps, installations and forces. All that is perfectly proper; it is necessary and proportionate under the UN charter's right to act in self-defence. It is necessary to prevent a repetition of armed attack and is proportionate as a means of achieving that end. It is also in conformity with the humanitarian laws of war, most authoritatively set out in the Geneva conventions and protocols.

The 1977 first protocol puts the matter starkly:

"The civilian population, as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack."

The Geneva protocols are located in the real world and recognise that there may be incidental loss of civilian life. The 1977 first protocol therefore prohibits attacks, which may be expected to cause civilian loss, when that would be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. There have been, and will be, civilian casualties in this type of conflict, which can only be a matter of very profound regret. No one who is a parent can fail to be moved by photographs of children injured and killed in such conflicts.

I wish to make two points. First, the number of strikes that have gone completely astray—as opposed to falling just outside the target—is small. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in opening the debate this afternoon, we cannot accept Taliban claims of numerous civilian casualties. I commend to the House the article in *The Times* this morning by the BBC correspondent, Simon Ingram. He visited a bombed building in Kandahar and wrote:

"And yet there were things that didn't fit. Where were the wounded or the bodies? Why had the building been targeted in the first place?"

It had been claimed that 15 people had been killed and 20 injured. In his account he points out that one building bombed was occupied by the Taliban religious police and that another bombed building was a short distance from four parked Taliban tanks.

The Geneva protocol makes it clear that states such as Afghanistan must not put civilians in that sort of position. Civilians must not be used as shields. Moreover, article 58 provides that parties must remove civilians from the vicinity of military objectives and avoid locating military objects such as the tanks that Mr. Ingram saw, in populated areas.

Mr. Galloway: Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Ross Cranston: No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman has had his platform.

As for the bombing impeding humanitarian aid, the more immediate threat is the Taliban themselves. The United Nations has complained that humanitarian aid and property is being looted at gunpoint. I am sure that the Secretary of State for International Development will address that point when she replies.

If I had more time, I would address other fallacies advanced by the critics—for example, that this is somehow a war with Islam or that the changes in domestic law proposed by the Secretary of State for the Home Department are unacceptable infringements of civil liberties. The bottom line is that what the coalition is doing is lawful, necessary and right.

5.52 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I have supported the Government's action, to a certain extent with reluctance. That is true of many of us who do not want to see bombing and the loss of life. On 11 September we knew that a response would be necessary. The statement made on 10 October by al-Qaeda spokesman Sulayman Abu Gaith, suggesting his group had no intention of respecting the principle of distinction between civilians and the military, showed a total disregard for international humanitarian law. The tragedy was perpetrated by terrorists, who should be brought to judgment.

The Prime Minister has now given more clarity to our aims: to close down al-Qaeda and bring bin Laden to justice. He has made it clear that our attacks on the Taliban are intended not simply to downgrade their capacity to stand between bin Laden and us but to remove the Taliban from Afghanistan. We have been given a clearer idea of what has been achieved in the first three weeks of bombing. The Prime Minister said:

> "We have destroyed the Taliban air force, put Taliban airfields and air defence systems out of action; destroyed all the main al-Qaida camps; profoundly damaged Taliban command and control facilities, and dramatically reduced their capacity to communicate with their forces in the field."

What targets are left, and what is their strategic significance? I am not trying to second-guess the armed forces, but in the coming weeks and months I want them constantly to make judgments about what will be necessary to achieve the original objectives and to carry out the minimum necessary, not the maximum.

It has been suggested that the United States military have been instructed to prepare plans for the possibility of a full ground invasion after the winter. If a full ground invasion is intended but not possible during the winter months, we cannot use bombing sorties simply to pass the time. Although the threat is specific, as the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) said, the location of the people we are trying to flush out is not. The need for precision is so important.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Sue Doughty: No. I want to continue.

If there were a break in the bombing or a significant scaling down of military action in the winter months, could bin Laden or the Taliban take advantage in a way that compromised our position? I would be interested to hear a response on that. Would air action also grind to a halt as the snows arrived? Could our aims be better progressed by that approach, because of the opportunities it would allow for moving refugees, providing aid and easing relationships with the Islamic communities?

Fostering relations with Muslims in the region is surely key to our success, first during the military campaign and then during the campaign that will follow. That must be given political consideration, as Ramadan will soon begin. We have suspended bombing from time to time for Friday prayers and we must consider the impact of the most significant part of the Islamic calendar—one of the five pillars of Islam.

When we are all confirming our respect for those of the Muslim faith, we must be sensitive to the impression that we will give to others if we bomb throughout Ramadan. I hope that that will be taken into account by those who make the decision. There are those who say that Osama bin Laden is not representative of that community, but sadly, there are plenty who fail to hear that message.

There will also be plenty who perceive and use continued bombing as an act of hostility towards the Islamic world. Like many others, I have concerns about the use of cluster bombs. I understand the difference between land mines and cluster bombs. Nevertheless, the risk of damage, explosions and damage to civilians in the 100 yd radius around cluster bombs deeply concerns me.

The Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported this week that cluster bombs were dropped on the village of Herat in western Afghanistan.

Clare Short: It is a city.

Sue Doughty: I thank the Secretary of State.

Herat was littered with unexploded bomblets, restricting the movement of local people, who will suffer not only now, but for years to come. Using cluster bombs is wrong, and doubly wrong when we criticise the Taliban for their humanitarian record. The Prime Minister said in his speech to the Welsh Assembly that we are doing all we can to limit civilian casualties, but while we continue to use cluster bombs that cannot be the case.

We are working towards understanding the real situation in Afghanistan and many wise views have been expressed. We know that our knowledge is imperfect, but we also know that there is a greater food shortage than before and that that is partly due to current action. However, it is much due to three years of drought, recent events and 20 years of armed conflict, resulting in 3.6 million refugees. Tens of thousands of people are on the move.

[Sue Doughty]

Our response is not yet sufficient. Daily ration packs are inadequate to feed all but a few, and we have discussed the problems associated with that. With winter coming on, it is so important that we put not only food but shelter and fuel into the area. If a pause in or scaling down of military action allows much greater humanitarian aid to be given, we must celebrate that and make our message clear that the people of Afghanistan are important to us. We must invest in them by providing the things they need.

We must also recognise that help will be needed to distribute food in Afghanistan, as local drivers are rightly afraid to enter hostile territory. If we want borders with neighbouring countries to be open to refugees, that will require a massive effort not only by allied forces but by our coalition colleagues to support the provision of temporary help for the refugees.

The Government have told us that this is a long game. The longest game, however, must be building a future for Afghanistan—one in which the people of Afghanistan, both men and women, have a stake and which they can accept as being owned by them with their government. The United Nations should not be left by itself. There will still be collective responsibility.

Mr. Goodman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Sue Doughty: I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

There will still need to be serious investment for the future for a long time. We must recognise that before the recent events Afghanistan was the poorest state in Asia. Having formed a coalition, we can use this opportunity to persuade its other members to give humanitarian aid and to offer Afghanistan the help that it will so badly need.

We support the aims of the coalition to bring bin Laden to justice and to remove the threat of terrorism. In doing so, I urge caution in the coming months on those who are taking the decisions on our behalf—caution in further bombing. They must ensure that any action has a positive outcome and can lead to meeting the objectives that we know so well. Efforts must continue to maintain support and relations between the allied forces and the Islamic community at home and worldwide.

I commend the Prime Minister's constant efforts to achieve a diplomatic solution. I urge that those efforts should continue, as far as is possible, because without those solutions we will have no future. They must continue not only for the next few months but for years afterwards as we try to achieve peace in the central and eastern areas of the world, as many hon. Members have said so eloquently. Before we do much more bombing, may we please consider why we are doing it? Please, may we call a halt to the use of cluster bombs?

6.2 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I have been waiting for some time to deal with the remarks of the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire), who is no longer in his seat. He made some disparaging comments about the campaign to give the women of Afghanistan a voice in the new Government that will, hopefully, replace the Taliban regime. He should know that there are many Muslim women parliamentarians. Men and women are considered equal in Islam. They may be considered different, but they are certainly considered of equal status. I hope that the campaign that has been led by women in the Labour party to give Afghan women a voice will be successful.

Mr. Goodman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman has only just arrived in the Chamber. I see no reason why I should give up any of my precious 10 minutes for him to intervene.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) talked about people being happy with the bombing. I do not know one person who is happy about it. I am extremely uneasy about bombing, in particular when I see the civilian casualties. I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence express his reluctance for military action. We must ask ourselves, however, whether there is any credible alternative. We should not assume that people are happy and cheerful and do not care about the civilian casualties. Those of us who support the action that the Government are taking are very unhappy and uneasy about what is happening and we wish that there were an alternative. Unfortunately, there is not.

It is crucial that we prevent bin Laden and his associates from acting again and again. People who have been responsible for the deaths of 6,000 innocent civilians will never stop. They were deliberately murdered; it was not collateral damage in any sense; it was a deliberate targeting. The people responsible will not stop now. What is to stop them? They will attack again and again, so we have to track them down. We have to unseat the Taliban regime, which is protecting them. I know of no way of doing it other than the way we are doing it.

I have had about 500 letters and e-mails about the terrorism in the United States and the Afghanistan situation. Many express unease at what is happening. I have read all those letters and e-mails very carefully, although I have not been able to respond to all of them in detail. Not one has suggested alternative action that would be effective in unseating the Taliban and destroying the terrorist network.

There is a strong pacifist element in my constituency and a very active organisation called CamPeace. It is campaigning vigorously against the war and has campaigned against military action in the past. Many hundreds of my constituents have supported the organisation, signed its petitions and participated in vigils which are held regularly. I understand that many people are against bombing a poor country ravaged by years of conflict and poor governance. However, I hope that the people who support CamPeace understand what they are supporting.

CamPeace has never accepted that Milosevic could carry some guilt for the atrocities in Bosnia and Kosovo. I have taken some material from the CamPeace website. It says about Yugoslavia:

"The great majority of the refugees who were forced to leave Kosovo for the neighbouring countries fled after the start of the bombing. It is now clear that the NATO bombing, far from 'averting a humanitarian catastrophe', actually accelerated and intensified it."

CamPeace refers to Carla del Ponte as

"Chief Persecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia".

It highlights a news archive with articles such as

"Was the Srebrenica Massacre a Hoax? . . . Serbian ethnic cleansing scare was a fake, says general . . . Film proves death camp photos were lies".

That shows what kind of organisation CamPeace is. It does not even accept that it was right to intervene in the genocide in Kosovo against both Muslims and Christians. The organisation has no credibility with me and I hope that it has none with my constituents.

I hesitate to speak about the middle east after the excellent contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). Peace in the middle east sometimes seems further away that ever. The vengeance attacks by the Israeli Government on the people of Palestine contrasts sharply with the attitude of the American Government, following the atrocities of 11 September. There was no quick retribution by the United States; instead, there was a thoughtful, considered period during which an offer was made to the Taliban to give up Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network so that it could be prosecuted. The offer was not accepted and military action has been started.

America's reaction was very different from that of the Israelis following the assassination of a Cabinet Minister. The incursion into previously unoccupied areas horrified many of us. Israel needs and deserves security. Palestine needs and deserves an independent state. Pressure must be brought to bear on the Israeli Government in particular to help bring about a Palestinian state and peace in the middle east. I believe that America, by its actions, now has the moral high ground and can bring not only financial but moral pressure to bear on the Israelis. That is extremely important.

I have been appalled by the many attempts to make this conflict into a conflict between Muslims and Christians. My local newspaper, the *Cambridge Evening News*, reported a short time ago an attack on two Muslim students who were wearing their traditional dress, their burkas. They had them pulled off their heads by some men as they crossed Parker's Piece in Cambridge. That has given rise to a great deal of anxiety. There was anxiety among Muslim women before this incident, and now there is more. I have tried to express my solidarity with the Muslim women's association in Cambridge. It does a good job. We need to stand firmly together and show that we are all on one side against international terrorism and for world freedom.

6.11 pm

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): When I spoke during the previous debate, there was a sense across the House that we were at something of a turning point in the conflict. I firmly believe that, with the decision to deploy ground troops, that corner has been turned.

I should like to pick up some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell). She was right when she said that everyone supported the aims of the operation. There is no alternative. It is important to remember that no service man ever wants to go to war, but they do so on this occasion because they believe that the cause is just. Therefore, it is appropriate that the thoughts of the House are with the service men who are about to be deployed to that region and their families here in Britain.

This operation has a degree of complexity that we have never undertaken before in this country. Military operations thrive on one clear aim. We saw that clearly in the Falklands and the Gulf. The original war aims laid out by the Government were to bring Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders to justice, to prevent the network from posing a continuing terrorist threat and then to deal with the Taliban who support them. In the three weeks since then, we have seen an inversion of those war aims, for understandable reasons.

We are now trying to destroy the Taliban. We hope by so doing that we will destroy al-Qaeda and therefore smoke out, in the words of the American president, Osama bin Laden. That has produced a slight difference of opinion between the military men and the politicians here in London. It is nothing more serious than that. It is made worse by the desire of journalists to pick it up and make a story. It is important that they behave responsibly, as many of us here are trying to do.

Following on from all that, there is a clear need—I am sure that the Secretary of State will address this in her reply—for a clear alternative structure for Afghanistan after the Taliban. Laying that out will have an enormously beneficial effect on many of the Muslim countries that we hope to involve in the process. I have always thought that once the Americans started to carpet bomb it would probably be a great deal less time than we thought before something happened. It is easy to predict that the Taliban will see some defections sooner rather than later and start to melt away into the hills. I and many other people across the House are extremely worried that, if that happens, regions will start to fall to anti-Taliban forces such as the Northern Alliance before an alternative Government have been put in place.

Like many hon. Members, I hope that the alternative Government will involve some form of ruling council that is 10 to 12 strong, representing all the different tribes. We must be ready to dominate the situation and not allow a vacuum to occur. There is clearly a role for a NATO force—I hope that it will have a heavy Muslim contingent—and probably, and I hope quickly, a United Nations force in its wake.

Such a force would have three clear roles. The first would be to maintain law and order. I am sure that we all agree that there would be nothing worse than the cycle of reprisals that might occur, if the Northern Alliance came sweeping down to fill the vacuum left after the Taliban. Secondly, that force could guarantee the security of any embryonic Government who are put in place in Afghanistan. Thirdly, and most important if we are to win the hearts and minds of the local population, that force must safeguard the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Furthermore, it is clear that the international coalition will have to play a considerable role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan when the conflict is over. I am sure that the role of the Secretary of State for International Development will be crucial in determining our contribution to that. It is thus vital that we have a coherent and viable plan for the reconstruction of Afghanistan post-Taliban.

In addition, there are a large number of diplomatic considerations that we need to address. Many of us have concerns about the state of Pakistan as regards its internal politics and what may happen there. That applies equally to Saudi Arabia, which—rather curiously—has been the

[Hugh Robertson]

home of many of the terrorists involved in these actions. That is a difficult problem to solve. I visited Saudi Arabia some years ago and was very aware that there was a middle class, which in effect generates all the wealth but has almost no power in government. Finding a way through that will be one of the challenges that awaits us in the future.

The final component will be whatever happens in the middle east. I must admit that I have always been something of an admirer of the state of Israel. One can only have an admiration for a nation that pulled itself up by its boot straps to create a state from the wreckage of the second world war. The problem is that the Israelis have never really come to terms with their gains in the 1967 war, which created much of the current mess.

What is important at present is that we set out a plan for a viable state of Palestine alongside Israel. It is vital that the Israeli Government do not confuse our determination to rid the world of the threat of terrorism with an opportunity to grab more land and establish more settlements.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly support the Government's efforts to win this war against international terrorism. However, as part of that multi-faceted effort, it is especially vital that we have a coherent strategy for the reconstruction of Afghanistan when the war is over. During our previous debate on this subject, I said that wars were easy to start but much more difficult to bring to a successful conclusion. Tonight, I fear that the difficult stage may only just be starting.

6.18 pm

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): I am delighted to be able to speak briefly in this important debate. I do so in support of the Government, in the knowledge that no one lightly advocates or takes pleasure in military action, especially where civilians are so tragically affected. There is great anxiety throughout the House about those civilian casualties. That would be nothing, however, compared to the guilt I should feel if Osama bin Laden and others were allowed to continue their bloody reign of international terrorism, and if the Taliban were allowed to continue the governance of Afghanistan.

I respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) in the same spirit as she offered us her comments earlier. I say to her and those whom I describe as the radicals-in-favour-of-doing-very-little-at-all tendency: simply to pause, or halt, the bombing as they suggest—whether for the limited period of winter or for Ramadan, or perhaps, in the view of some people, such as my hon. Friend, for good—would merely allow the Taliban and Osama bin Laden to continue to prosper. They would see weakness, when in fact there is only determination on our part to weaken bin Laden and his organisation.

There are many things on which I could comment, but as I have only a limited time I shall raise a few concerns. As part of building the international coalition, we have lifted nuclear sanctions against India and Pakistan. I worry that we are perhaps stoking up some difficulties for ourselves, in that two nuclear powers could still be involved in a conflict over Kashmir a few years down the line.

I reiterate that I fail to understand why the poppy fields remain untouched and have not been included in the list of targets that we have identified. We should do all we can to end that grotesque industry, by providing agricultural support and investment so that the Afghans can grow decent crops that do not poison the people of their country or the wider world.

I wish to make another substantive point: some hon. Members have rightly concentrated on the terrible civilian deaths in Afghanistan, but I want to comment on the terrible civilian deaths in the middle east. The death of a civilian in Afghanistan is as tragic for the individual's family as is the death of a civilian in the west bank or in Tel Aviv, but I fail to comprehend those who advocate the view that the lack of a peace process in the middle east caused the actions of Osama bin Laden, or that the lack of meaningful dialogue produced Hamas.

Let us remember that when peace seemed most likely in the middle east, when Labour's Ehud Barak was in power, suicide bombings against Israeli civilians were a weekly occurrence and the attacks of 11 September were probably initially planned during that very period. I do not believe that anyone has been fooled into thinking that the guiding principle of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah or any of those organisations relates to the settlements, the status of Jerusalem or the complex issue of the return refugees. Indeed, we could solve each and every one of those issues and Hamas would still bomb civilians, Hezbollah would still launch Katyusha rockets and Islam Jihad would continue its bloody trade.

As the Prime Minister has said on his visits to the region, there is an urgent need to return to the Mitchell peace plan and for Israel to show all possible restraint, subject to its right to defend itself and its citizens and with the guarantee of security that it deserves. However, the Palestinians, along with the Syrians and the Iranians, should do more to rein in those terrorist organisations, whose guiding principle is not specific, but includes the very destruction of the state of Israel and the gross undermining, if not destroying, of the American way of life and American and European cultures.

In reining in the terrorists, the Palestinians deserve absolutely the right to statehood and a viable state, with defined borders. Anything else would be a recipe for insecurity, and the last thing that Israel and the Palestinians need is continued insecurity. The Palestinians also need economic prosperity, but that has not happened during the peace process. The poverty of the Palestinian population grew the longer the peace process continued, and we cannot tolerate that type of peace process.

In conclusion, it is high time to decouple any phoney connection between the actions of Osama bin Laden and the other terrorists with the lack of a peace process in the middle east. There should certainly be a solution to the problems of the middle east, but despite the events of 11 September, not because of them.

6.23 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): We are very glad to have this opportunity to debate international terrorism again. It has been very apparent this evening that, as the process evolves, we have fresh questions to ask, and it is important that we have the opportunity to do so. I particularly thank the Secretary of State for International Development for coming here yet again to debate the humanitarian aspects, especially as we understand that her Department is extremely busy now.

I have gained the impression this evening that two debates have been going on simultaneously—one on the rights and wrongs of the military action and the other on the effectiveness of humanitarian action—but the truth is that the two are inextricably linked. Our aim is to support the Government, and I am very glad that the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), for one, was certainly clear about that in his speech. Of course, I sympathise with those who are asking for a pause in the bombing. That opinion was put with great passion—even epitomised—by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway).

No one likes war. No one unless there is something wrong with them, likes bombing people. No one likes to think that innocent people are being killed. To ask our service men to put their lives on the line, we must be clear about our aims.

Several hon. Members spoke of the nature of the threat that we face, the terror that has destroyed lives and compromised our normal way of life. Tonight on the wire comes news that anthrax has been found at an American embassy in Europe for the first time. The threat is present and on-going. The terror affects our ordinary daily lives. The President of the United States has had to go into hiding. We know the threat to have been very high in recent days. One of the fundamental questions is: do we want to go on living like this?

Several hon. Members—my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), the hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) and the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock)—correctly defined the perpetrators as "evil", as an "extreme sect" and as having hijacked Islam. That is important, because it will differentiate the terrorists from their false claims. It is not a holy war; we must not let bin Laden take us into one.

The Taliban's behaviour towards its own country both before and after 11 September is one of the fundamental problems that we seek to address. Before 11 September, it was the Taliban who were forcing aid workers to leave the country. The Taliban have abandoned their people, not us. Any aid worker who stayed in Afghanistan risked punishment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) said, 7.5 million people are at risk of starvation this winter and that is due in no small part to the way in which the Taliban have ruled their country. It is true that it is due in part to the famine and drought that they face, but it helps to emphasise the fact that fighting the Taliban is vital. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) said in his article in *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday:

"Removing the Taliban does not conflict with our humanitarian policy. It is the humanitarian policy".

Given all that, does the Secretary of State agree that the most significant humanitarian policy that the Government could adopt would be to rid Afghanistan of that brutal and oppressive regime, which has been the scourge of a country and a people for far too long?

Any war in any country will raise humanitarian questions. This war is certainly no exception. May I ask the Secretary of State about the news that 300,000 of the most vulnerable refugees have been allowed to enter Pakistan? We welcome that news, but has any similar progress been made in relation to opening the borders with Iran? What representations has her Department made to the Government of Iran regarding the refugees now gathering on the Iranian border? What extra help can her Department offer to deal with the real risk of political instability that that brings?

We welcome the news that some refugees will be allowed to cross the border into Pakistan, but unless care is taken that could exacerbate the problem. As I have said before, intermittent opening of the border causes people to mass at the Afghan border. What action is the international community taking to help those who have arrived on the border but cannot cross? Aid agencies report enormous difficulties helping refugees on the border owing to the presence of the Taliban themselves. How does the Secretary of State think we can best get aid to those people?

Geraint Davies: Does the hon. Lady agree that the United Nations should consider setting up a refugee zone inside Afghanistan, a safe haven that is protected from bombs, armaments and the Taliban and is provided with humanitarian aid? The people who wanted to get away from the difficulties could find a haven there.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Of course, without the co-operation of the Taliban, it is particularly difficult to bring about anything within the Afghan borders.

Geraint Davies: By force.

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Gentleman says "by force", but surely that is the point. I hope that he will concur with the Prime Minister that the removal of the Taliban is essential to the strategy.

Who will decide who is vulnerable enough to be allowed to cross the border? It has been reported that the Pakistani soldiers patrolling the border let through those who can pay, but not the widows and children who have no means of bribing them. Will the UN be able to monitor who can enter Pakistan?

The camp near Chaman is run by the Taliban. It was described by Ruud Lubbers as "like a prison". Are aid agencies allowed access to the camp? He also said that there were real fears that the camps would become training grounds for the Taliban. Are there any checks on refugee camps as potential recruiting grounds for the Taliban? Last winter, people throughout Afghanistan died of exposure in camps. I repeat the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) that everything possible be done to raise conditions in the camps to internationally acceptable standards.

I appreciate that it is very difficult to know exactly what is going on inside Afghanistan, but can the Secretary of State tell us whether there have been any measures to improve relief and shelter for the 2 million internally displaced people this winter? So far, there has been no national appeal jointly organised by the aid agencies. Given the possible longer duration of the war in Afghanistan, will she endorse such a national appeal by the Disasters Emergency Committee to ensure that there is enough support to sustain the humanitarian effort in the longer term?

Last week, the Secretary of State said that only 10 per cent. of the aid pledged had actually come in. What is her assessment today of the likelihood and time scale of the

[Mrs. Spelman]

pledges being fulfilled? In the International Development Committee this week, the aid agencies were asked how long a ceasefire would need to be to get enough aid in, but the answer is that it is already too late to get the past two months' supplies in, as well as enough stocks for the winter.

Great emphasis was laid on finding alternative means of bringing in aid. We welcome the news in today's press that DFID, with its Russian counterpart, has agreed a joint effort to deliver 9,000 metric tonnes of food in the north-east region. We understand that the programme is to be launched in the next two weeks, coinciding with the first snows. Can the Secretary of State assure us that the drivers will prioritise the areas most likely to be cut off by snow and not unload in more accessible areas?

In the International Development Committee on Tuesday, the point was made that there are gaps in the World Food Programme's aid, because staples are provided but not the complementary foods needed for babies, children, the sick and the elderly. Will the Secretary of State recognise those gaps and see what can be done to provide more appropriate food?

I hope that the Secretary of State will take these comments in the constructive spirit in which they are intended. The humanitarian situation unfolding before us could affect the whole course of the war. We face a terrorist threat that could cause great instability both here and in Afghanistan. These terrorists have no respect for our human rights and freedoms or those of the people of Afghanistan. We are not willing to allow them to compromise our way of life, and we should be equally determined to ensure that they no longer compromise the right to life in Afghanistan.

If we are to win the war—and I firmly believe that we owe it to the people of Afghanistan to win it for them—we must convince Afghans that the war is not against them. The people of Afghanistan could yet become our greatest allies in our bid to rid the country of the terrorists who have ruined it for too long. Let us do all that we can to build their trust.

6.34 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): This has been a good debate and most of the speeches have been extremely thoughtful and have addressed the real complexity of the situation facing us. It will be impossible for me to do justice to all the points that have been made, especially those relating to the humanitarian situation, and I shall be sure to write to the hon. Members to whom I am unable to respond tonight.

As I informed the House last week, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is dire. We cannot be sure that it will not get worse. We are succeeding in increasing supplies into Afghanistan, but the situation remains very worrying and very fragile.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Clare Short: No, not yet.

I shall come to the details of the present situation in a moment. Before doing so, I want to remind the House, the country, and especially my hon. Friends who are calling for a bombing pause, that the situation inside Afghanistan has been desperate, with terrible suffering resulting from endless war and misgovernment for very many years. For example, in 1998, the United Nations had to truck in 750,000 tonnes of wheat to keep starvation at bay. UN operations have been very difficult and harassed for very many years. The reality is that the Afghan people's plight has been desperate for a long time but until very recently too few people have been concerned about it.

As one of my hon. Friends said, a quarter of all the children in Afghanistan die before they reach the age of five. That is one of the worst figures in the world. Illiteracy was a major problem before the Taliban appeared, affecting 90 per cent. of girls and 60 per cent. of boys, and Taliban policies have worsened things terribly. Within three months of the capture of Kabul in 1996, the Taliban closed 63 schools in the city, throwing 103,000 girls out of school.

The Taliban also ordered that women could not teach. That meant 7,800 women teachers losing their jobs and 148,000 boys being thrown out of school. The Taliban also shut down Kabul university—it is not true that women were not educated in Afghanistan before the crisis—and that sent home 10,000 students, 4,000 of whom were women.

When the Taliban took Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998, a brutal and massive massacre followed, with thousands of corpses left littering the streets. There is continuing persecution of Shia and Sufi Muslims because the Taliban do not recognise Sufism or the Shia as legitimate traditions within Islam.

It is not true to suggest that there was not a terrible humanitarian and political crisis in Afghanistan before 11 September. Those who suggest that simply stopping the bombing would make everything all right are misleading themselves and misleading the public.

These are just a few examples of the barbarism that the Taliban have inflicted on the people of Afghanistan. As the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) pointed out, we must be clear that the removal of the Taliban Government, which is necessary to secure our objective of bringing bin Laden to justice and closing down al-Qaeda's headquarters in Afghanistan, is also absolutely necessary if the people of Afghanistan are to have any hope for the future. Those objectives are not clashing; they are completely complementary.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Is my right hon. Friend not being disingenuous in accusing those of us who want there to be a pause in the bombing of being against all military action and of being naive enough to think that the terrible humanitarian situation will be relieved overnight? My position is that bombing is interfering with the delivery of relief. We cannot get any information from my right hon. Friend about its impact, but it must surely be having an impact. The priority now, and part of the campaign against terrorism, must be to get humanitarian relief delivered to the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Lady must confine herself to an intervention.

Clare Short: I have many faults, but being disingenuous is not one of them. Those who suggest that

the only problem with humanitarian relief is the bombing are misleading themselves and misleading the country. They are not paying enough attention to the seriousness of the situation that we and that the people of Afghanistan face. I do not respect those who do not attend to the detail. I respect everyone's right to dissent—this is an enormously complex and difficult situation—but when people get up and pontificate, they really should do more work about the realities inside the country.

Mr. Alan Simpson: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Clare Short: No, I will not.

The reality is that the needs of Afghanistan have been largely ignored, as a couple of Opposition Members have said, since the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Since then, UN appeals have not been fulfilled. Warlords have devastated the country, and the brutal regime of the Taliban has made things ever worse. Afghanistan is suffering terribly. It has become like an economic black hole. It is causing intense suffering to its own people while sending out waves of insecurity and chaos to the surrounding region. The reliance of the ruined Afghan economy on the growing and sale of drugs has been undermining and corrupting neighbouring countries. It is an extremely dangerous situation for the people who live in the region and for the world as a whole.

Part of the nightmare—if we do not remain determined to succeed, it is one that we could face—that would result if we were to fail in our present efforts could be the destabilisation of Pakistan. Indeed, it could be the Talibanisation of Pakistan. We would then have a Taliban regime with a nuclear weapon facing another nuclear power with an unresolved problem over Kashmir. These matters are enormously serious.

I say to my colleagues and people outside the House—I am receiving thousands of letters, and thank heavens we live in a country where people are so troubled by the war and the bombing—that they are right to be troubled. War is always ugly. Bombing should always be regretted, but it is essential to the interests of the people of Afghanistan and of the world that we carry through our current efforts to success.

The reason why bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda network are headquartered in Afghanistan is the same reason why people are suffering so terribly. Afghanistan is a failed state. There is gross misgovernment by a brutal regime that twists and distorts all the teachings of Islam. We must bring the war to an end as soon as possible, and to achieve that we must do all that we can to support Ambassador Brahimi, who is leading the UN effort to bring together a transitional Afghan Government representative of all the people. That is the way in which the war will be brought to an end. That is the way in which the international community will be able to co-operate in bringing massive further humanitarian relief into the country and then helping in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Harry Cohen: I am in agreement with what my right hon. Friend says. However, has she heard the report on CNN today that cluster bombs are being dropped that are the same colour as the packaging of food parcels? Will she intervene so that that bombing is stopped at least until this matter is sorted out?

Clare Short: I am coming on to cluster bombs. I must confess that I try to avoid watching CNN. I will deal fully with the point raised by my hon. Friend and others when I made a statement on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

Ambassador Brahimi's work is continuing intensively throughout the world, as is the preparation of plans for the rehabilitation of Afghanistan. The plans have not yet been published, but I agree that it is important that all who are troubled by the war know that we are deadly serious about sticking with this and helping the Afghan people to have a proper country and a decent future. Today I can announce that I am making available £1 million to Ambassador Brahimi to help facilitate his efforts.

We must ensure that food and other humanitarian relief is provided to the people of Afghanistan for as long as it is needed, and that refugees are properly cared for. I say to the hon. Member for Meriden that the numbers of refugees have been much fewer than we expected. The UN appeal expected 1.5 million. About 80,000 refugees have made their way across the borders. The borders are closed, and that is a problem. We are trying to get them open. We are giving commitments to the Governments of Iran and Pakistan that we shall ensure that all the costs are recovered to them. The problem is that they were both left with 2 million refugees after the withdrawal of the Russians from Afghanistan, so they do not entirely believe that. They are also worried about arms and Taliban supporters coming in with refugees and destabilising their countries.

We have to keep up the pressure and care for the refugees. At the same time, we must have some sympathy and concern for the worries of surrounding countries that fighters will cross the borders, as they have before, and bring about destabilisation.

Geraint Davies: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Clare Short: No, I shall not do so for the minute. I am sorry; I shall give way later if I have time.

I can inform the House that food is getting into Afghanistan in larger quantities now than at any time since 11 September. As I said last time I spoke to the House, so many figures are flying about because of all that has happened in the past month. After 11 September, the withdrawal of international staff because of the threat to their lives meant that food stopped going into the country. Then it started again, but the bombing stopped it. So there have been varying amounts of food and the average for the month appears much worse than the actual performance on getting food into Afghanistan. I am providing figures that will go into the Library today on daily delivery into the country, which gives the clearest possible picture of the trend. Hon. Members will see that the trend is an upward one, but we must not be complacent and must do better.

Mr. Alan Simpson: Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Clare Short: No. I understand that my hon. Friend told the country that I was not saying what I meant. I resent that deeply. I would not dream of standing up and not saying what I mean about these matters. My hon. Friend should not have said such a thing.

The World Food Programme has increased deliveries and resumed them through the border at Chaman near Kandahar, where there are many displaced people. I am

[Clare Short]

pleased to announce that the UK has agreed to contribute £600,000 to help fund a joint effort by the World Food Programme and the Russian Government to increase food deliveries from Tajikistan to north-east Afghanistan in the next few weeks. As a result of that effort, a further 9,000 tonnes of food will be delivered into Afghanistan in the next two months.

As I have said before, our information on food delivery inside Afghanistan is incomplete, partly because the Taliban will not allow humanitarian workers to use telephones. They do so under threat of losing their lives. So we cannot even get accurate reports about the situation inside the country. There have been more reports of looting and vandalising. The Taliban still have control of the World Food Programme warehouse in Kandahar and the 1,600 tonnes of food stored in it. Sadly, however, many tonnes of food were lost when the International Committee of the Red Cross warehouse in Kabul was bombed—something that we should all regret very much. There should be a very thorough inquiry into how that occurred.

As a result of all those difficulties, the World Food Programme has decided where possible to bypass its warehouses in urban areas and deliver food directly to rural areas and communities. That means that distribution is fanning out across the country and more deliveries are occurring in that way, which is highly desirable.

As I have said, I genuinely understand all the people who call in their letters for a pause in the bombing, as well as my hon. Friends who make such calls, because they feel emotionally that is unbearable to bomb a people that is hungry. The truth is, however, that a pause would simply incentivise the Taliban and other fighters to attack humanitarian convoys. It would make the situation worse and would not be a solution. We must restrict the bombing to military targets, be very careful in doing it and bring it to an end as soon as possible, but pausing for humanitarian purposes would be a grave error. Future supplies of food would become military targets in order to prevent the conflict from continuing. It would be an error of enormous proportions.

Liaison between the humanitarian effort and the military to ease the delivery of food has improved since the start of the conflict, but it could be much better. It is crucial that we learn the lessons of previous crises in Kosovo, Bosnia and East Timor. Those lessons must be put into effect so that the military can ensure that it minimises all possible obstacles to the humanitarian effort. We did that well in Kosovo, but it is not operating now as well as it could. It could be corrected and we must get on with that with great urgency. I have experts in this area in my Department. We are working very hard to improve matters and we must ensure that more is done.

On cluster bombs, I promised the House in response to questions asked last week and again today that I would find out all I could about their use. I understand that 200 such bombs have been used against five targets. One of those targets was a terrorist training camp, while the others were Taliban military positions. The cluster bombs used are armed with general-purpose bomblets designed for use against vehicles and buildings. They are designed to explode on impact. None of the cluster bombs dropped over Afghanistan contained delayed action minelets or land mines. Britain has signed the Ottawa convention—some of my hon. Friends can take pride in that—so no UK facility could be used if such bomblets were being used. That is an important contribution.

Despite the terrible difficulties that we are facing, more food is getting into Afghanistan and deliveries inside the country are continuing. However, the situation is fragile. Before 11 September, we were faced with a country of 20 million people between 5 million and 7 million of whom needed food trucked in by the United Nations in order to remain alive. The so-called Government of that country was obstructing the delivery of humanitarian relief. The situation is very difficult, and it will continue to be difficult. No one should be complacent, but no one should pretend that the military campaign is causing the difficulties.

We must be intelligent and serious enough to pursue a number of objectives at the same time. We must be determined to bring bin Laden and his associates to justice and to close down the al-Qaeda network. That requires the replacement of the Taliban Government. At the same time, we must continue to truck in food and to provide for the refugees. We must unite the world around a plan for a replacement Government in Afghanistan who are representative of their people and want to co-operate with the international community.

Those objectives are difficult and complex, but they are do-able. Anything else is intolerable. Stopping the bombing and not taking action would result in more disasters like that at the World Trade Centre, and the people of Afghanistan would continue to suffer this abominable misgovernment that has brought them as low as they are today.

I shall now give way to my hon. Friend.

Geraint Davies *rose—*

Mr. Alan Simpson *rose—*

Hon. Members: Which one?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I thought the right hon. Lady was giving way to her hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson).

Clare Short: No, I was not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I bow to correction.

Geraint Davies: Has my right hon. Friend considered the viability of setting up United Nations runs and protected zones within Afghanistan for humanitarian aid to be delivered to people who would be protected from possible falling bombs?

Clare Short: Yes, indeed. In Islamabad, the representative of the UN special mission to Afghanistan said to me that we must have many different plans and enormous flexibility to be able to move forward, depending on how the situation develops on the ground. We hope that we will enable UN workers to return to parts of the country, so that trucking in food and humanitarian supplies will become easier in those areas—it will be areas rather than routes. It is difficult to negotiate with the Taliban to get any co-operation to bring in food. However, all such instruments will be tried.

As I said, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South misled the country about my views without even talking to me, so I have no intention of giving way to him. *[Interruption.]*

It is important that the talk of a war against terrorism be tempered by our explanations to the British people of our strategy to deal with this crisis. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Lady. This important debate is coming to a climax, and the Secretary of State should be heard in greater silence.

Clare Short: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The al-Qaeda network exists in 60 different countries, and its headquarters are in Afghanistan. We must bring different measures into play at the same time, one of which is the sharing of intelligence and information so that people responsible for co-operating with the network can be arrested and brought to justice, and the network dismantled. We must take much firmer action on money laundering. There is a big link between drug dealing and money laundering, which enables the network to function. Co-operation on action against money laundering can begin to dismantle the network.

We need military action in order to weaken the Taliban's military forces so that al-Qaeda cannot continue to operate in Afghanistan. We need to maintain our humanitarian effort to keep the people of Afghanistan fed. We must co-operate with the United Nations in preparing the ground for a new Afghanistan. Alongside that, we are working with the Governments of Iran and, most particularly, Pakistan so that they are not destabilised by our current activities.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): My right hon. Friend has rightly pointed out the dreadful position facing women in Afghanistan. As we prepare for the future in Afghanistan, what can her Department do to ensure that women have a stronger voice in the future?

Clare Short: People sometimes talk as if the treatment of women and girls in Taliban cities such as Kandahar is an example of the traditional treatment and education of Afghan women. That is wrong. Herat, for example, is an ancient and civilised city. It is a centre of learning and education. It is 5,000 years old and is talked of as a great city in the history of the world. There have been many great women at the university there—scholars, architects and so on. Many of the educated women have now left Afghanistan as refugees, but we must lay the plans for the new inclusive transitional Government that will enable the educated people of Afghanistan to return and help in the restoration of their country. Restoring the right to education for girls and boys is crucial.

A couple of weeks ago, I visited the North-West Frontier province, where there is a great deal of movement across the border with Pakistan. The education Minister there told me that the answer to backwardness and extremism is the education of girls. On behalf of our Government I undertook to work with the Government in the North-West Frontier province to ensure that, as rapidly as possible, boys and girls are educated. We must ensure that the full wonderful glory and civilisation of Islam is properly honoured by us, across the world and in Afghanistan. There is no teaching in Islam that says that girls should not be educated or that educated women should not be respected. That is a complete distortion, and bringing it to an end will be a priority for all of us as we create a new Afghanistan.

These are enormously serious and sombre times. As has been said, this is probably one of the most complex military and humanitarian disasters that the world has seen in recent years, if not ever. We must hold to our resolve and be determined to succeed. Success is possible, but very—

Mr. Dalyell *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That this House do now adjourn:—

The House divided: Ayes 13, Noes 373.

Division No. 48] **[6.58 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dalyell, Tam
Galloway, George
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Price, Adam
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wood, Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Paul Marsden and
Mr. Kerry Pollard.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*

Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Edward
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai
Hawkins, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Horam, John
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Leigh, Edward
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mallaber, Judy
Maples, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverhton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Winnick, David	Wright, David *(Telford)*
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*	
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*	**John McDonnell and**
Woolas, Phil	**Mr. Simon Thomas.**

Question accordingly negatived.

7.12 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For the record may we clarify the fact that all four Tellers in tonight's vote are opposed to the war and that it was a procedural issue that demarcated them as Tellers?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I think that that will be evident. If there is any doubt about it, individual hon. Members can undoubtedly make it clear in the usual way.

It being after Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed.

Cotswold Canals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

7.13 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am pleased to move this Adjournment debate and I know that others wish to say something about this important canal network, so I shall be precise.

This is an important issue and I immediately declare a non-pecuniary interest as a vice-president of the Cotswold Canals Trust, like the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). Although we draw no benefit from it, other than of a helpful kind, it is important to put that on the record.

I wish to speak almost exclusively about my part of the Cotswold canal system—Stroudwater—which goes from the Gloucester-Sharpness canal to Stroud and slightly beyond. Obviously, if and when we see the completion of this network it will link the Severn to the Thames, which is an important statement in terms of our ability to see how waterways can be opened up properly.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. There is not time to make a speech and I shall not delay the House. Does he agree that an important part of the network is the Wilts and Berks canal, which will join the two canals together to create a genuine network around the area?

Mr. Drew: I am more than happy to agree, because we are here in the true spirit of co-operation to ensure that we get the whole canal opened up, although I shall highlight particular problems that make that more difficult.

I am, as always, grateful to several people who helped me to prepare information, particularly those in British Waterways: chief executive David Fletcher and regional officers Chris Mitchell and John Lancaster. I am pleased to have met Roger Hanbury, chief executive of the Waterways Trust, several times recently. He is a good choice to ensure that we get the new organisation up and running so that it is as effective as possible.

Last but not least, I pay tribute to those members of the Cotswold Canals Trust who have, over many decades and through their voluntary and earnest efforts, kept alive the dream of reopening the wider canal network and the Stroudwater canal in particular. I must refer to Bruce Hall, Neville Nelder and Ken Burgin. Many more people are worthy of a mention, but we are short of time.

The debate is opportune, because it comes on the back of two important documents. The first, which is entitled "Waterways for Tomorrow", was released by the Government a couple of years ago. It is a stimulating read. For a long time, people thought that canals came on the back of every other form of transport and were of the past. However, the document proves that canals can make a difference to our overall integrated transport programme and, more particularly, that they have a vital role in tourism, recreation and economic regeneration. I shall say more about that later.

It is important to put it on record that professionalism increased as our effort to open up the canal network gathered pace. I have paid tribute to people, so I must

[Mr. Drew]

do likewise to organisations. British Waterways has exercised increasing influence and it took the network under its wing. Both it and the Waterways Trust are committed to the attempt to reopen the network.

I must also refer to the recently released report on the feasibility of restoring the Cotswold canals, which was produced by British Waterways and commissioned by the Waterways Trust and which shows that reopening, rather than being a long-held aim, is an eminently deliverable concept over time. The Minister might like to say how we can get funding and help.

I want to go over the key issues, of which there are several, and we cannot but start with technical matters. There is an understanding that the canal is historically important, as it dates back to the end of the 18th century, and we know that there were technical problems, because of water transference and because physical obstacles had to be overcome, not least the Sapperton tunnel, which remains in place and which will no doubt still cause difficulties if and when we get the canal open.

In the meantime, we must discuss the practical problems in my neck of the woods. Unfortunately, the canal system goes under the M5 and the A38. It also merges with the River Frome. None of those problems are insuperable, but in their own right they are a headache and we need to recognise that that is why the £82 million cost suggested by the report commissioned by the Waterways Trust is a fair estimate. I would argue that the goal is achievable. We will create a win-win situation in terms of reopening the canal and the tourism and recreation benefits that come on the back of that. We will also get the benefit of economic regeneration.

There are other issues. Of course, funding is important in its own right. I would like to think that the Minister can give us a steer and tell us how we can raise the money. It will not come from a single sector. A genuine relationship between the public and the private sector is needed, combined with the voluntary endeavours of those who have done so much to keep the spirit of the canal alive.

I would highlight the role that must be played by the south-west regional development agency, which is certainly in favour of reopening. Again, we must consider carefully how it can raise money. Obviously, we would be grateful for any help from central Government. We will also be looking for lottery funding. We understand that the Government cannot influence that, but I want to ensure that the matter is put on the table during this debate.

Planning and land ownership issues are involved and I will not pretend that the reopening of the canal has universal acclaim. Some individuals are disturbed by the thought that it will reopen—I and the other hon. Members present know them well. I understand the problem and that is why, in principle, I am concentrating on the western part of the canal, where there are not the same land ownership issues. We cannot avoid those issues, however, which must be sorted, and we must do so through dialogue. People must feel that they are being taken into the loop of discussion and we must ensure that they are listened to.

There are also planning issues. I will not wax lyrical on those, as I have received various rejections in written answers to parliamentary questions. I have raised the issue of Ebley wharf in my constituency, which is being funded on the back of a private development. I see that the Minister is laughing. He knows that I am slightly at variance with the way in which that matter has been handled.

If we do not get a proper balance between public, private and voluntary sector funding, the danger is that the canal trust must consider potentially conflicting development. That is what people in the area I mentioned feel, which is a shame. Some of the good will that has been built up over generations could evaporate if people see that the canal restoration is being funded through unnecessary and undesirable development. I will pass on quickly from that issue, but we must be aware of it.

On the western side, thankfully, land ownership is concentrated largely in the hands of the Company of Proprietors. I must mention the late Fred Rowbotham, who was the chairman of the company for years and wanted to see the reopening of the canal. Further east, many individual owners are involved, which will make reopening more difficult.

Water management is an important issue and we underestimate it at our cost. One can raise revenue through the movement of water and, if we can reopen the canal, we can move water. The Gloucester-Sharpness canal provides water for the Bristol water service, so the canal could raise revenue as it would allow access to drinking water. It could also act as a means of flood relief. Given the Minister's particular responsibility, he might wish to allude to that.

I touched on the rationale for reopening this canal network. It could be used for leisure-inspired activities and there may be a freight use, which I would not want to underestimate. Waste movement has also been mentioned.

Regeneration is another key argument and it is one of the factors that unites everyone. It is the factor that has driven me to pursue the matter as it is key in my constituency. Reopening the canal could regenerate the areas alongside it. It is not the key reason, perhaps, why Stroud will regenerate as a town, but if the project can be engineered it can only help that regeneration. I want it to happen sooner rather than later and many of my final conclusions will be based on the time scale involved. Fund raising can seem like an endless activity unless we can put a definite time scale on it. More and more people are becoming aware of that and thinking hard how to do it.

I am pleased that the keynote approach is one of partnership. The Conservative Members here tonight, whom I am pleased to see, represent areas that are part of the partnership. The canal system passes through countless local authorities as well as the other organisations to which I have referred. Many individuals also want to play a part.

Realistically, the only way in which we will reopen this canal system is by phasing the funding and engineering. It would help if we could get the project team up and running as soon as possible, and there is the will to do that. This is about maintaining momentum, building partnerships and making sure that the current style of leadership continues.

In conclusion, I have some questions for my hon. Friend. To me, the most important single organisation is the south-west regional development agency. How can we engage with the agency to ensure that it can lever in resources and work with the Waterways Trust? How can

we resolve some of the land ownership questions? They are tricky and we will have to face up to them sooner rather than later.

On a more general note, how can British Waterways borrow money? I have seen some material in formal Government publications and elsewhere. I asked a question for written answer about what degree of freedom British Waterways, as a public corporation, has outside Treasury rules. It would be fair to consider that opportunity.

There are the issues about navigability and whether British Waterways subsumes some of the activities currently undertaken by the Environment Agency and other organisations. I should be grateful for anything that my hon. Friend has to say about that.

How can we keep expectations rolling along in terms of deliverability? Finally, restoring the canals and regenerating the land alongside them is a genuine way for rural regeneration to link into transport and the use of brown land. The sooner we can deliver that, the better.

7.28 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who procured the debate, for allowing me to participate. I had not been aware that it was to take place until I saw it on the Order Paper, but I am now delighted to be able to participate.

I declare an interest as a vice-president of the Cotswold Canals Trust, in common with the hon. Member for Stroud. I am very pleased to be associated with that organisation. We are talking about restoring the canal link that linked the Severn to the Thames. A Bill was put through Parliament as long ago as 1783 to allow construction to begin to take place. In 1787, a 3,817 yd tunnel was built. To construct such a long tunnel—probably the longest that had ever been built in the world at that time—was no mean engineering feat. It remains the third longest canal tunnel in the United Kingdom today.

The hon. Gentleman told us that the link from the Thames to the Severn is in two parts—the Stroudwater canal, which leads up to the tunnel, with the Thames and Severn canal on the other side. The hon. Gentleman's part of the canal, the Stroudwater canal, is a much smaller project to complete. The feasibility study undertaken by Gloucestershire county council in 1996 estimated that that part of the restoration would cost about £10 million. Apart from the road links—the M5 and the A38 are significant problems that need to be overcome—the hon. Gentleman's part of the canal is largely in the same ownership.

The part that is covered by my constituency represents a much bigger engineering project. I have already mentioned that the tunnel is collapsing in places. The substrata of the canal have been a problem ever since the 1780s when the canal was opened. Cotswold limestone is porous and needs to be lined with clay. There are also altitude problems just at the other side of the tunnel at the Daneway, which is 350 ft above sea level. To give you an idea, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the engineering feat that was achieved, to get the water up to that level, there were 28 locks, and to get it down again there were another 15. It was a major engineering feat to build the canal in the first place, and it would be a major engineering feat to restore it to its former glory now.

Having said that, if the Government were to give sufficient lead—this is why it is important that the hon. Member for Stroud has secured this debate tonight—the huge amount of voluntary work that has already taken place in my section of the canal could be completed. I went one Sunday afternoon to see 100 volunteers working on the lock gate by the western spine road. That is an example of the enormous amount of voluntary work that is being done for a project that many people would like to see completed.

I am sure that the Minister will not be able to give precise pointers about where the funding might come from, but if he were to give a steer that the restoration was something that the Government would like to see happen, the huge number of volunteers and local people involved in the project would be able to combine their energies to ensure that the project was completed.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I thank all those people whom the hon. Member for Stroud has thanked, especially the Cotswold Canals Trust and its chairman, Bruce Hall. I also thank the local authorities, which are extremely supportive of the two projects.

Some landowners in my constituency have reservations about the restoration. By and large, the people who use canals are peace loving, quiet and well behaved. The canals give a great deal of opportunity for other leisure pursuits such as fishing. Some 7 million people walk by the canals each year. This is a highly commendable project. It is very environmentally friendly. It would bring great benefits to the whole of Gloucestershire, especially to tourism in this depressed time after the foot and mouth outbreak. It would be a good fillip to the Cotswolds if the Minister said something positive this evening.

7.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) for his knowledgeable speech and I congratulate him on obtaining this debate. As I told him before the debate, as part of my preparations for it I have been reading extensively about the canal system, which I found absolutely fascinating. I can well understand hon. Members on both sides of the House having such an interest in it; it has enormous potential and its history is interesting. Waterway restoration has been under way since the 1950s, and more than 400 miles of derelict waterways have been restored.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud rightly said, that restoration has brought with it the benefits of revitalising rundown areas, generating new jobs and development and increasing opportunities for leisure, recreation and tourism. I want to make it clear that the Government strongly support waterway restoration, because it acts as a catalyst for social, economic and environmental regeneration. There are currently more than 100 active restoration projects, each of which will make its own contribution.

Restoration of the Cotswold canals is one of the country's leading restoration projects. It is an ambitious project, as my hon. Friend said. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) rightly stated,

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

it offers the opportunity to re-establish the link between the Thames and the Severn, which would make it of national importance to the waterway system.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the Minister take it from me that there will be considerable support in my west Oxfordshire constituency for the reopening of the Cotswold canals? The upper Thames flows through my constituency from Lechlade in one corner towards Oxford in the other, and there is great potential to open up that waterway. Our canals are a great leisure benefit to people, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said.

In his remarks, will the Minister pay some attention to the call, which has great merit, to transfer leisure and tourism responsibility for our rivers from the Environment Agency to British Waterways? The latter is well placed to take a co-ordinated approach to leisure and tourism, taking in both canals and our rivers.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which was also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud, in relation to the current review of the Environment Agency—the quinquennial financial, management and policy review. It covers certain waterways where the Environment Agency currently holds the navigation rights and is considering whether they should be transferred to British Waterways. That decision has not yet been made, and it rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I can assure the House that she will take notice of the remarks that have been made and will give careful thought to the issues. Whatever the outcome, in developing the benefits of rivers and canals there are enormous merits in a closer partnership between British Waterways and the Environment Agency.

I am aware that regeneration will bring about restoration and will add impetus to the restoration schemes in the area, including the Wilts and Berks canal, which would reconnect the Thames with the Kennet and Avon canal via Swindon. The restored canals offer a possible route for water transfer from the Severn to the upper Thames, where there are significant water supply problems. The commercial possibilities of water transfer could help to fund restoration—a point made by my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend asked me to give some pointers regarding the finance that would be needed to fund that major restoration project. Obviously, there will be considerable discussion, but the regional development agency is a key player. The agency has joined a partnership to examine the feasibility of restoring the canals, and is considering raising funds for a feasibility and environmental impact study. It expects there to be other contributors, but the matter is under consideration.

There is also the heritage fund, for which landfill credits could be used. There is a great deal of mineral extraction in the area and there is real potential for landfill credit funding for the restoration. There could be partnership approaches involving the local authority, voluntary bodies and other organisations. British Waterways is ready to give technical advice and support. It has raised considerable sums, through water networking and by using canals for such things as cabling. Considerable revenue is raised from that, so it, too, offers possible funding. My hon. Friend referred to the potential of planning gain as a means of funding some of the restoration.

A range of opportunities can be examined, and the benefits are great. The British Waterways study reckoned that about 1.8 million new visitors could be attracted to the area and that they would bring with them spending power of about £8.5 million, creating about 500 new permanent jobs and more than 1,400 temporary construction jobs. That would be a significant boost for the economy of the area, as the hon. Member for Cotswold pointed out.

As an occasional canal user, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that one of the great attractions of inland waterways is the peace and quiet. The restoration would not be a threat to landowners, as the hon. Gentleman suggests; many benefits could be brought to the area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud asked me some questions about land ownership. Clearly, the best way forward is negotiation. We could take powers in relation to the construction of canals and railways, but in a restoration project of this kind it is better to proceed by negotiation. I am sure that that can be achieved.

My hon. Friend asked about the borrowing powers of British Waterways. It has the power to enter into public-private partnerships, and it has done so successfully. It also has the power to borrow according to Treasury rules, but it does not have the power to borrow on the open market at present.

I shall conclude by giving hon. Members the assurance that they seek. Although the Government do not underestimate the magnitude of the task, which may cost more than £80 million, I want to make it clear that we support the principle of such restorations.

Mr. Drew: It would be remiss of me not to invite my hon. Friend and Lord Whitty to visit that wonderful canal. With that in mind, will my hon. Friend perhaps help the various parties by updating himself and Lord Whitty on what they wish to do?

Mr. Morley: I assure my hon. Friend that I should be only too pleased to update my noble Friend Lord Whitty, who has responsibility for inland waterways in DEFRA, but I also assure him that I found the scheme so interesting that, if I can take the opportunity to visit his constituency, I shall be only too delighted to do so. [HON. MEMBERS: "And ours."] And those of other hon. Members—I seem to be awash with invitations at the moment.

In conclusion, I wish to say on behalf of the Government that we wish the restoration partnership every success. Although there will be many negotiations—we have to recognise that it is a long-term project—if we can play a constructive and positive role, we shall be only too pleased to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 2 November 2001

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that the first Bill on the Order Paper, the Patents Act 1977 (Amendment) Bill, has been withdrawn. We shall therefore proceed to the second Bill.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask both why this problem has arisen and two specific questions? First, why has the Bill been found to be defective only at this very late stage, whereas the defect might have been identified earlier? Secondly, why is it not possible to rescue this potentially useful Bill by amendment in Committee?

Mr. Speaker: I was concentrating on the hon. Gentleman's first point; could he repeat his second one?

Dr. Cable: Some hon. Members attending this debate were hoping that this useful Bill might be passed for further scrutiny and improvement by amendment in Committee. Why is it not possible to do that?

Mr. Speaker: It is entirely up to the hon. Member promoting a private Member's Bill, even when we have gathered in the Chamber to debate it, to decide whether he or she wishes to proceed with it. As I said, the Bill has been withdrawn. There can therefore be no other comment on the matter.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you not agree that it is a gross discourtesy to hon. Members when a Bill is withdrawn at such a late stage? I certainly spent some time yesterday afternoon preparing a speech for this debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."]—and I know that many other hon. Members have done the same. If notice of the Bill's withdrawal had been given earlier—yesterday morning, for instance—much of the time that has been spent by hon. Members could have been saved and diverted to other purposes. Did the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) give you a reason for withdrawing the Bill?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is asking me to express an opinion, but as he knows, I cannot do that. I am not entitled to an opinion so I cannot help him. However, I am sure that there will be an occasion when he can use his speech.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Whilst not asking you to express an opinion, I wonder whether you think that it would have been appropriate for the hon. Member for Bridgwater to have an opportunity at least to express to hon. Members in the Chamber why he felt it was appropriate to withdraw the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Bridgwater is guided by the same rules as guide all hon. Members: the rules of the House. He has exercised his right to withdraw the Bill and there is nothing more to be said about the matter.

Orders of the Day

Food Labelling Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.37 am

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I shall have slightly more time for this debate than I had anticipated, but I am sure, seeing the calibre of people on the other side of the Chamber, that Labour Members will have no trouble in adapting their speeches on the first Bill, if they want to make them, to this debate.

For the past 10 years I have been faithfully applying for the ballot for private Members' Bills, and in each of those years I have failed. I have tried just about every imaginable method to win, including using various combinations of my telephone number and the dates of my wedding anniversary and birthday. At last, however, I have hit upon a way of winning, and I have no objection if other hon. Members copy it. I decided to use my house number. Next year I shall again use my house number, as I am convinced that it is a winning combination.

My Food Labelling Bill owes very much to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien)—whom I am very pleased to see on the Opposition Front Bench—as it contains a great deal of his Food Labelling Bill. The inclusion is intentional both because his was an excellent Bill and because I wanted to build consensus based on known legislation. My Bill makes some minor amendments to the earlier Bill, to make it somewhat Euro-friendly, but I shall deal with those later.

I am very grateful for the backing of hon. Members on both sides of the House. My Bill's supporters include the hon. Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry), the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) and my hon. Friends the Members for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) and for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson).

Of course, hon. Members put their names to the Bill before the summer, and it has been a very exciting summer politically. Many of those who agreed to put their names to the Bill are unable to be here today because of their new appointments. In fact, it seems that I have been remarkably good at picking out the rising young turks on the Tory Benches—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Was my hon. Friend referring to me?

Mr. Pickles: I was referring to the young and the young at heart. My right hon. Friend did not put his name to my Bill; nevertheless I feel graced by his presence today.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Does that not indicate, completely counterfactually, that the right hon. Gentleman has a heart?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Pickles: I am sure that we are all grateful that it is not likely to be put to the vote.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): He would have to be labelled.

Mr. Pickles: I am not sure where we would put the label.

Hon. Members should take heart, as some of the Bill's luck will probably reflect on them and when they rise to the dizzy heights of the Cabinet, perhaps they will owe it to their presence here today.

The Bill is a modest measure which attempts to build an all-party consensus. I hope that hon. Members will not be disappointed to hear that I do intend not to be confrontational towards the Government, but to move the issue on and to get a decision or a promise without delay. Given the time, it is quite possible that we will have the opportunity to thrash out some of the issues today. I hope that the measure will be considered in Committee so that it can receive line-by-line scrutiny that will result in a solution. Perhaps I am slightly undermining my case by saying that I do not mind whether it is found through this legislation, but it is really important to have honest labelling of food products.

My clear intention is the unambiguous, straightforward and, above all, honest labelling of food. Everyone agrees that there is a need for it—from the Prime Minister to past agriculture Ministers to the present Minister with responsibility for the food chain. Ministers have made speeches at National Farmers Union conferences and other gatherings saying that it is necessary because the United Kingdom has a higher standard of care of animals and we want to get on the side of our producers. Farmers, retailers and shoppers all want something better. This is an honest and straightforward attempt to achieve that.

The Bill attempts to bring form and substance to the intention of Parliament when we passed measures to protect the welfare of animals. It is also an attempt to help the hard-pressed farming industry. Hon. Members will be aware that the first diagnosed case of foot and mouth disease was discovered in my constituency of Brentwood and Ongar in February. The outbreak was restricted to the abattoir and some surrounding farms. I saw at first hand the devastating effect of that terrible disease, not just on the farmers and the land, but on the wider rural economy. I readily concede that the effect on Brentwood and Ongar was little more than a pinprick compared with the suffering of farmers in Cumbria and Northumberland; nevertheless it is still felt today.

Above all, the Bill attempts to empower consumers—to give them a ready avenue to make the choice that Parliament and the Government are so keen for them to exercise. I should stress that it is certainly not an attempt to restrict imports or ban methods of production that are perfectly legal throughout the EU. We took a conscious decision to apply different rules to animal husbandry in particular, and we did so for the very best of reasons. We wanted to reflect on how animals should be kept, to set clear standards in respect of how they should be reared and fed, and on movement. Of course, the methods that we used before the regulations were imposed and the law

was changed are cheaper, and the methods that we have chosen for the United Kingdom are inevitably more expensive. Parliament laid down the standards and it is now up to us to ensure that the public have an opportunity to reflect those standards in their choice of purchase.

We did not take decisions in a vacuum or lead the public; we followed public opinion, which has been very clear on this for a number of years. According to a recent survey by the Food Standards Agency, nearly 90 per cent. of consumers are concerned about the way in which animals are reared. I can think of no better way of expressing this than quoting the response by the National Pig Association to the policy commission on the future of farming. It is dated October 2001 and says:

"Citizens expect to consume meat in this country which has been raised in high welfare and ethical standards. The Government responds to these expectations by setting standards of production, transport, welfare, etc which reflect the demands of society . . .

At the point of sale the consumer is not provided with accurate labelling so that an informed choice can be made and full values, including welfare and ethical values, cannot be compared."

What that means in practice is that when someone goes into a supermarket, they are not able to exercise that choice.

Since the Bill was last presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury, the famous red tractor scheme has been introduced. Last week I went into my local Tesco, where I have been shopping for about 10 years, and it was festooned with—

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): Did the hon. Gentleman have his reward card?

Mr. Pickles: I did indeed. I know that the Deputy Prime Minister has some valueless card, but I carry this one and I am very pleased that it is blue.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene with regard to my Tesco card; still, out of sheer curiosity I give way to him.

Mr. Bryant: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is worried by reward cards and the fact that, generally, all supermarkets are fully aware of exactly what food he eats week by week?

Mr. Pickles: I am sure that the nation is delighted to know about my consumption of baked beans and British sausages. I have to say that there is a tremor of excitement in the Pickles household when the little reward card comes and I can get 20p off a packet of crisps and maybe a jar of Bovril, but I lead a relatively quiet life. The hon. Gentleman would deprive me of such things. I am happy for people to know what I buy in return for the small gifts that I am pleased to receive.

Anyway, I went towards the meat counter and saw that it was festooned with red tractor signs. There were pictures of benign looking farmers in their shirt sleeves smiling down at me, extolling the very best of British products. I receive all sorts of promotional material from Tesco and do not doubt its commitment to the scheme. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) managed to get me to disclose that I am a regular customer and I receive correspondence not just on crisps and Bovril, but on British beef and British meat. I thought that it would be relatively easy for me to pick out a pack of British bacon, but it was not.

An ordinary person, not someone involved in the regulations, would think that British bacon had been raised, slaughtered, cured and packed here. However, I had to spend a serious amount of time looking, almost to the point where I seemed to be loitering. I am sure that the security staff were starting to form a cordon around me because I was picking up pack upon pack. Although I managed to find local bacon close to the red tractor sign, it was surrounded by bacon from all over the world.

I picked up a pack that I was certain was British bacon because it was described as Wiltshire cure. On closer examination, I became convinced that the unfortunate pig that supplied it had not so much as seen a postcard of Wiltshire, let alone visited that fine county.

Tesco offers plenty of choice, but as a consumer I could not easily exercise it. I wanted to buy a product that was produced to a high standard of animal welfare. The lack of honest labelling prevented me from doing so.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that the National Farmers Union sought to introduce and sponsor the red tractor logo because the Government had not given the previous Food Labelling Bill the opportunity to proceed? In the absence of that, a second-best—albeit welcome—scheme had to be introduced by the NFU that was to British farm standards. A product does not have to be British, but simply has to comply with those standards. That is very different from the opportunity presented by the Bill.

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is right. I am pleased that the NFU and the National Pig Association support my endeavour to introduce the Bill. I thank those organisations, FoodTrak and, in particular, the Food and Drink Federation for helping me to draft the Bill, including the changes that we have made to my hon. Friend's Bill.

When we debated the previous Bill, we spent an inordinate amount of time discussing whether it was an anti-European Union measure. As my hon. Friend said at the time, that is absolutely not the case. The Bill has been carefully worded so that that will not happen. The EU law on labelling has a flexible interpretation. We have been offered guidance on that. We are not introducing covert protectionism or retaliation. Obviously, the European court will check whether it conforms with agreements.

Since the previous debate, we have agreed that British beef should be labelled with its country of origin. The European Commission has ruled that that is legal under EU law. In France, the national pork federation and the federation of commerce and distribution have signed an agreement to allow the identification of the origins of pork sold through retail outlets in France. That reasonable measure is initially targeted at fresh meat, but more complex identification of processed products is expected to follow.

[Mr. Pickles]

In addition, a 3D label in Germany identifies the origin of domestically produced poultry meat, which has to meet detailed quality criteria and feed standards. A former Attorney-General has also given us the benefits of his views:

"there is every reason to think that the Bill could be put into a form that would comply with EU law, even if it does not already."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2000; Vol. 345, c. 712.]

It would not have been possible to attract support from hon. Members on both sides of the House if the Bill had been a bit of Euro-bashing. Frankly, I would not have supported it if it had been. I also doubt whether we would have obtained the support—

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman may want to hear what I am about to say before he goes on about cards again.

We would not have obtained the support of the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), who represents my neighbouring constituency and is, I think, a chairman of Labour's pro-European group.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why he would not want to present the Bill if it were just a means of Euro-bashing?

Mr. Pickles: Because I am that kind of person.

We want to build on EU law. We should take a lead and be not just at the heart of Europe, but at its cutting edge. That is not simply my view; it is also held by the noble Lord with responsibility for the food chain. Many hon. Members will have been glued to their television sets every night during the recess watching "Newsnight". There was a fascinating discussion on 28 August, and I have a transcript of that interview with Mr. Tim Bennett of the NFU and Lord Whitty. I shall not read out the whole interview because, although riveting at the time, it would be tedious now.

In an exchange that reflected Lord Whitty's views, Mr. Tim Bennett said:

"If we are going to produce better food quality, produced to these exacting standards and to compete with lower prices from around the world, we have to make sure the consumer is informed about how the product is produced. Because at the moment we don't get that."

Kirsty Wark, a presenter on the programme, asked, "Why not?" Mr. Bennett replied:

"it's a combination possible from the retailer and from the Government. If Government wants us to go down the lines of less intensive, they have to make sure the labelling laws in this country make sure the consumer is well informed about how our food is produced."

Kirsty Wark then asked:

"Lord Whitty, is that something you would be doing immediately?"

He responded:

"The laws are by and large EU".

to which Ms Wark said:

"There are ways you can build on EU laws? And that's exactly what they're asking for."

Lord Whitty said:

"I would agree. We need to make sure the consumer is aware of the way the product has been produced. Its origin. And the environmental standard which it has met."

Lord Whitty wants legislation to make the consumer aware of how the product is produced, its origin and the environmental standard that it has met. The Bill seeks to do nothing less. It would put into legislative form what Lord Whitty wants. "Newsnight" is not an obscure programme on which to make such an announcement. I suspect, and it grieves me to say so, that it may have reached more people than this debate will.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Shame.

Mr. Pickles: It is indeed a shame, but no doubt the time will come when the reading of *Hansard* at the breakfast table will again be a common practice among the population.

Mr. Bryant: When was it common practice?

Mr. Pickles: In the Pickles household. After I have gone through communications from Tesco and various loyalty cards, the next thing I reach for is *Hansard*.

Lord Whitty's assurance is sufficient in itself to get this measure into Committee.

Ms Atherton: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that for us in Cornwall, food labelling is particularly important. Cornish clotted cream and Cornish pasties on any table in Cornish households are the subject of much debate. How would the Bill affect those households?

Mr. Pickles: I am certain that Cornish householders keen to support local produce or higher animal welfare standards will be in a better position to do so as a result of the Bill. Various rules exist within the European Union with regard to regional identification. That is a building block that the Bill enhances. However, the Bill is specific about enhancing methods of production and environmental standards and about country of origin.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): When the Cornish purchaser is buying clotted cream, what percentage of the milk in that cream will be from Cornwall? Perhaps the Bill would be a way of finding out whether the milk used is imported or from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Pickles: That is a very good point. It marries my point and that of the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) with an eloquence that I could not match.

Ms Atherton: So smooth.

Mr. Pickles: Well, I am in politics.

A regulatory set-up in the EU covers whether a product is Cornish clotted cream or clotted cream produced by the Cornish method. My Bill would demonstrate to the Cornish purchaser—as the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury would have done—that the product was indeed a product of the United Kingdom, or at least of England and Wales.

Mr. Gardiner: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that under the existing legislation and the EU legislation on

food labelling, food is considered to have been manufactured or produced in the country in which it last underwent a treatment or process resulting in substantial change. The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) queried whether Cornish clotted cream would have to contain Cornish milk to make it Cornish. Under the existing legislation it would be Cornish if it had undergone its last major substantial process in Cornwall.

Mr. Pickles: That is right. The Bill would make things transparent. It is not about banning things or stopping them happening but about honesty in labelling.

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman has been extremely kind in giving way on many occasions this morning. Does he accept that many people find the Bill disappointing precisely because it does not seek to prescribe certain elements? It would not inform people about the problematic ingredients to which many people have allergic reactions, such as nuts. Many people thought that the Bill would provide that if food contained nuts, that would have to be specified on the label. It is a source of great disappointment that the Bill does not seek to tackle something that is a very real problem for many people in this country.

Mr. Pickles: Those issues are covered by other labelling regulations, but I am not a proud man and if the hon. Gentleman wants to enhance my Bill, I will willingly accept his help. If he wants to help the Bill through the Committee, I will lobby the Labour Whips. I will have more to say about nuts and potato crisps shortly.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: The critical question that was raised by the hon. Members for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) and for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) underpins the intent behind the Bill. As I understand it, the Bill is not just to do with the latest substantial-change treatment to the raw material—or to the material in the form in which it is received at the plant—as is the case under current legislation. It is to do with the overall content. We want consumers to be confident about what they are buying. Knowing the provenance of a product, as well as being aware of the standards of production that led to the last substantial change, gives consumers confidence. Knowing where the milk came from is as important, if one wants to be sure that it has been treated at the original source in a way that will give consumers confidence, as the latest substantial-change treatment. Hence, a main ingredient is defined as anything that is more than 25 per cent. of the content. I hope that helps to address the points that were raised.

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is quite right. During the last debate on this issue, we spent some considerable time on this almost de minimis point. My hon. Friend was quite keen to ensure that we do not become bogged down in clotted cream or shepherd's pie, as it were. He reminds me that I should have said that the remarks of the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) came close to protectionism and the desire to ban imports. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention because it has taken a couple of pages off my speech. *[Interruption.]* He put it far better than I could.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: I do not think I will ever resist giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bryant: I thank the hon. Gentleman, but I am a little frightened by that comment

Mr. Pickles: So you should be.

Mr. Bryant: The point about 25 per cent. content is very significant. Let us consider lemon tart, or tarte au citron as they call it in other countries, not to mention Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury, although not in Tesco. Actually, to most of us in Wales, it is lemon meringue pie. Clearly, lemons never constitute 25 per cent. of a lemon meringue pie, however it is made. None the less, a lemon meringue pie without lemons, or without significant lemon taste, or when one cannot identify where the lemons come from, might be a lesser lemon tart.

Mr. Pickles: I am not certain about most things in life, but I am certain that someone who wishes to sell a lemon tart—or even a tarte au citron—intends to put the description on the label. What we should be concerned about is making sure that what is on the label is honest. There is no reason why the label should not display the fact that the lemons are Israeli, or Palestinian, or come from Spain. That seems perfectly reasonable.

I am beginning to develop the view that we should not get bogged down in clotted cream, shepherd's pie or tarte au citron.

Mr. Bryant: It is a nice idea, though.

Mr. Pickles: I suppose it is—but I have been on a diet, and I am a born-again muesli man myself. Let us move on.

A number of things have happened since our last debate. We have had the voluntary code, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury has rightly pointed out, the farm assurance scheme. I think that that has been a success, to some degree, in attracting people's attention and increasing awareness of the quality of UK products. That is quite right. Indeed, it has been said from the Government Front Bench that British food remains the best in the world.

However, confusion still exists. We have managed to increase awareness, but not the way in which consumers can act on that awareness. Consumer and farming organisations are still demanding a fairer labelling system, backed by the law.

The second development is less welcome—the outbreaks of classical swine fever and foot and mouth disease. As I have said, although my constituency fortunately escaped classical swine fever, it did suffer from foot and mouth. That was an awful experience, devastating not only for the people directly involved but for the wider community.

One of the features of previous agriculture debates in which I have participated has been the analysis of farm incomes published at this time of year by the accountants Deloitte & Touche. The October figures for this year have just been released, which is timely. It is shocking to hear that on a typical 500-acre family-run farm, annual profits

[Mr. Pickles]

have decreased from £80,000 to only £2,500 in five years. Deloitte & Touche estimates that in the year 2000, the average farmer's salary was only £8,000 a year.

Total income from farming for the year 2000 has fallen by 27 per cent. in real terms to £1.88 billion—down by more than two thirds over the past five years. To give some kind of comparison, I must tell the House that in 1996 it was more than £5 billion. Bank borrowing by the agriculture industry continues to rise, amounting to some £10 billion, while investment levels on farms are the lowest since the early 1970s.

Most shocking of all, the National Farmers Union estimates that about 47,400 farmers and farm workers have left the industry in England and Wales over the past two years. I know about that from my local farming sector. I met its representatives in early October and they talked about their sons' and daughters' reluctance to enter the farming industry. In my area, the tradition of farming continuing down the generations is, in some cases, about to end.

The most dramatic effects have been on the pig industry. Over the past 10 years, the size of the UK herd has fallen sharply, and now stands at its lowest level for more than 50 years. Imports of pigmeat have consistently risen. Between 1994 and 1999, the UK was a net exporter of fresh pork in every year except one. Last year, the position was reversed and the home producers could not sustain their share of the market. In short, the retailer and the food service sector in general are importing food produced to a lower specification.

I emphasise the fact that my Bill does not seek to outlaw that, but simply to ensure that the purchaser has a right to know which products conform to the standards that the British consumer has long come to expect.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster) *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: I give way to my hon. Friend and neighbour.

Angela Watkinson: The hon. Gentleman and I do, indeed, share a constituency boundary. A farm in my constituency, only one mile from that boundary, was one of the earliest sufferers from foot and mouth disease. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that the Bill is non-discriminatory towards imports of products of any origin that find themselves in our shops? It is the honesty in labelling that will enable the customer to understand the variation in prices, which reflect the variation in standards of production. Production costs in this country are higher because of the high standards of animal husbandry. If customers know where the products come from, they will have an explanation as to why some imports are cheaper than some home-produced items. Customers will know that although they are paying a little more for a product, they are getting a higher-quality product. Is that not why honesty is so important?

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is right. The Bill is about quality and quality assurance. It is about ensuring that customers are not misled into purchasing what they think is local bacon, because it is called "Wiltshire cure", only to find that it is more likely to have come from Czechoslovakia or Poland. I am happy for people to purchase Czechoslovakian or Polish bacon; I have no problem with that—but I want people to be able to know that they are purchasing bacon that has been produced in conformity with the quality assurance and the standards of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: Of course. The hon. Gentleman has a free pass, so far as I am concerned. Any time he wants to come in, he is most welcome.

Mr. Bryant: The good thing about free passes is that as they are free, one does not feel one needs to use them all the time, just to get good value.

I was just wondering whether the hon. Gentleman was aware that Czechoslovakia is now the Czech Republic. It is not one country any more.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman is, of course, most helpful—and absolutely right. I was not speaking in a strictly geographical sense. I am very much aware that there is the Czech Republic and the other part of what was Czechoslovakia, and all the other places in eastern Europe. The point that I was making is that the Bill is about ensuring that standards of husbandry can be assured.

The figures that I read out from the Deloitte & Touche report do not entirely take into account the full effects of classical swine fever and foot and mouth. I am afraid that if we have a similar agriculture debate this time next year, the situation is likely to look even grimmer. I hope I have said enough to show that the estimated cumulative loss to the UK pig industry between 1998 and the end of 1999 was about £340 million.

The importance of the pig industry should never be underestimated. As the distinguished journalist Digby Scott—the winner of this year's David Black award—said when receiving his award at an event on Wednesday attended by several hon. Members:

> "If you picture the countryside as an enormous inverted pyramid, then pig farming is that tiny pin prick at the very bottom—helping support the huge economic structure above of leisure, tourism, retailing, manufacturing and government."

The effect of foot and mouth disease in my constituency completely convinced me of that. I was surprised that so many rural businesses and so much diversification of farmland depended ultimately on cattle and pig production.

The foot and mouth restrictions did not only affect a tiny farming community: they went deep into the countryside and deep into the suburbs. The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne and I attended a meeting about waterways where we were told about the effects of foot and mouth disease on our inland waterways and about the impact on tourism. We must not underestimate the importance of basic farming production for the infrastructure and social cohesion of the countryside and the general community.

Although I have slightly more time than I anticipated as the first Bill we were to have debated was withdrawn, I think I am in danger of being rather self-indulgent in terms of time, so I shall turn quickly to the clauses. The

purpose of clause 2 is to ensure that food labels carry particulars of the country or countries of origin of each of the major ingredients of the food.

Clause 3 is concerned with production standards. The intention is that where food production standards are lower than those that apply in England and Wales reference must be made to that on the label.

Clause 4 is similar to provisions in the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury, but I draw hon. Members' attention to subsection (1) which sets out rules on packaging, and anticipates the growth of web-based and bar-code information systems. The hon. Member for Brent, North expressed deep concern about notes, and paragraph (e) would address that problem. It would ensure that consumers can obtain information on a specific product, either through the web or from bar codes. Hon. Members will be familiar with the little price guns that we see in Safeway, Waitrose or Sainsbury; they contain much more information than merely the price and the product name.

The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) who was in his place, but is now on the Treasury Bench—

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): He is never still.

Mr. Pickles: Indeed. The hon. Member for Hendon will like my next point. It is possible to take one of those guns, point it at a packet of Walkers crisps and find out which field the potatoes were picked from. That is obviously of some importance with regard to pesticide controls and the like. Within a very short time it will be possible for people to use such programmed systems, so that someone who has a nut allergy or does not want to buy products from a certain country or wants to obtain particular products will be able to use those guns in supermarkets. They will be an enormous help—

Mr. Stephen O'Brien *rose*—

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is about to enlighten us. I cannot wait.

Mr. O'Brien: The technology exists; indeed it existed 18 months ago. The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) has also done a great deal of work in this area, and he and I have talked to some of the corporate entities who are at the leading edge. There is already a link between everything in my hon. Friend's Bill, the animal welfare standards and the food safety regime: computer programmes can help to identify a product on the supermarket shelf—however it has been treated and presented—back to the field, the animal or the farm whence it came. For instance, Swedishtasty.com will explain exactly where a piece of beef came from—*[Laughter.]* Swedishtasty.com is a particularly good site—I recommend it strongly. It is a good example. I intervened because my hon. Friend is right and I endorse his point that the Bill offers an opportunity to enhance and bring together the various strands to deliver benefits to producers and consumers alike.

Mr. Pickles: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I had heard that he was a great devotee of the website Swedishtasty.com—I was delighted to discover that it was about meatballs—*[Laughter.]* Perhaps we should gently draw a veil over that point.

The proposals will bring honesty into labelling. They attempt to build on EU legislation, and will offer help to the farming industry without asking for subsidy or unfair advantage. The Bill will empower the consumer to make informed purchasing choices and gives strength to measures that the House has previously adopted with enthusiasm.

I commend the Bill to the House.

10.27 am

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I am delighted to speak on the Bill. I compliment the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on his tenacity in holding the House captivated for the past 50 minutes. I congratulate him on his good fortune in securing such a significant place in the private Members' ballot. I am glad that he has let the rest of the House into his secret. I shall make sure that I enter my house number in the ballot next year in order to secure similar good fortune.

I begin by looking at the issue of nuts—a cause of great concern in relation to food labelling regulations. Nuts are the most prevalent of the allergens in food that can cause significant trauma to people. For many, many years a sizeable lobby has pressed for better legislation to ensure that the labelling of food products is simple and clear.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's remarks about transparency and honesty in labelling. That is of fundamental importance. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman had known of them, he would have been extremely supportive of the questions that I put earlier this year to the former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food asking what steps he was taking to ensure standardisation of food labels so that universally recognised symbols could be adopted for descriptions of foods that, first, contain nuts; secondly, and equally important, do not contain nuts and verifiably have not done so in any part of their processing; and, thirdly, might contain traces of nuts. That is the clarity and honesty in food labelling for which many people have been calling.

Earlier this year, I received from my constituents the Doran family correspondence that says:

> "I find it so frustrating that so many issues take top place on the agenda when so little people are actually affected, i.e.: beef labelling, GM foods. I am not minimising the anguish of those people who are affected by them but it feels that the issue of nut allergy is left on the shelf because the tide of public opinion hasn't yet knocked on its door.
>
> My son could die if he ate something with a trace of nut, or nut oil in it. He is four years old. We can't leave him with family and friends because it is too easy to forget that this simple food could kill him. But it would be far easier if we knew that anyone who was minding him could look at a product and know straight away if it had nuts or not—and if so, it should state if it is nut free."

I could quote much more extensively from correspondence from the Dorans and others.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I am aware of that problem because my nephew, Adam, suffers from the same allergy. It is extremely difficult to buy Easter eggs, for example, because even when one thinks that one is buying pure chocolate it can contain a trace of nut that is often not put on the label. It is a difficult problem, especially for uncles trying to buy treats for their young nephews.

Mr. Gardiner: That is yet another example of the importance of this matter. As my hon. Friend says, it is not just a social problem—uncles buying treats for their nephews—it can be critical for allergy sufferers.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar was good enough to say that if improvements can be made to the Bill in Committee, he will be open to accepting them. If the Bill receives a fair wind and passage today, I hope that he will be true to his word.

Mr. Pickles: I wish to be absolutely straight with the hon. Gentleman and confirm that point: yes, I would very much welcome his suggestion.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

There is hope, even if the Bill were not to get a fair passage today, because I understand that the European Commission considered the matter recently. The Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), and other Ministers have been pressing the Commission to take action on this matter for some time and the Government have been most insistent on some exemptions to ingredients lists. In September, the Commission introduced a proposal to ensure that allergens were listed and, if the proposal is adopted, nuts and other such allergens will have to be listed wherever they are used. That will be a big step forward in improving transparency and honesty in labelling.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will take note of what has been said in the Chamber this morning: that it is not good enough simply to note when a product contains nuts; it is equally important to say when it does not and when it might. The doubt that can arise from food labelling is extremely worrying to parents and other carers.

Angela Watkinson: One of my grandchildren has a nut allergy and I am well trained in reading the information on sweet labels. Sometimes, however, the print is so small that I need a magnifying glass, which I do not happen to carry with me when I shop. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be much more useful to have the simple phrase "nut free" rather than having to trawl through a list of ingredients in search of the words:

"May contain traces of nuts."

Mr. Gardiner: I certainly agree with the hon. Lady in the case of products that can be certified nut free. I hope that she agrees that, in cases where there is no significant use of nuts in the production process, yet where one sector of the kitchen where it is produced makes food containing traces of nuts, it is important that the food product that officially contains no nuts should not state that it is nut free, because the dangers of cross-contamination in such a production process can prove fatal.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: Has the hon. Gentleman compared the timetable of this Bill, if it is given a fair passage and is successful in entering our domestic law, with discussion of the matter within the EU, which has been rightly and fairly highlighted? Given the moving and important story of the four-year-old in his constituency, it would appear that time is of the essence and that we must look at the fastest track to ensure that safety for consumers, particularly those with allergies, is put on our statute book to instil the highest possible confidence.

Mr. Gardiner: I have certainly considered the time scale in which the EU might be able to act. Discussions on country of origin labelling began in May of this year at a meeting of the CODEX committee on food labelling. They are expected to continue at the committee's meeting next year, but in the meantime the agency will review its guidance on country of origin labelling to ensure that it tackles that and other issues that concern consumers. The question is, what will that guidance be and how quickly can it be implemented? I understand that it will be implemented before the next meeting of the CODEX committee.

Mr. O'Brien: Although guidance is important, the hon. Gentleman's earlier comments can be underpinned by the need for confidence. Above all, his arguments seemed to suggest that he supported the necessary statutory regime that could enforce that level of confidence. Guidance may be welcome, but I urge him to look carefully at the opportunity that the Bill presents to ensure that that is in place well before—given its track record on the issue—the EU's programme for determination of this subject.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. Judging from the consensus that appears to exist in the Chamber this morning, the correct labelling of food products to denote potential allergens in them has all-party support. Actually, it has cross-party support—although we have not been joined by other Opposition parties this morning—and we would all like to see it put into legislation as fast as possible.

I now come to the elements of the Bill addressed by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, particularly labelling with the country of origin. First, however, I wish to ask the hon. Gentleman why he adopted specific interpretations in clause 1. One of my questions arises from bitter personal experience. Clause 1 says:

"'food' is to be interpreted in accordance with section 1 of the Food Safety Act 1990, but does not include . . . sea fish or shellfish listed in Schedule 1 to the Regulations".

I proudly claim the distinction of being the only human being ever to be mugged by a clam in New York.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Was it the Ku-Klux Klam?

Mr. Gardiner: No, I said clam. It occurred some years ago—*[Interruption.]* I know that the House will have some mirth at my expense this morning, but as John Bunyan would put it,

"My marks and scars I carry with me to be a witness that I have fought His battles who will now be my rewarder."

Some years ago in New York, I was invited to lunch by a client. Despite what happened, that client was and still is a very good friend. He asked me whether I liked clams and I said that I had never tried raw clams but that I had sampled clam chowder when I lived in Boston. He insisted that I have some clams and also asked whether I liked oysters. I said that I had never tried oysters so he

ordered half a dozen clams and half a dozen oysters. We sat down and ate these things. I must say that I found them execrable.

Ms Atherton: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gardiner: Before I give way, I must say that they were not Cornish oysters.

Ms Atherton: I assure my hon. Friend that I will deliver to him personally half a dozen Helford River oysters. I am sure that he will find them very enjoyable.

Mr. Gardiner: I thank my hon. Friend for that offer. However, my experience that day left me resigned to never touching the things again.

A few hours later when I was with another friend in New Jersey, I began to feel extremely sick. While retiring to the bathroom, as it was called, I passed out, knocked my head against a marble staircase, cracked open my skull and ended up spending the night undergoing CAT scans and goodness knows what else in a New Jersey hospital. I dread to think what the health care I received in America cost my travel insurers. The whole experience was extremely disconcerting.

Mr. Dismore: In the light of my hon. Friend's experience, will he tell us whether he had been drinking spirits at the time? It is now a well known medical fact that drinking spirits with raw shellfish can cause a very bad reaction. Indeed, many good fish restaurants in London now say on the menu that one should not drink spirits if one is ordering raw shellfish

Mr. Gardiner: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. I have only two things to say to him. The first is that I was not drinking spirits at the time. The second is that, given the choice between eating shellfish and drinking spirits, I certainly know which course is distinctly preferable. I am a good Scotsman, so my hon. Friend need not ask any more.

The fact that sea fish and shellfish are not considered to be food for the purposes of the Bill would cause many people concern. Perhaps the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar will consider that point.

Mr. Pickles: I commiserate with the hon. Gentleman. A platter of fruits de mer in Rouen had a similar effect on me, so I sympathise with him.

Although there is some farming of shellfish and fish, they are mostly collected by hunter-gatherers. That is why shellfish and sea fish are not covered by the Bill. The hon. Gentleman refers to safety and to the definition of ingredients but, as I said earlier, let us get the Bill into Committee. The Government no doubt have strong views on that point, so they might table an amendment to deal with it.

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman has been extremely gracious in accepting interventions and in recognising that other suggestions may be introduced into his Bill at later stages. The House is grateful to him for the open way in which he has dealt with these matters.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman has told us a shaggy clam story, but I hope that he will not recount too many similar experiences or long stories. If the Bill is to go into Committee, we need to make progress this morning.

Mr. Gardiner: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it is always my intention on a Friday morning to examine the Bill before us and to give it a fair degree of scrutiny. Instead of Members urging me or anyone else in the Chamber to clam up, I hope that they will look not at the clam but at the oyster and seek to find the pearls of wisdom therein.

Another aspect of clause 1 concerns me. It relates to the interpretation of the term "major ingredient". It is a serious matter, because the clause states that

"'major ingredient' means an ingredient which forms more than 25 per cent. by weight of a food".

When I thought about the fact that a "major ingredient" had to form more than 25 per cent., I referred to "Dod's Parliamentary Companion 2002". I wanted to assure myself that the Conservative party formed a major ingredient of the House of Commons. I thought that it would be absolutely borderline but, on checking, I found that there were not 160 Conservative Members, as I had remembered, but 166. That means that, by a margin of two, they just form more than 25 per cent. of the House, so they can claim that they constitute a major ingredient.

Had I any doubts on that point, I know from looking at the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar that I need not have worried. The definition refers not to forming more than 25 per cent. but to forming

"more than 25 per cent. by weight of food".

On that ground alone, the hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members are easily able to satisfy the rubric. I am happy about that.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman might have seen me pointing to him in a threatening manner. Considering the amount of weight I have lost, he should have offered me some encouragement instead of mocking my bulk. We make the tasty part of this particular meal.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for taking my remarks in the good humour with which they were intended.

Clause 3 is headed "Labelling: production standards". In it, the hon. Gentleman has hit on something that is of great concern to many of my constituents in Brent, North and, no doubt, to many of his. The point relates to the welfare of livestock and the treatment of animals. The British public are concerned that the standards of animal welfare that we wish to maintain in this country are not universally respected in the rest of the world or, indeed, in the rest of the European Community.

The Government make representations in the European Union on issues of animal welfare, and I am sure that many of us share the concern that we have not yet established a regime throughout Europe that we would consider matches this country's welfare standards for animal husbandry. There is more that we could do even in this country and this clause identifies an important point. Consumers want to be happy with the standards for the treatment of animals in the rearing and husbandry process. That is a matter not of vegetarianism, simply of animal welfare. People who are rightly happy to eat meat want

[Mr. Gardiner]

to know that the animals have been treated in a proper and humane way. I welcome that element of the hon. Gentleman's Bill.

I have certain concerns about the Bill. Scope for such national action as the hon. Gentleman seeks to introduce is limited by European law. It constrains any restriction on trade within the single market under the interpretation from Europe. If the Bill were adopted, it would inevitably be overturned by the European Court and could result in the UK being obliged to pay substantial compensation to affected interests. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able satisfy the House that those criticisms of his Bill are not correct. I fear that he may not. I applaud the hon. Gentleman's willingness to consider other aspects that may be introduced into his Bill at a later stage and his desire to achieve open, honest and transparent labelling, especially on the welfare of livestock. Elements of the Bill are worthy, and I wish him well with it.

10.51 am

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). As the candidate for Tatton, I followed his general election campaign closely. We were pleased to see him returned on election night, and I am pleased that he won a high place in the ballot for private Members' Bills and chose to reintroduce this one, albeit altered to take into account the points raised by the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), who is now leaving the Chamber, about its compatibility with European law. I am glad that my hon. Friend is continuing with the Bill that my neighbour and good Friend the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) introduced in the last Parliament.

There is no doubt that the food labelling Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury introduced struck a chord with the farming community and Members of Parliament like me who represent rural communities. There is great anger in the farming community that many of the high animal welfare and hygiene standards to which they adhere are not adhered to in other EU countries, and that they are placed at a disadvantage in the marketplace.

There is a sense among farmers that if consumers were given a real choice—if they could go into the supermarket and choose good-quality food produced from animals raised to a high standard of animal welfare—they would make that choice. The problem is that they do not have the information. That is why the Bill is so important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar rehearsed many of the tragic statistics about the state of farming. I recently met farmers in Chelford, which is a large agricultural market in the south of my constituency. Anyone who meets farmers these days cannot doubt how desperate the situation is for them. The total income from farming has fallen by two thirds in the past five years. Deloitte and Touche estimates that the average annual salary for farmers is just £8,000 a year. Bank borrowing by agriculture amounts to £10 billion a year. Investment levels are at their lowest since the 1970s.

The dire situation has been brought about by a number of factors. If we are honest, we should accept that we in the House have little control over some of them. One is the high value of the pound relative to the euro. There is not much that we can do about that, except perhaps to reduce the dependency in the long term of farming on subsidies from Europe and the green pound. The second such factor is the low value of commodity prices across the world—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Bill that we are discussing is about food labelling.

Mr. Osborne: Factors that we cannot control have damaged our agriculture, but one thing that we could do is introduce this Bill, which would make a huge difference to the state of farming. The food labelling laws are a mess. If you went into a supermarket, Madam Deputy Speaker, and saw my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar loitering by the bacon counter, you would find what he finds. You could pick up a pound of bacon that says "British", but the pig may have been raised in Holland in a sow stall or with a tether, practices that this House banned a decade ago. It could have been slaughtered in another European country that does not have the same slaughtering regulations that the House has introduced. The pigmeat could have been brought to this country, seasoned or smoked and packaged and then labelled "British Bacon". That is absurd.

When consumers come across my hon. Friend loitering by the bacon counter, like him, they are confused. They may want to buy bacon from pigs raised in humane conditions, but they cannot make that informed decision. They may want to buy bacon or other meat that has been slaughtered humanely, but they cannot make that informed decision. They may want to support British agriculture, but they cannot because the labelling laws cause confusion. The Bill would end that confusion.

It is striking how broadly the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury and this one have been welcomed by both consumer and farming groups. It was my dubious pleasure to be a special adviser—now a dirty word—to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for several years under the previous Government. It was remarkable how infrequently consumer organisations and farming bodies agreed. The Bill has a broad measure of agreement.

In the notes helpfully provided, at least for Conservative Members, it is clear that the Bill is supported by the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and the National Pig Association, but also by the Consumers Association. The Consumers Association said:

> "This Bill is a step in the right direction. . . . Consumers need the ability to properly choose what they eat—that means country of origin being clearly labelled on food. . . . Country of origin labelling needs to be specific so that consumers can make effective choices about what they buy—and where it comes from. This means that any general 'EU' or 'non-EU' label would not go far enough. For example, such a label would not have enabled customers to choose whether or not to eat Belgian meat during the recent dioxin scare."

The Bill thus has a broad measure of support from consumers and farming organisations.

One striking thing about the farming community, as those who represent it in the House know, is how well informed farmers are about decisions made by the House and the Government. That is partly because their income is hugely dependent on the decisions of the Government. They are a politically well-informed group in our society. They follow our proceedings. Not many people will be

following them today, but the farming community will. What we say here will be circulated in agricultural markets, NFU newsletters and so on.

Farmers were disappointed when, for reasons that they did not fully understand, the Government squashed the previous Bill in the last Parliament. They will be disappointed and will not understand if the Government squash this Bill in this Parliament. This is an important Bill. So many things that we do to help farming and for which the industry asks are expensive, involve billions of pounds of subsidies, and require complex European negotiations and difficult regulations. But this is simple to do, works with the grain of the market and consumer choice, is welcomed by consumers and would do a great deal for farmers. I hope that the Bill gets the support that it deserves.

11 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I apologise to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), as I was taken aback when I saw him on my screen launching his Bill. This follows yesterday evening, when some 400 hon. Members either tried to prevent my Adjournment debate or helped it to take place. Procedurally, it has been an interesting 24 hours, but I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for missing his initial pearls of wisdom.

I am a sponsor of the Bill, and I make no apology for saying that I support it. The cause of food labelling needs to be advanced in this place. I was not as active as I should have been with the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), and I shall mention why that failed. However, the need for food labelling—in the form of this Bill, future legislation here or European activities—is proven and the rationale for bringing forward greater controls could not be shown more straightforwardly than by the recent crises in this country.

The previous Bill failed because it was deemed to be in contravention of the treaty of Rome, principally articles 28 to 30. If that is the case, we need to talk to Europe about how we can improve its regulations and legislative powers, as well as what we choose to do here. We must also consider how easy it is to define how we wish to label items. It is accepted that consumers want as much information as they can handle. Even if they do not want to see it on the packaging, there will be occasions when they will want to get information on what is in their products and who produces them.

Rather than getting into the obscurantism of defining exactly in law what needs to be done, we should accept the principle that it is good for the producer and the consumer that we label as effectively as we can and that the only thing that should limit us in doing that is the means by which we can communicate the information.

Three questions must be asked about the proposal. First, can it be done, and, a related issue, why did the previous Bill fail? Secondly, what are the benefits of the Bill and who are the beneficiaries? Thirdly, what can we do in this place and elsewhere? I wish to address the third point.

The hon. Member for Eddisbury has talked about those who stand to gain from their advancement of the software and their knowledge of IT, which could make it possible to label more effectively. He and I have met the company i-label. Previously, providing appropriate traceability from the raw to the finished product, whether it was animal, grain or whatever, was seen as difficult. Software and databases are now capable of handling such complex information, and that is why I am more than happy to support the Bill.

The two parts of the Bill involve country of origin labelling and corporate standards. There will always be a debate about how much people want to know exactly what was produced in this country and not elsewhere. I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) in the Chamber, as she agrees that people are more interested in the localisation of food rather than the nation state.

I will not criticise farmers—many of whom I call friends—but one reason why our farming industry has not done as well as others is that it has not worked hard enough in marketing and producing locally through co-operatives to give local consumers what they seem to want: the knowledge that good-quality food has been produced locally. If we can pull those things together, British farming can go forward.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: I entirely endorse what the hon. Gentleman says about branding and a sense of identity and confidence. Regionalisation and localisation of source and production must be the right way forward, and there is a derogation within EU law and our domestic food labelling regulations that enable that to take place here and in France where products can be described as coming from Perigord. Country of origin is important because it relates to the jurisdiction of law and regulation in terms of the standards of production. If someone knows that a chicken has come from Thailand, they will know that there have been stories that many hormones have been used there that would be banned in this country. It is right for consumers to have the right to know the country of origin and the EU aspect of regionalisation would not apply in those circumstances.

Mr. Drew: I accept that, and some of us feel strongly that we need to sort out the import situation. I say that with the best of intentions; I do not think that what happened in the past was unacceptable. I attended a briefing at the Labour party conference organised by the National Farmers Union, at which the union's campaign on fair labelling was introduced. It was interesting to hear the different agencies describe honestly some of the problems that they have with searching and impounding. Sometimes, they cannot impound; there are checks and balances within the system, but there are also loopholes. The country of origin issue will not go away, because the import problem will not go away.

Standards have been driven up throughout the EU, and that is a jolly good thing. However, imports from third countries can cause difficulties. We need standardisation but we cannot do that alone. We may be an island but, in some respects, that can lead to more difficulties because there are so many points of entry to this country. There will never be enough resources to constrain what we do not want to see.

Mr. Pickles: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that there is nothing in the Bill that prevents anything being imported from anywhere in the world? It is merely about honesty in labelling.

Mr. Drew: That is absolutely right; I was merely making the point that the Bill should not be seen in

[Mr. Drew]

isolation—nor should any legislation. The Bill must be part of a process of ensuring that people are buying what they think they are buying, and that what they eat is safe and of the quality that they expect. All such matters must come together.

We on the Labour Benches can feel some pride in the fact that, through the work of the Food Standards Agency, matters outside this country are moving in our direction. I spoke a week last Thursday—I am not sure whether other Members present today also attended the debate—in the debate on the European Food Authority. Although I am not the greatest pro-European on the Labour Benches, I recognise that there is much to be said for standardisation of foodstuffs across the EU, and I take pride in supporting the establishment of the authority. Through the operation of the Food Standards Agency, this country is very much in the lead in that respect. As I said then, the agency plays a pro-active role, and I would like that to be extended.

I have talked to representatives of the agency about labelling. Obviously, it must be careful, because it is an agency of Government. However, it is fair to say that it is fairly relaxed about the need to consider standardising produce. It has launched its own investigation into some of the assurance schemes to ensure that they are what they claim to be. Therefore, the agency is engaged in the area.

We are a pioneer, if not the pioneer, of food standards agencies. People from all parts of Europe—indeed, the world—are calling in FSA representatives to find out exactly what we are doing and how we are doing it. If that can help us advance the way in which we consider foodstuffs in Europe, that can only be good. Such action will have to be taken through the route of the wonderfully named Codex Alimentaris. I know little more about it than what it seems to do, but it needs to be transparent and able to ensure that all of Europe moves in the same direction because what happens elsewhere has an impact on us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) had to leave the Chamber, but his comments on nutrition and why the Bill does not cater for it are worth bearing in mind. Having talked to the FSA, I know, as will my right hon. Friend the Minister, that the matter causes the Government some concern. More and more people are interested in driving up nutritional standards, but the way in which we do that is subject to some debate, both inside and outside the Government.

When the chairman of the FSA, Sir John Krebs, recently addressed the all-party group on food and hygiene, he was honest enough to say that nutrition was one area in which the agency had made less progress than it had hoped to make, and certainly less than it wanted to make. We must learn from that that there are two extremes in the matter: the nanny state, in which everyone is told what they should or should not eat, and a state in which everyone can eat what they like and take the consequences of it. We have heard some amusing interludes on that point.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman has raised an interesting and important point. One report produced by the Education and Employment Committee and the Education Sub-Committee, on which I served in the last Parliament, was on school meals. It centred on nutritional value and the information required to help not only teachers but, most importantly, parents to choose to encourage their children to eat certain food. That choice could be made as a result of labelling. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point on the culture of information on nutritional value, and labelling would go a long way to support that.

Mr. Drew: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We need to approach the matter from several angles; it concerns not just food but health, which is why I am pleased to see my right hon. Friend on the Front Bench, and education. The FSA is at the forefront of efforts in this area. If the Bill can in any way assist us in our relations in Europe, that can only be a good thing.

I cannot do anything other than use this opportunity to talk about another issue raised by Sir John Krebs in response to questioning: genetically modified organisms. I have a long track record of being against GMOs, but taking an exact stance is becoming increasingly difficult as the world moves on.

The issue is interesting because it concerns not just the product but labelling. The FSA has had some difficulty because it has stuck to the perceived line of 1 per cent. tolerance. Some people will know what I am talking about and some may not. Basically, if a food contains less than 1 per cent. of any GMO, it can be labelled GMO-free. That causes some of us difficulty, as such foods are patently not always GMO-free. Technology is not yet capable of assessing not only the traceability of GMOs but the process by which such organisms are created. That is a question of derivatives. I gather that tests are being undertaken, so the issue might become clearer. That shows the difficulty of labelling and where dividing lines should be drawn, but it is no excuse for not labelling.

I know of very few consumers in Stroud who do not want to know whether products contain GMOs. Such knowledge might not make a difference to their consumption. I find it disappointing that people talk a lot about having the right to choose in the matter of animal welfare, but do not always choose the right way. I would like people to choose animal welfare-friendly foods, but all the surveys indicate that welfare is not always the determining factor. More often than not, price, accessibility and so on determine consumer choice, and we must recognise that. Nevertheless, there is no excuse for not labelling honestly and fairly so that we can ensure that the consumer is sovereign. That of course would help producers, too.

Let us consider what will happen as a result of today's debate. As one of the Bill's sponsors, I would obviously like it to go into Committee and for us to be able to test whether Europe is capable of dealing with the issue. If Europe wants to consider legislation at European level, that is fine by me because, at the end of the day, consumers want such knowledge. We know that we have the technology to deliver information, although that may not always appear on a label. Consumers can ask about contents. That has been a key change over the past 18 months, and we know that it will improve.

I can think of very few occasions on which consumers will not want to know exactly what is in their food. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North said, it is nothing less than a life-or-death issue for some people.

I therefore support the Bill. I hope that it will make progress not only in this place, but outside, so that the public know that we are addressing this as a serious issue. More particularly, I hope that Europe takes the matter up and does not get involved in turgid discussions that come up with an answer in five years, because we cannot act too soon. This is an important issue and will not go away. I am a sponsor of the Bill and give it my strong support.

11.20 am

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I am particularly keen to speak on the crucial issue of food labelling because of the many farmers in my constituency. Herefordshire beef is probably the finest beef in the world; in fact, it is definitely the finest beef. We also have Ryeland sheep, of which hon. Members may not be so well aware, but they are equally tasty. We farm chickens for the Sun Valley foods consortium.

I visited a pig farm only the other day and was witness to the fact that the pig farmer was prepared to go the extra mile. That involved crawling into stalls—well, they are sheds more than anything—to change the straw twice a day throughout the winter, so that people could be confident that they were eating free-range piglets. We also produce dairy to such an extent that Cadbury's has situated its factory in my constituency to gather milk. The roads run red with the potato lifting that goes on, and we are famous for our cider apples. I also draw hon. Members' attention to Peter Davies of Claston farm, who has been pioneering the dwarf or hedgerow hop, which will, I hope, lead to at least 50 per cent. of all British hops being produced in Herefordshire.

With that in mind, it is repulsive to the House that not a single Liberal Democrat has deemed it worth while to turn up. It is hard to tell whether it is more repulsive when they are here or when they are not. It is deeply offensive to the farming community.

Mr. George Osborne: Is it not extraordinary, given the pontifications of the Liberal Democrat leader that he is in some sense an Opposition to the Government, that not a single member of his party is here, particularly as so many of them represent rural constituencies?

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. Perhaps we will all benefit when even fewer Liberal Democrats are able to take their seats.

The Bill is crucial because it gives the wherewithal for shoppers to support the farmer if they so wish. No one has to buy British, but at least the consumer would be supported by the strength of the law.

Information is helpful, not destructive. *[Interruption.]* A Liberal Democrat Member has now come into the Chamber, but it is too little, too late. Freedom of speech and information is helpful, not destructive. Indeed, a new Gallup survey suggested that animal welfare is now even more important to shoppers than it was before the foot and mouth epidemic—60 per cent. more important. Mike Sharpe, spokesman for the RSPCA's freedom food label, has said that consumers would be able to improve welfare conditions with their purchasing power and that

"Farmers can't be expected to continue to invest in improving conditions if the public won't support them at point of purchase."

Many Labour Members signed a recent early-day motion on fox hunting because they wrongly think it is cruel, yet this Bill will do more to prevent animal cruelty on an international basis—*[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) want to intervene?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Cleethorpes wishes to make a contribution, I am sure she knows how.

Mr. Wiggin: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Every time we hear mention of animal cruelty, our conscience should remind us that if we do not support the Bill we will have done more to promote cruelty than any huntsman has throughout his entire life.

On Tuesday we shall debate the movement of animals, with the humane idea of cutting the number of journeys that animals make. This Bill would do far more to cut the misery of animals abroad than anything proposed in that forthcoming Bill.

The focus of previous opposition to this Bill has been removed by the re-wording. We are now looking to promote only the highest levels of animal welfare, which is surely best practice. Labelling clearly and accurately must surely be the priority of the Government, particularly after the mix-up of cow and sheep brains during the BSE-scrapie investigation. Perhaps Ministers will now have learned their lessons about labelling and will wish the Bill to be implemented swiftly.

The Government propose to slaughter any sheep that is not scrapie resistant. They would have

"powers to ensure that we can remove from the flock the genotypes of sheep susceptible to scrapie".

That is a quote from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I guess from the opposition that we have heard that the Government do not care about the consumer, the sheep farmer or indeed the sheep themselves, and that they are using this proposal as another way of continuing the slaughter of the national flock. I hope that, by supporting the Bill, that will be curtailed.

Eco-warriors—including a Liberal Democrat peer—destroy genetically modified maize. We want to know whether food is genetically modified or not. We also want the right to know that our meat has been reared under the best welfare conditions, and we need to know that in the shop, at the point of purchase.

I live in the country and I am proud to be British. I have nothing against eating French golden delicious apples, or oranges from South Africa, so why will the Government not help me to buy pork chops from pigs that I know have been raised, slaughtered and packaged in the UK?

Poultry farmers do not receive subsidies but their customers, the supermarkets, insist on assurance schemes and back them up with crates of paperwork. I have been shown a crate full of the paperwork required to produce just one turkey. Assured schemes insist on high welfare, so that, for example, pigs have straw to rootle in and do not lie in their own soil. Likewise, grain has to be stored in areas where rats and mice are poisoned, and farmers must have plastic light guards so that glass from broken light bulbs cannot get mixed into our food. Assurance schemes are paid for by farmers and are undermined by imports from abroad. We must help our farmers by ensuring that assured food is not compared with food of lower standards or even no standard at all.

[Mr. Wiggin]

Cages for battery hens are to be made larger, allowing slightly more freedom of movement. How do our Government support our egg producers? They allow eggs to be imported from abroad where they have no control over the cage size. Germany is poised to outlaw battery cages in egg production, going beyond EU requirements. The new rules will ban conventional cages within five years and EU-approved "enriched cages" from 2012. Labelling will not change the size of the cage, but it could allow our shoppers to choose which eggs to buy. It will also give our producers a unique selling point.

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend has hit on the essence of the Bill. Nothing in it will outlaw any practice that is currently legal within the EU. There is nothing in the Bill to prevent the importation of those products. What it does do is empower the purchaser to make a choice.

Mr. Wiggin: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

We are trying to lift standards of poultry competitiveness, rather than punish the kind farmer. Young farmers could better see what customers want, and provide it, instead of watching as they are punished for their kindness by lower prices.

Traceability is the new burden on farmers. Cruel ear tags hang from every cow and, soon, every sheep, so that we can trace any disease straight back to the farm. Why can we not do the same for our shopping?

My constituency would benefit from being able to raise, slaughter and package all Herefordshire beef and lamb so that it could be marketed under the Marches meat label. We are technically able to do that already, but to ensure the same standards of traceability for food as we do for the live animal, it must be a legal requirement so that consumers have faith in the labelling.

I have a little red tractor logo stuck to my fridge so that my family do not forget to check to ensure that we are buying British. It is not always easy to do so. Yesterday, in the Tea Room, a colleague who was about to eat a burger said that he hoped it was British, so even in the House we have lost our confidence in food labelling. That loss of confidence is due, perhaps, to the unscrupulous behaviour of some retailers. We need to know that the full force of the law will be used to ensure that we know what we are eating.

I praise the Meat and Livestock Commission for its efforts to promote British meat, including the annual barbecue that it holds to ensure that Members are aware of the sheer excellence of British meat. Now is the time to use our shopping baskets to support its efforts.

The Bill will not save anyone from buying cruelly produced meat, but it will ensure that, by reading the label, people are able to save themselves from doing so. This morning, as I had my breakfast, I read my Weetabix packet. The contents list stated that Weetabix contained folic acid, and told me how many vitamins it contained, but I could not tell where the wheat came from, which would have been useful because more than 25 per cent. of the product is wheat.

Even beer and other types of alcohol are clearly labelled. I recommend the cider on sale in the House, as it is made in Much Marcle in my constituency and the apples are from the surrounding countryside. Hon. Members will find it absolutely delicious, but I am sure that there is room on the bottle for a little label confirming that all the apples are British.

We must avoid the European plug syndrome, in which the highest standards are dumbed down to ensure European satisfaction. The electrical three-pronged plug used in this country is the safest in Europe because it is independently fused, but the rest of Europe has not adopted our high standards as it is too expensive to do so. We should not allow such an attitude to determine our diet. We must support the Bill as we would support our electrical plugs, because British is safer.

We know that far more can be done to stop illegal meat imports. I could see no signs at Gatwick airport telling me not to bring in meat, or stating the legal limit for such imports. We must take action to prevent the smuggling in of food from abroad, and we must do everything that we can to stop the import of bush meat. We certainly do not want to import Afghan heroin, and perhaps the Government might apply some of their anti-Taliban sentiment to preventing the smuggling of all illegal imports into the UK.

The foot and mouth crisis was certainly imported. The Bill would make it less worth while and more difficult for people to bring in diseased meat, and would provide for them to be prosecuted for doing so. That is the kind of action that we need to take.

This is a great legislative opportunity to help British farmers, who have had a tough time. Indeed, a farmer whose claim form for the countryside stewardship scheme arrived at DEFRA's office in Bristol on 3 October had it returned with a letter dated 15 October saying that his claim could not be accepted before 1 October. As one might expect, he has little confidence in the Department. This is a chance to remove that sense of persecution.

We know that the Government have given billions of pounds to farmers in foot and mouth compensation. We know that better labelling is wanted by the Prime Minister. We know that the Bill will help, and that it has been drafted to take into account the worries of Labour Members. We know also that the Government could put energy into finding a way round EU constraints, for the benefit of European animals if nothing else.

We always buy dolphin-friendly tuna, so why should we not buy other friendly foods, such as pig-friendly pork and chicken-friendly eggs? The answer is that we do not know which foods are friendly, and we should know. The Bill is constructive and helpful, and we should all support it because it promotes freedom of choice, freedom of information and freedom from cruelty.

11.33 am

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I am pleased to speak in the debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on his choice of Bill. I am sure that all hon. Members with an interest in agriculture and the rural economy are familiar with the issue of labelling.

Labelling is a constant theme at my regular meetings with farmers in my constituency, who are justifiably proud of their produce and want its source to be known far and wide. I shall use our particular experience in Cornwall to illustrate the wider themes. As hon. Members

will know, Cornwall has had significant economic problems in recent times, but one of our strengths has been our identity, both as a community and as a place that people know and love. It has long been the wish of our farmers and our tourism industry to make the most of that strong and instantly recognisable identity and, of course, of the Cornish brand. That applies to agriculture, tourism and a host of exports.

With European support under the objective 5b programme, the Cornish King potato brand was successfully developed. We now see the emergence of Cornish Yarg cheese, which is, I am sure, to be found by hon. Members in supermarkets, specialist delis and, of course, in the Members' Dining Room. I hope that they choose to partake of it. I have a small Yarg factory in my constituency, which is a prime example of a small industry succeeding through the quality and reputation of the product.

Just this week, we discovered that unemployment in my constituency has fallen by nearly 50 per cent. since 1997. I am delighted to say that the area has had the fifth highest fall in unemployment in the whole country during the past year. I have absolutely no doubt that the achievement is partly due to local small businesses, such as the Yarg factory that I have described. It is a precedent for a brighter future.

Hon. Members know that the successful development of indigenous brands and marks of quality that can be promoted at home and abroad offers much to an economy such as that of Cornwall. The clear, reliable and wholly honest labelling that hon. Members have described is essential for that development. Failure to achieve that threatens to undermine confidence and the positive initiatives that I have described. Any sensible legislation to enable that labelling to develop, and to build on existing legislation, can only be a good thing.

I agree with the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar that better labelling is supported by consumers and producers alike. People like to know where their food comes from and what is in it. Some people can take that to extremes. The Cornish pasty was mentioned earlier. I have heard what may be an urban, or rather a rural, myth that someone has written a university thesis on the composition of the Cornish pasty.

Mr. Drew: That is no surprise.

Ms Atherton: No, it would not surprise me if it were true. The composition of the pasty is a debate that goes on in Cornish pubs night after night.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): And in Devon.

Ms Atherton: Indeed.

Mr. Dismore: Perhaps my hon. Friend could give us her thesis on the proper ingredients for a Cornish pasty.

Ms Atherton: I fear that if I did so we would be here for a long time, but if Madam Deputy Speaker will permit me, I can say that a good pasty needs high-quality Cornish beef, Cornish potato, onion and high-quality pastry.

People like to buy local produce, if they can. We can see evidence of that trend in farmers markets and the sale of local produce in village shops. I have recently given my support to the introduction of milk in Cornish schools which I believe should be produced, and known to be produced, locally. A similar scheme in primary schools in my constituency gives each pupil a piece of fruit each day. I believe that the fruit should be locally produced, and that the young children should know that it may have been grown by their own parents. Not only does good labelling give consumers greater protection, but we see the relevance of the issue to the rural economy.

Hon. Members have made it clear that they passionately support the Bill. There is a consensus on the Floor of the House that we need to take action on food labelling, and a willingness to do so. I hope that the Bill goes into Committee for further discussion. We have heard suggestions for amendments, and the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar has generously offered to consider improvements.

I am sure that hon. Members may have noticed that I have not been very successful at dieting. That is in part my own fault, but it is partly the fault of the food industry and its labelling. I have discovered that there are more calories in most fat-free and diet products than in normal products on the supermarket shelves. That, I think, is why I have not been successful with different diets over the years. I would like the Committee to look into the scandal of the labelling on slimming products in this country.

I am pleased that our debate has focused in part on Cornish clotted cream. We have done our bit for the Cornish brand this morning. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar once more on his Bill and thank him for his interest in a matter that is of great importance to the farmers and consumers of my Falmouth and Camborne constituency.

11.40 am

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. When I think of meetings that I have had with south Bedfordshire farmers last year and this, and when I think back to a farmer's wife who came to one of my mobile surgeries in the village of Heath and Reach in my constituency last year, I must say despair would not be too strong a word to express their feelings about their industry. When I raised with them the issues of food labelling, making sure that British farmers did not suffer prejudice as a result of the current situation, the action that we can take, and animal welfare, I received a warm response. They expressed a wish that the House should do something about those important issues.

As Members on both sides of the House have said, the issue is clearly important to farmers; throughout the country, farmers will pay attention to our debate and, indeed, the progress of the Bill. As has been made clear, the measure does not just have the support of farmers and producers; it is supported wholeheartedly by consumers. As Members, we must represent 95,000 or so consumers who are keen to have information to enable them to shop intelligently and patriotically; they want to be able to make informed decisions about the food that they choose to buy.

Because the issue is important, I hope that Ministers will take account of the need for speedy legislation. This morning, it has been said that perhaps the objectives could be achieved via the European route, but I very much hope that the Bill will go into Committee and proceed speedily

[Andrew Selous]

through the House. As has been said, speed is of the essence, whether we are talking about people who suffer from nut allergy, the state of the farming industry, or indeed the wish of consumers to have proper information. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) said, it is a scandal that chickens from Thailand can come into this country containing hormones that are not legal here and, to boot, have a Union Jack stamped on the packaging if the final processing takes place in this country. That is a disgrace and should not be tolerated; legislation is urgently needed to do something about it.

Similarly, with animal welfare, the British public rightly expect our farmers to adhere to the highest possible standards. I am proud that the House has seen fit to make sure that we have higher standards of animal welfare than many other countries. For example, the stall and tether method permitted in other countries is not allowed here. Again, that imposes an extra cost and, I submit, adds extra value to the quality of British produce. If British farmers have to endure that extra cost, they should receive the benefit of its being made clear on the labelling; when the produce of other countries does not come up to those exacting standards, that should also be made clear.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman talked about the cost of cheaper imports and food labelling, a principle that I support. However, do people buy food because of the label or because of the cost of the product? Will the Bill provide all the answers that the hon. Gentleman seems to suggest it would? I suspect that if stall and tether methods are still used abroad, but the meat is cheaper, the majority of people will buy the cheaper product.

Andrew Selous: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who raises the important issue of the cost of our food. We should all be conscious of the fact that people on low incomes have to watch their weekly shopping bill very closely indeed. The hon. Gentleman has made a valid point; it may be that some people simply cannot afford to indulge their consciences by buying the food made to high standards of animal welfare that they would like. However, the point still stands; information should be put in the public domain and included on the product so that people can make a choice. We would all understand if very poor people were unable to buy the more expensive product, but many people want to make sure that they shop with compassion and buy food that has been produced to the highest possible standards.

In time, I hope that we can give a fair wind to local labelling, as has been discussed this morning. Totternhoe in my constituency gets a considerable number of eggs into the local shops, which are clearly labelled as coming from that village; indeed, the farm where those chickens live is well known, and I have been past it many times. Anything that we can do to restore the link between the consumer and the place of origin is very welcome.

Shona McIsaac: On that point, farmers markets and the option of buying direct from the farm are becoming more popular in this country. The hon. Gentleman said that something should be done, but is it not up to the farmers to take that initiative? Certainly, as a consumer, I respond to those initiatives because I know the origin of the food—the farm or the place that it comes from.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who is quite right. I am pleased that she mentioned farmers markets. In my constituency, the market town of Dunstable has had a farmers market in the past; Leighton Buzzard also has one. I very much welcome that initiative, which restores the connection between the consumer and the place where food is produced, enabling local people to come face to face with the producers and have the opportunity to support local farmers. Like the hon. Lady, I believe that that initiative should be encouraged, and hope that we will see more farmers markets in future.

In conclusion, I am pleased that we have had an opportunity to debate the Bill, an extremely important piece of legislation that has the support of the farming community and consumers. I very much hope that it will make fair progress in the House and that procedural or other means will not be found to kill it off.

11.48 am

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on his speech. As the daughter of a chef, the grand-daughter of a cook and somebody who spent many years on magazines such as *Woman*, *Bella* and *Chat*, editing recipes and producing food writing, let me say that food is a passion is mine. Whether shopping for it, cooking or eating, it is very much the love of my life. When I shop I always look for the best-quality products that I can find. The information given to the shopper or consumer is vital, so I was pleased when I learned that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) was introducing a Bill on food labelling. However, I have one reservation, which relates to some of the points made by hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) about nutritional information, especially in relation to fat-free products. I believe that the hon. Gentleman should address that.

I have another reason for thanking the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar. I decided to do some essential research for the debate, and delved into the nether regions of my larder and freezer to check the food labels. I wanted to see the countries of origin of the food in my larder and the type of information that was provided on labels.

I am eternally grateful to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar for providing me with that opportunity. I realised that, because of my lifestyle as a Member of Parliament, there were far too many out-of-date products in my larder. They have now been consigned to the bin. The experience was also educational, as it was essentially a tour of the world. My larder contains Puy lentils, Camargue red rice, borlotti beans and cannellini beans, all of which will soon be out of date as I do not eat many of them; many varieties of pasta, tabbouleh, falafel, couscous and tahina mixes; and jars of cornichons—gherkins to most of us.

Angela Watkinson: If I may lower the tone for a moment, I admit to being one who has recently had to resort to that wonderful invention—the ready meal that comes out of the freezer and goes into the microwave.

Mr. Dismore: Disgrace.

Angela Watkinson: I used to grow and cook my own vegetables. I have gone from one end of the culinary

spectrum to the other because of my now busy life. Ready meals have multiple ingredients, thereby opening up a large aspect of the labelling issue. Does the hon. Lady agree that, in that particular type of product, because of the variety of ingredients in just one pack, the labelling issue is particularly important?

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. The issue is vital regardless of which product one is buying—whether it is a ready meal, a tinned meal or a frozen meal. The information on the label is also vital regardless of whether it concerns origin or nutritional value. Hon. Members have already mentioned the issue of food allergies, and that information, too, is vital.

Despite the lifestyle that we lead as hon. Members, which seems to necessitate snatching food as we can, there are many very good recipes that we could make using natural ingredients. I could share some of those recipes with hon. Members later—*[Interruption.]* I could put them in the Library.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) made an interesting point in her intervention. One of the issues that arose when I was promoting my Food Labelling Bill, of which the current Bill is an amended version, was that main ingredients comprising at least 25 per cent. of the product should have label information on the country of origin and standards of production—which the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) omitted to mention when talking about nutritional value. Therefore, a ready-made shepherd's pie, for example, would have to have label information on country of origin and standards of production for the potato and the meat. If it were a Cornish pasty, there would have to be such information also for the carrot—which the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) failed to mention—but not necessarily for the spices. Those were some of the provisions. I hope that that helps the hon. Member for Cleethorpes.

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and I appreciated the point about a major ingredient comprising 25 per cent. or more of the product. However, I hope to explain later why I am concerned about that aspect of this Bill.

After I threw out all the food from the back of my larder that I should have thrown out years ago, and because the Bill deals particularly with meat products—as I think the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar would admit—I went to my freezer, which was slightly more horrific than my larder. Many of the meat products that were in my freezer have now also been consigned to the bin. All that seems to be left in my freezer now is something called "Phish Food", which, for those who are not in the know, has nothing to do with fish but is a variety of ice cream. It is delicious: chocolate, marshmallow, caramel. It is wonderful stuff. Food, as I said, is my passion, and I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if occasionally I get a little carried away about it.

Ms Atherton: Is "Phish Food" a low-fat food, please?

Shona McIsaac: "Phish Food" could in no way be described as low fat, but it is delicious and, as I have always said, one should be able to eat whatever one likes.

The labelling on that ice cream, which was made in the USA—another flavour is "Cherry Garcia"; the company is quite good with its names—was far more extensive than that which I have seen on products made in the United Kingdom. I was gratified to see that amount of detail on nutritional information and welfare standards. The particular company is also very keen on obtaining its milk from cows that are raised with very high welfare standards.

Like the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, I want to see honest and unambiguous labelling, and I have some worries about food labelling. Many people are trying to lose weight or diet, as my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne said, but the nutritional information on labels is absolutely scandalous. Because of the way in which the information is calculated, the labelling is completely wrong and totally misleading to consumers.

Products in supermarkets often proclaim that they are "lower fat" or "80 per cent. fat free", but water is often included in the calculations. Rather than working out the percentage of calories that is derived from fat, percentages are calculated on the basis of gross weight. Consequently, manufacturers will say that such products are 80 per cent. fat free, whereas in fact, based on dry ingredients alone, products such as "low-fat" mayonnaise are astonishingly high in fat. That may explain why my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne has discovered that many foods that are labelled as being healthier, good for dieting and lower in fat are far from it. Such labels are completely misleading. I am concerned about the provision specifying that major ingredients are those which constitute 25 per cent. of the product's weight because it does not get round the problem.

Mr. Pickles: I apologise for intervening, as the hon. Lady is making a very interesting point. I suspect her concerns might more appropriately be dealt with by new regulations under the Food Safety Act 1990. Although we could examine the issue in Committee on my Bill, I suspect that we shall have to ask Ministers to introduce regulations. I believe that the Secretary of State already has the power to do precisely what the hon. Lady is suggesting.

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. If the Bill is considered in Committee, I hope that that point is addressed. I was using the illustration of food such as lower-fat mayonnaise as an example of how the consumer can be hoodwinked by labelling. I would not want the hon. Gentleman to fall into that trap by specifying that labels would have to identify the country of origin of any ingredient representing 25 per cent. of a product by weight. I feel that it would have to specify dry weight, otherwise some producers would be able to avoid stating the country of origin of an ingredient by playing around with statistics.

Mr. Pickles: I have no problem whatever with that suggestion and would look favourably on any amendment to that effect.

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that commitment. I know that he is particularly concerned about country of origin, but food labelling should provide more than that. Some people want to know that they are

[Shona McIsaac]

buying healthy food. If we are to be fair to the consumer, labelling has to reflect the complete picture and supply nutritional information, country of origin and as much detail as possible about the ingredients of a product, including welfare standards.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: The principle behind the Bill is that labelling should include as much information as possible. However, consumers have to be able to manage that information, so it has to be user friendly. It was proposed that country of origin, which is easy to focus on, can be identified by means of a letter. That would have to be enforceable by law. Standards of production, nutritional value, whether a product is GM-free or contains allergens which need to be identified could be dealt with by means of certification for ease of reference, as was discussed on 3 March 2000 when I presented the original Bill. The subject could be explored in detail in Committee, particularly as responsibility for the Bill has now been transferred to the Department of Health, which would be anxious for accountability to be set out along those lines. I hope that my intervention, which was somewhat longer than usual, has helped the hon. Lady.

Shona McIsaac: It is extremely helpful. As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, information has to be presented in a way that consumers understand. Returning to my example of consumers being given misleading information about so-called healthy food, we must not allow that to happen in respect of country of origin. Food labels can provide quite a lot of information that is not necessarily misleading in a type size that is so tiny that it is virtually impossible to read and therefore meaningless. It is vital that food labels provide information that is set out clearly and is easy to understand.

I now turn to an issue that was raised earlier, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne. I get the distinct feeling that people wish to buy British products which are of a high standard; local products are something of which people want more. My hon. Friend referred to Cornish pasties and clotted cream. My parents live in Devon, where we like our Devon pasties and Devon clotted cream which are also very high quality. The local element is important.

Mr. Dismore: Do Devon pasties contain carrots? I do not think that Cornish pasties do.

Shona McIsaac: When I visit my parents in Plymouth, I go to Ivor Dewdney's pasty shop. The pasties are delicious, but I do not think there are any carrots in them. I do not know whether they are sold in Cornwall.

People want local food. I represent a Lincolnshire seat, and when I buy Lincolnshire pork sausages, I want to know whether the meat comes from Lincolnshire or whether it can be any pork. Perhaps the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar can tell me. Does the meat have to come from Lincolnshire or it is just the recipe that makes them Lincolnshire pork sausages? I know that the welfare standard for pigs in Lincolnshire is phenomenally high. The hon. Gentleman was at the pig breakfast the other morning and I am sure that he can help me.

Mr. Pickles: The first point has already been covered. We are talking about existing welfare standards in the United Kingdom. On the specific point that the hon. Lady raised, I shall try to be helpful. I am embarrassed to say to a food expert that, as far as I know, Lincolnshire sausages are made to a specific recipe that includes leeks, just as Cumberland sausages are made to a specific recipe using peppers and spices. Hence the problem with Wiltshire cure. It is possible to produce something of that description many miles from Wiltshire. The Bill would ensure that the consumer who purchases Lincolnshire sausages is assured that the pig has been reared under a regime that the House has approved.

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that information. I am gratified to hear him confirm that it is the recipe that matters. However, many people believe—certainly in the region that I represent—that Lincolnshire pork sausages include pork from the farms in that area, but that cannot be guaranteed unless a customer visits a specialist local butcher who makes his own sausages.

There is a passion for local food. The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) mentioned cider. As secretary of the all-party cider group, I was pleased about that advertisement on its behalf. My passion for British food also applies to traditional British drinks.

Angela Smith (Basildon): In what quantity?

Shona McIsaac: In moderation.

Recipes that use British cider and beautiful outdoor reared British pork can be delightful. The Bill needs to cover local food.

Richard Younger-Ross: I agree with the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) that Lincolnshire sausage is a recipe. Most people know that. Any good country cook book—if the hon. Lady is a good cook, she will have one at home—will contain a recipe for Lincolnshire sausages. I have made them to such a recipe. Cumbrian sausages in local butchers will also be made to a recipe. The hon. Lady should not worry too much about confusing the origins of Lincolnshire sausages.

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that.

Lincolnshire pork sausages, Cumberland ring sausages and other wonderful traditional British food need to promoted.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend may be aware that I am a Yorkshireman, and I like to have Yorkshire pudding with my roast beef. Is she seriously suggesting that a Yorkshire pudding should comprise only flour, eggs and milk from Yorkshire?

Shona McIsaac: Many of my Yorkshire friends have reliably informed me that that would be the crême de la crême of Yorkshire puddings.

The quality of the product is important. Yorkshire pudding is another wonderful British food. Coupled with—

Richard Younger-Ross: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Shona McIsaac: Oh dear. If the hon. Gentleman likes, I shall try to work my way through the best food products of the entire United Kingdom.

Richard Younger-Ross: Yorkshire pudding comes from France. It was brought over during the Napoleonic wars.

Shona McIsaac: The hon. Gentleman is in danger of causing hostilities to break out with my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). However, if he wishes to get into that argument, many traditional British foods originated in other cuisines. For example, haggis, which is quintessentially Scottish, has its origins in France, and I probably risk getting hate mail from Scots for saying that. We cannot get away from those links.

Country of origin labels need to be coupled with the promotion of British food, not just to people who live here, but to tourists as well. That would also help farmers. A few years ago the Scottish tourist board and other agencies produced an initiative called the taste of Scotland. It used the very best products and ingredients, whether from land or sea. It was promoted so that hotels, restaurants and pubs would get a Taste of Scotland award. It is now a phenomenally successful strategy which I should like to see extended to many other parts of the United Kingdom. I do not know whether the Cornwall tourist board has something similar.

Mr. Wiggin: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Bill applies to England and Wales, not to Scotland.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Lady will have heard that point.

Shona McIsaac: I appreciate the consequences of having a Scottish Parliament but that does not dull my passion for the traditional foods of all these islands.

I am concerned that although beef and lamb from Scotland can be labelled as Scottish beef and lamb, and sold as such, that does not mean that those animals were born in Scotland, merely that they were finished there for three months. The Bill wants to specify the country of origin, but it appears that imports could still come into this country for three or four months, after which time they would be slaughtered, and still be described as British. The Bill does not seem to cover that point.

I should like food labelling to be a little more honest about mechanically recovered and reformed meat. I do not believe that products using such meat portray British food at its best, and the fact that meat is derived from such processes should be far more prominent on food labels. If it were, people might choose products of a higher standard and better flavour, even if they were more expensive. Ham sandwiches in the Tea Room here generally contain reformed or mechanically recovered ham. People would not pay the lower prices if they understood more about how that meat was obtained. That must be made clearer.

I understand that because of EU regulations that have been in place since BSE and other issues, some of the measures that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar proposes are already in place. Will he confirm that? I understand that from 1 September this year, all beef sold in the EU must be labelled to show the EU country in which it is slaughtered and that from next year the country of origin will have to be on the label. Is that correct?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Lady is absolutely correct. That clearly shows that this is not an EU-bashing Bill; it is within EU law. The hon. Lady makes her point excellently, and I thank her for making it.

Shona McIsaac: My point is that the hon. Gentleman has introduced a private Member's Bill to deal with concerns that are already being addressed, particularly in relation to beef.

I understand that most beef purchased in the UK is in the form of mince; people make shepherd's pies, cottage pies, pasta dishes and so on with it. Yet apparently, the new regulation will not cover mince products. If someone buys a steak, the information will be on the label, but if the steak is minced, the label will not have to show country of origin. I cannot understand that.

Mr. Pickles: My eyesight is not good enough to see which document the hon. Lady is holding, but the Library has brought out a good briefing paper that goes into that in great detail. *[Interruption.]* I thank the hon. Lady for holding the document up for me to see; it is indeed the Library briefing, and the third or fourth page of it explains the details.

My substantive point is that when my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) was trying to introduce his Bill, he was told by Ministers that what he wanted to do was not possible, because it was against EU regulations and law. The fact that we now have the scheme that the hon. Lady has just mentioned demonstrates beyond peradventure that that is not so.

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful intervention. I have read the excellent Library briefing note, which, as he says, goes into the subject in great detail. However, it does say that there will be concerns about certain EU regulations. I realise that the hon. Gentleman is saying that his Bill is not EU-bashing, but even the Library note says that concern could be raised about some of the measures that he wants to introduce.

Mr. Pickles: It is a matter of some regret that, because of other parliamentary business, I could not publish the Bill earlier.

Shona McIsaac *indicated assent.*

Mr. Pickles: Yes, I apologise. I am sure that hon. Members will understand that I was engaged on other matters of equal importance.

Mr. Dismore: Oh.

Mr. Pickles: I was trying to arrive at a consensus, and was meeting representatives of the food labelling industry so as to incorporate their amendments. I then amended my hon. Friend's definition, to avoid getting entangled in any possibility of infringing EU law. It is my fault that the Library staff had not caught up with the changes. When they spoke to me I said that my Bill would be

[Mr. Pickles]

largely the same as my hon. Friend's Bill, but then I made material changes, which is why the Library briefing is not as accurate as it would otherwise be. As I say, that is not the Library's fault but mine.

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that explanation, and for being so open about what happened. When I saw that he was going to introduce a Bill on food labelling I went to ask for a copy. I realise that it was a little late in appearing, but now I understand what happened.

Country of origin will have to be listed for major ingredients—that is, ingredients that constitute more than 25 per cent. of the product by weight. If the Bill gets into Committee I should like that definition to be 25 per cent. of dry weight; otherwise the largest ingredient may be water, and people will not get the information that many Members want to see on food labels.

Mr. Dismore: What troubles me about that idea is: what happens when the product is supposed to be liquid, such as an alcoholic drink or soft beverage? How does one define the dry weight of a fizzy drink, beer or wine?

Shona McIsaac: I must admit that that is a conundrum; I was thinking mainly of foods such as ready meals, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson), who is no longer in her place. I was thinking in particular of ingredients in recipes for such foods, as opposed to fizzy drinks. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar is concerned mainly about meat products, so he is probably not very worried about the country of origin of the ingredients of fizzy drinks—most of which now seem to be created in chemical factories.

Mr. Dismore: May I give my hon. Friend the specific example of wine? We have heard reports over the years of some real shenanigans in parts of the continent, with wines from two, three or four different countries being slung in a tank together and then rebottled. I would be very concerned if my hon. Friend's definition of dry weight did not catch such practices.

Shona McIsaac: My hon. Friend has certainly revealed something else that will have to be addressed in the Bill. Instead of merely specifying weight, perhaps we should specify dry weight for certain goods. We need to clarify that part of the Bill and expand it to take into account the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised.

Mr. Bryant: What about Irn Bru? For many years, it was advertised as being built from girders. What are we to do about that?

Shona McIsaac: All I say about Irn Bru is that we should drink vast amounts of it. I adore it. I am reliably informed that it is one of the best hangover cures. Perhaps we should stock a little more of it in the Members' Tea Room, as some Members may benefit from it at breakfast.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: Rather than prying too deeply into hangover cures, I want to refer to the points made by the hon. Member for Hendon. They would make exceptionally good points for scrutiny in Committee. I hope that he was making them constructively because he wants the Bill to proceed and that he was not merely trying to find problems. There is enormous support for the measure, not only from both sides of the House but from a host of interest groups representing many millions of people who would like these provisions to come into force—and fast. They offer a better option for negotiation with the EU than the current arrangements. As the hon. Lady knows the hon. Member for Hendon better than I do, perhaps she can help me by confirming that he was being exceptionally constructive and suggesting points for Committee rather than trying to criticise the Bill as a whole.

Shona McIsaac: I do not think that anybody has been particularly destructive today. We have all made valuable contributions to the debate. Indeed, what has come out of the debate is our genuine passion for food and for the wonderful products of our islands. We are all trying to be helpful. We may have some concerns about aspects of the Bill. For example, I am worried that food can be labelled as low fat when in fact it is not. Such things need to be addressed and unless I raise them now, they may not be dealt with in Committee. I am putting down my marker to say: "Somebody, look at these," so that if the Bill goes into Committee, those points will have to be addressed.

On labelling, my final piece of research—apart from eating copious quantities of Phish Food from my freezer—

Mr. Dismore: With a "ph"?

Shona McIsaac: Yes. Phish with a "ph".

Mr. Dismore: Or was it the freezer?

Shona McIsaac: I doubt that my freezer has a "ph".

Reading through the ingredients of the staple food product in my office, I found that they were wheat flour and milk chocolate—28 per cent.—so that could be the major ingredient. However, the label does not make it clear whether that 28 per cent. relates to the fact that the milk chocolate is 28 per cent. of the product or to the fact that the milk chocolate has only 28 per cent. cocoa solids. We can be misled even by something as innocent as a chocolate digestive biscuit. Incidentally, my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne may want to know that it contains 87 calories with 4.1 grammes of fat. That would work out as a fat content of about 33 per cent. so—

Mr. Pickles: I must point out to the hon. Lady that in my experience there is nothing innocent about a chocolate biscuit. However, all these things can be dealt with in Committee.

Shona McIsaac: In that case, I hope that the hon. Gentleman is taking note of the issues that I have raised this morning. When we consider the list of ingredients of a product, the major constituent is not always clear. Although ingredients are meant to be listed in order of quantity, in the case of chocolate digestives the 28 per cent. probably relates to the milk chocolate rather than the product's weight.

I thank the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar again for his thoughtful speech and his generosity in allowing so many interventions. I am eternally grateful to him for causing me to clean out my larder of all the out-of-date food. He has done a service to the McIsaac household.

Ultimately, all Members here today have a passion for food, especially British food, and we want to promote the very best products that this country produces. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has taken on board my concerns, particularly the way in which statistics are played with. Food labels must be clear, honest and completely unambiguous in relation not just to country of origin but to health and nutrition.

12.26 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I have a great passion for food and I welcome the Bill. This is a timely debate. I came to the House today to discuss patents legislation, but something funny happened on the way to the forum.

I am afraid that we might conclude from this debate that the Bill represents the solution to the plight of farmers. I have met farmers in my constituency and members of the National Farmers Union who are worried about the marketing of their produce and about mislabelling in supermarkets and shops. They have a passion for the Bill and want food produced in Britain to be clearly marked as such. In Committee, we shall have to discuss the problems that will arise in the process.

There are problems with defining where a product comes from. For example, a pork product may have been bred in Shropshire, fattened in France, slaughtered in Holland, processed in Belgium and sold back to the UK. How would such a product be defined?

Mr. Pickles: I am happy to explain that. Had the hon. Gentleman not missed the first two hours of the debate, he would have heard me deal with it earlier. We also heard an interesting speech by the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who dealt precisely with that matter, so I suggest that the hon. Gentleman checks *Hansard*. Frankly, I am embarrassed to have to respond to somebody who did not turn up for the debate and who has not apologised to me or the House for missing it. Labour Members missed a few minutes of my speech because of the collapse of business and were profuse in their apologies. I very much regret the hon. Gentleman's discourtesy to both me and the House for going into matters about which, had he been more diligent in his duties, he would have known something.

Richard Younger-Ross: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not being here earlier, but I was having to apologise to a constituent who came here from Devon to listen to the Patents Bill debate. He had been involved in talks with the promoter of that Bill.

Mr. Dismore: I fully take the hon. Gentleman's point, but I am surprised that the Liberal Democrat Benches have remained empty for most of the debate. Although I understand his reason for being absent, it would surely have been appropriate for a Liberal Democrat colleague to be present to tell him what went on.

Richard Younger-Ross: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I have been here for much of the debate, and I apologise for not being able to be here for its beginning. I have a passion for food and, despite the point scoring, the issues raised are pertinent. I will read *Hansard* with interest tomorrow to discover a few answers.

It is important that we do not go away with the idea that labelling is the answer to all farmers' problems. If we do, we shall let the Government off the hook. Many issues relating to education and the cost of products must be resolved. We need a policy for the way in which supermarkets buy from farmers. Whether it is through the promotion of co-operatives or whatever, we should enable farmers to strengthen their arm when they deal with supermarkets. Despite the fact that I have heard people outside say that labelling can provide the solution, the answer is not as simple as they might think.

Regional food is very important. When I was on holiday in Yorkshire, I was lucky enough to be able to go to a food festival in York. It was exceedingly good. There was a stand that sold bacon from Gloucestershire old spot pigs, and I had never had the opportunity to try it before. It was sweet, succulent and excellent. The fact that such products are being sold means that there is greater interest in food, by and large among the chattering classes.

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman has highlighted some of the problems with the Bill. He spoke about Gloucestershire old spot pigs, but were they raised in Yorkshire? If they were, would not the bacon have been York ham?

Richard Younger-Ross: I did not have the opportunity to talk to the pig at the time, so I cannot say where it came from. It was not marked or labelled. Old spot is a breed, so it is misleading to go down that line. It was succulent bacon and the producers should be proud of the product. I hope that more people have an opportunity to diversify and sell quality products.

I was also pleased that a company from my constituency, Roccombe Dairies, was represented at the festival. It makes excellent organic ice cream—it is better than Phish—and it has been very successful. It has been sold in the precincts of the Palace.

The Bill and the extra interest in food will help us deal with some of the problems. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) that we will be able to consider the issues further in Committee and that that will have positive consequences. However, we should not claim that the Bill will be the answer. Hon. Members on both sides of the House need to put more pressure on the Government so that they deal with the problems of the costs that farmers face and consider other ways of aiding them. That will ensure that the food industry in this country is profitable and long standing.

12.32 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I apologise for not having been able to be here for the whole debate. I was chairing a fascinating debate among young people in Committee Room 10—almost on a par with the quality of debate in the Chamber. I am glad that some of those who debated so effectively upstairs are watching this debate and seeing what parliamentarians get up to on their behalf.

[Mr. Chris Bryant]

I have a series of problems with the Bill, not least because it does not address the real issues. Food labelling is a problem and there is not enough information on the foodstuffs that one comes across. Like the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), I shop in Tesco. In the Rhondda, we do not have any other major supermarket chains apart from the Pioneer stores in Treorchy and Porth. They are not open at 11 pm, which is when I tend to get home on Thursday evenings and do my shopping. However, this weekend, I obviously wanted to stay here for this important debate, so I do not know when I will get to the supermarket. On the whole, it is Tesco for me.

I am troubled by the amount of information that supermarkets can garner about the shopping, eating and even clothing habits of their customers through the reward card system. There is an issue of civil liberties there, but I do not want to stray into a matter that is of no relevance to the Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been circling the Bill. It would be to the advantage of the House if he would now home in on it.

Mr. Bryant: Thank you for your invitation to attack the Bill in a more vulture-like way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which I shall now seek to do.

The information that my constituents look for when they buy food is, first, the sell-by date. A few days before the general election, I visited a shop just outside my constituency. I was taken to the front and shown a large display that boldly announced, "Out of date crisps—22p". Why a shop should boldly declare that the crisps were out of date, I do not know. There is still a market in food that has passed its sell-by date, and the Government need to look into it. Everyone has welcomed the advent of marking products with sell-by dates, but we need to look into it more closely. I have regularly seen in supermarkets in south Wales products that have had their sell-by date deleted and another put on top.

My constituents also want to know, as the Bill acknowledges, what is inside the products that they buy. However, I do not think that their primary interest is where the eggs, butter, flour and salt in their tarte au citron comes from. They do not want someone in an obscure bureaucratic office to analyse whether the lemon tart is made according to Jamie Oliver's recipe, which requires 18 lemons, constituting 25 per cent. by weight of the tart, or to that of the two fat ladies—who are now singular—which involves only eight lemons, constituting less than 25 per cent. by weight. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members laugh, but the issue of the major ingredient is a significant problem.

Mr. George Osborne: The reason why we were chuckling is that the hon. Gentleman said that the two fat ladies were now singular. That is because one of them has died, I believe.

Mr. Bryant: I did not know that Opposition Members could be so cavalier as to laugh at the death of one of the two fat ladies. I was thoroughly aware that one of them had died. That still sounds cavalier, but the point is made.

An issue that is significant to my constituents is the nationality of the food that they buy. At least one other hon. Member in the Chamber will have been delighted to notice that in recent years there has been a resurgence of Welsh produce across the whole country. Indeed, on a recent visit to Madrid, I was delighted to see products on which a little red dragon showed that kettle chips, lamb or other produce were from Wales, and that they were marketed as such. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar want me to give way?

Mr. Pickles: No, I am just gesticulating.

Mr. Bryant: I am glad that it is just gesticulation. The marketing of Welsh produce is of significant benefit to Welsh farmers and businesses.

Shona McIsaac: I am intrigued by what my hon. Friend says about finding Welsh products in Spain. However, could not British products such as Welsh lamb be exported to other European countries, slaughtered and then labelled Spanish, French or whatever?

Mr. Bryant: That is an important point. The Bill will make it more difficult for my constituents involved in livestock or packaged products to sell their produce elsewhere in the EU. The pop factory in Porth once used to produce Corona. Hon. Members may remember the slogan—

Shona McIsaac: "It's frothy man."

Mr. Bryant: No, that was for another product. The slogan was, "Every bubble's passed its fizzical." Unfortunately, the pop factory has gone the way of all mortal flesh, although it has been replaced by an extremely successful television studio. However, we still have one of the most successful ice cream manufacturers in the country, Mr. Creamy, in Tonypandy.

Mr. Pickles: I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman has Mr. Creamy in his constituency but—forgive me—what does this have to do with the Bill?

Mr. Bryant: I am talking about clause 2(1)(b) which refers to

"where the food has more than one ingredient, particulars of the country or countries of origin of each major ingredient."

I do not want to bore hon. Members. [HON. MEMBERS: "Too late."] I did not want to bore them, and I do not want to bore them any further by reciting a lengthy list of all the Mr. Creamy products that are available. Under the Bill, I do not know how one will be able to analyse and package Mr. Creamy's products in a way that would not make it impossible for consumers to have a genuine understanding. Many Opposition Members attack the EU for ludicrously excessive bureaucracy, yet this is a classic instance of it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see that you are frowning. You may be concerned that I am circling the Bill, but I am trying to make a specific point about the 25 per cent. clause.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman does not attempt to second-guess the

expressions that flit across my face when I am listening, absorbed, to a debate. I suggest that he sticks closely to the terms of the Bill.

Mr. Bryant: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will try my best. One of the problems that the Bill tries to rectify is that of misleading information on packaging and goods, suggesting that a piece of meat is Welsh when, in fact, it turns out to be from Germany, France, the Czech Republic, Poland or Hungary. That is not as important as the fact that most packaging is almost unintelligible, containing lengthy recitations of different elements inside a product, leaving one none the wiser. I am hesitant about the Bill because of the temptation to create an overly bureaucratic system.

The Bill misses the point because we genuinely need a fully European answer to the question of food labelling. We do not just need a one-country answer. The matter is important to my constituents who are trying to sell their products elsewhere in Europe. We must consider not only whether the Bill would achieve anything legally—I understand that it is in contravention of several articles of the treaty of Rome, as amended by the treaty of Amsterdam—but whether we are doing our best for our constituents who have businesses to run. I am confident that the Government are moving towards a fully European answer and are pushing, through the EU, to ensure that we have a system that gives everybody the full information that people need when shopping in Tesco, Sainsbury, or wherever.

We need a robust legal answer to those points, but I do not think that the Bill is legally robust. It is not robust when one considers the treaty of Rome or the definition in clause 2 of "each major ingredient".

Mr. Pickles: Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell us which articles of the treaty he feels the Bill infringes?

Mr. Bryant: Articles 226 and 227 would be problems. The hon. Gentleman is frowning; if he wants a copy of the treaty, I have it with me. We note that he is merely frowning.

The idea that we should institute our own specific understanding of what counts as sufficient and sensible labelling, as opposed to that elsewhere in the EU, is flawed.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: Given the hon. Gentleman's important point that he believes the Bill to be legally flawed, I should be grateful if he told us about his background. Perhaps he is qualified in the law. I am unaware of the authority with which he makes the assertion.

Mr. Bryant: I did not know that it was customary in the House to ask about hon. Members' backgrounds. However, I was head of European affairs for the BBC, so I have some passing acquaintance with the legislation to which we are referring.

Clause 4 defines the method of marking or labelling. It states:

"Subject to subsection (2), the information required by this Act shall be provided—

(a) on the food's packaging;

(b) on a label attached to the food's packaging;"

and so on. There is a genuine problem about the recycling of packaging. I bought a half leg of Welsh lamb in Tesco the other day, and delicious it was, but it came in a package of enormous proportions, which when chucked away took up half the bin. There is a problem with the amount of information that we as legislators decide must be on packaging. It is one of the issues that we need to address because a landfill site in my constituency is full of packaging. Conservative Members, via the Bill, want to increase the amount of packaging.

I conclude by making a plea to Conservative Members on behalf of those in my constituency who make and produce foodstuffs in all their various forms—whether it is Mr. Creamy or anyone else.

Mr. Pickles: I have enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's speech and he has been most courteous in giving way, but I am still bemused. I think that he referred to article 217; I may have misheard. I do not understand the point that he is making on that article. My understanding is that the articles of concern to the Government are 28, 29 and 30 and—I think—36. As he may be making an important point about article 217, I would be grateful if he clarified it.

Mr. Bryant: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me an opportunity to clarify the position. It is article 226. That article would mean that the European Commission could rule against the UK on the matter, and article 227 would mean that other member states could bring a complaint against the UK.

Mr. Pickles: This is clearly an important point. That was precisely the article under which the Commission acted with regard to British beef, poultry in Germany and French pigs, so I think that the hon. Gentleman has rather undermined his case. We are clearly within article 226—that is why I was looking bemused. Now I am beginning to feel more confident that we are within articles 28, 29, 30 and 36.

Mr. Bryant: I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. If the Bill were to become an Act, it would be open to challenge by the European Commission under article 226 and by other member states under article 227. As I am sure he knows, the numbers of all the articles change, so he may have confused himself a little.

Mr. Pickles: The articles do not change up in the 200s from the 20s.

Mr. Bryant: They do change up in the 200s—75 became 92 and so on—but we are now straying into articles and numbering.

Mr. Pickles: I hardly think that I would get confused by a change in numbering from the low 20s to the upper 200s, but the hon. Gentleman has undermined his case. I reiterate: the Commission acts according to precedent and it has created a clear precedent with British beef, French pork and German poultry. I am confident that the measure can get through. *[Interruption.]* It is no use the Minister shaking his head because the Government were wrong last time on British beef. He got the same advice last time. They were wrong then and they are wrong now. They should give the Bill a chance for the sake of British farmers.

Mr. Bryant: The difficulty that the hon. Gentleman is having is over the difference between article 28, which

[Mr. Bryant]

explicitly prohibits quantitative restrictions on trade between member states and measures of equivalent effect, and the later articles in the treaty of Rome—226 and 227—which give either the Commission or member states the opportunity to challenge in relation to article 28.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman would be right if article 28 referred to quantitative restrictions, but it refers to quantitative restrictions on imports, and there are no quantitative restrictions on imports in the Bill.

Mr. Bryant: The point is that the article is not just on imports, but on trade. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] It is. It is about restrictions on trade between member states—clearly, imports are a form of trade between member states—and measures of equivalent effect. If we change the labelling that has to be used in this country, we are by definition affecting the trading relations with other countries in the European Union. That is what then becomes subject to potential challenge under articles 226 or 227.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: It was after all the hon. Gentleman who introduced this line of argument, so it is proper that we seek to pursue it. As he interprets the article, how does that leave the position that has now been created by precedent in relation to France and beef imports, and the analysis that he is trying to project of the Bill?

Mr. Bryant: I would have to leave that to lawyers with greater capacity than I, but the Bill is at least in danger of falling foul of the EU legislation and at worst does not deal with the real problems that constituents face. It does not provide what is truly necessary, which is a fully European answer to the issues of food labelling.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman is being most courteous and this is proving to be an interesting exchange. I note that he is retreating from his earlier position, and I am grateful for that. We know how the Bill will be affected by the article to which he has referred: it will be examined on two issues, covert protectionism and retaliation, and it is clean on both charges.

Mr. Bryant: I disagree. I do not know whether Conservative Members have a copy of the treaty, but I should be happy to lend them one. Article 28 says that any autonomous alteration or suspension of duties in the common customs tariff shall be decided by the Council acting by a qualified majority on the proposal from the Commission. That has regularly been interpreted as referring not only to specific changes to tariffs and duties but to anything that materially or directly affects the free movement of goods in the European Union. Article 226 says that the Commission has a right to challenge, and article 227 gives other member states the same right.

The hon. Gentleman's simple assertion that his Bill is clean does not mean that it is clean. I am not the only person who has contested this point; other hon. Members have done so. I oppose the Bill not only on that point but because I want a genuinely European solution to the problem of food labelling. The Bill would inevitably queer the pitch for any future proposals by the Government for action through the European Union. That would be a mistake, and that is why I wholeheartedly, rather than slightly, oppose the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman said earlier that points made by other hon. Members were sensible and could be dealt with in Committee, so they should vote for the Bill's Second Reading, but I want to do more than tinker with its clauses. My objection is more substantial; it strikes at the heart of the Bill. On behalf on Mr. Creamy, Welsh kettle chips and Welsh lamb, I want to see, a genuinely European solution to the problem of food labelling.

Mr. Pickles: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to spoil an otherwise absorbing speech by mocking those of his colleagues who made legitimate points. My point, which I want to make forcefully, is that if other European Union countries such as Germany and France are prepared to give a lead, why cannot we simply follow them? Why do we not do something for our farmers? Mr. Whippy and Welsh lamb would be better served by the Bill than by waiting for pan-European promises of legislation. We have heard those promises before, and they have not been fulfilled.

Mr. Bryant: I am slightly confused by what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He seems to be accusing me of demeaning the comments made by other hon. Members. I am not doing so. As I said, I have not been here for the whole debate, but I agree with many of the objections that I have heard. The hon. Gentlemans response to some of the objections made by my hon. Friends was that they could be dealt with in Committee, so they should vote to give the Bill a Second Reading. I do not disagree with those objections; I believe that they show that the Bill is fatally flawed and should be rejected.

Conservative Members have rejected entire Bills, as a matter of course, despite maintaining in public that they object only to elements of them. They have often voted against a programme motion as a means of objecting to a Bill. I am therefore arguing that the Bill is fundamentally flawed, so it should not make any progress after today.

I should correct the hon. Gentleman about Mr. Whippy. I do not know where Mr. Whippy is based, but it is certainly not in the Rhondda. Mr. Creamy has a virtual monopoly in my constituency; it is very fine ice cream, and I recommend it to the House. Perhaps we should make sure that Mr. Creamy's ice cream is available in the House.

Clause 4, which deals with packaging, is as flawed as clause 2. We are in danger of creating a situation that is unsustainable for those who produce foodstuffs in this country; it is also unsustainable for supermarkets and those who have to dispose of household waste. That may seem relatively minor, but I believe that it is significant. This country already finds it difficult to match the aspirations of other European countries on recycling. I shop in Tesco, where I buy tomatoes, bananas, potatoes and so on, all of which are packaged, as they have to state which country they come from. I have to dispose of all the packaging—yet another little plastic tray, wrapped in yet another piece of printed cardboard. Invariably, I end up with more packaging than foodstuffs.

The Bill is fatally flawed and misses the point. It will not achieve its objectives because it is likely to fall at the first, second, third, fourth and fifth legal hurdle in Europe.

Producers in other countries, and, indeed, some in our own country, will probably say that the legislation should not be introduced because it is unfair and disadvantages countries other than Britain. I am sure that later we will hear about important advances that the Government want to make in food labelling across the whole of Europe.

I know that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar will deny this, but underlying the Bill is an anti-European sentiment—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are mildly fulminating, but only recently the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar raised the matter of what the Germans and the French are doing. If we wait for Europe, he suggested, nothing will ever happen.

Mr. Pickles: My credentials on supporting matters relating to Europe are pretty good, as are those of the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), who is sponsoring the Bill. We want a Europe of equal partners where, perhaps, we take the lead; we do not want a Europe where we are the slowest member. The Europe of bureaucracy and sloth is not the modern Europe that most people in this country want.

Mr. Bryant: I know that sometimes hon. Members have to pretend to be shocked and surprised, but I am genuinely shocked and surprised by the hon. Gentleman's argument. Indeed we should have a less bureaucratic system in Europe, but he has introduced a Bill that is the height of bureaucracy. It is likely to make it far more difficult for producers in this country to sell their goods in the rest of Europe; it would create unnecessary bureaucracy. The hon. Gentleman compounded his error by trying to suggest that, as he has good European credentials, he could not possibly advocate anything other than a system of equal partners. If we are going to be equal partners, why should we introduce unequal legislation?

Mr. Pickles: Has the hon. Gentleman paid the slightest attention to this debate? He has been an assiduous attender, but does he understand that the French are right to introduce legislation on labelling? Does he understand that it is reasonable for the Germans, and for us, to introduce such legislation? I hope that the Bill will be a platform for pan-European legislation, which I believe would be a good thing. We have to start somewhere, however, and my Bill is a good start.

Mr. Bryant: If the hon. Gentleman really wanted this Bill or similar provisions to be the platform for pan-European legislation, he could have introduced them by means of Conservative Members of the European Parliament. There is now a perfectly decent method whereby the legislative process can be started in the European Parliament. However, the Bill's underlying tenor is precisely as I have suggested.

Mr. Pickles: That is an outrage—

Mr. Bryant: Sorry?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pickles: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I heard myself speaking and realised that it was my voice. I am so sorry.

Mr. Bryant: I did not hear what the hon. Gentleman said, so I cannot get too excited about it.

As I said, my main concern is to speak on behalf of United Kingdom consumers and as a Welsh patriot who wants Welsh products to be available both elsewhere in the United Kingdom—so that it is a delight to walk into Sainsbury's in Islington and see Welsh products proudly displayed with a nice little Welsh dragon—and beyond.

Mr. Wiggin: How can the hon. Gentleman be sure without a Bill such as this one that the little Welsh dragon that he sees in Islington is labelling a genuinely Welsh product?

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Gentleman makes a point, but it is not the point of the Bill.

Mr. Wiggin: Yes, it is.

Mr. Bryant: The Bill will make no difference. Not only is it likely to fall at every legal hurdle it encounters, it does not explain how legislation introduced solely in the United Kingdom will affect the sale of Welsh dragons in Catalonia, Torino and other parts of Europe. I am trying to make that point. Those who think only about whether Welsh products will be sold only in the United Kingdom have small minds that need to be enlarged.

Mr. Wiggin *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bryant: Is the hon. Gentleman trying to intervene?

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful for the opportunity to do so. I am in despair listening to the hon. Gentleman. So far today there has been some consensus in the Chamber that British consumers should have the opportunity to know what they are buying when they go shopping. The Bill seeks to achieve that objective. By going down a Europhobic, Eurosceptic route, the hon. Gentleman has completely lost the consensus and—

Mr. Pickles: The plot.

Mr. Wiggin: Indeed. I despair for those in my constituency who farm. They, above all, want the opportunity for shoppers and consumers to know what they are buying.

Mr. Bryant: I do not question the hon. Gentleman's sincerity in wanting to achieve a laudable and honourable objective—ensuring that everyone has genuine information on the food that they eat; I think that every hon. Member agrees that that is a laudable and commendable objective—but the Bill will not achieve that objective because it does not stand up legally within the European Union.

Moreover, I think that the Bill prevents us from achieving a bigger objective: the creation of a Europe-wide labelling system that enables Welsh dragons to appear in shops in Madrid, as they do already, and elsewhere across Europe, giving people some confidence about what they are buying. I do not think that the Bill will achieve that objective.

One tiny issue—I apologise to the House if it has already been raised today—is how Scotland is treated. Scotland is not included in the Bill.

Mr. Pickles: It has a devolved Parliament.

Mr. Bryant: I understand that it has devolved powers. However, that only underlines the point that we should

[Mr. Bryant]

not be creating separate legislation in England and Wales, but seeking a Europe-wide settlement of the issue. That is why I would push my right hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues to work towards a better Europe-wide resolution.

Mr. Wiggin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bryant: No. I have given way plenty of times and I am about to conclude.

I believe that the Bill is flawed, and not in a way that could be rectified, improved, ameliorated or tidied up in Committee. I believe that it is so fatally flawed and so potentially dangerous to the business and farming interests of people in this country that we should throw it out, not just lock, but lock, stock and barrel.

1.10 pm

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on achieving such a high position in the private Members' Bill ballot and selecting this Bill. As is well known, it deals with a topic that is close to my heart and affects the interests of those who operate in the rural economy, and everyone who lives, works and shops in towns and villages in my constituency and up and down the land. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should congratulate my hon. Friend on raising a key issue for the confidence of consumers and the need to rebuild confidence in the rural economy which sustains the livelihoods of so many people—particularly in the light of recent events, not least the foot and mouth crisis. I was enormously impressed by my hon. Friend's straightforward analysis in introducing the Bill.

I know that it is not usual to criticise the preceding speaker, but the comments by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) were a departure from the broadly constructive tone of all the other speeches today. I hope that I will be able to address some of his points in detail. He was certainly flailing around with a number of issues in an attempt to claim that the Bill was flawed ab initio, although it was difficult to see how he could substantiate the serious points that he raised.

In general, we have had an enjoyable and important debate, not least because it gave rise to a degree of levity. We discovered that the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) certainly has a passion for food and was able to describe all sorts of recipes. We were all struggling to find which part of the Bill they related to, but we got there in the end.

The debate identified the enormous importance that the Bill gives to the tied interests between producers and consumers. As is well known by all who have taken the time to study this topic, our food labelling and food standards regulations are second to none by comparison with any country in the world, and that is absolutely right. That enormous body of regulation goes hand in hand with the quality and standards of production that our farmers are able to maintain. As I said in 2000 when I introduced the Second Reading of my Bill, which was subsequently amended by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar, it is clear that the insistence upon identifying country of origin and standards of production is needed by consumers and producers in order to give people confidence in our products. What has changed is the departmental responsibility for the Bill. It has moved from what was the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—now the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—to the Department of Health, which is why the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), is present.

Although I understand the thinking behind that—not least with the introduction of the Food Standards Act 1999—there is a residual concern that the necessary value chain between producers and consumers has been divided, whereas in the past there was an attempt to ensure that it was brought together. That is important in the context of the Bill, because much of the presentation has depended on looking at the problem purely from a farmer's point of view. Of course it is important for all hon. Members who represent rural constituencies to consider what opportunities there are to support farmers and all those who produce from the land, be that cereal or meat. However, their support will be effective only if it coincides with the interests of consumers.

Although I welcome the Minister's presence, there is concern that food safety issues, on which the Department of Health naturally has an angle, have been over-emphasised and that we should instead be examining the total value chain from producers to consumers. I do not think that accountability is necessarily an issue, but farmers and all those who are engaged in the rural economy have recognised the shift which occurred between Second Reading of the original Bill on 3 March 2000, and now. It will be interesting to hear what different arguments the Minister will make. The subject was constructively discussed on 3 March last year.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. I understood that the official Opposition supported the split between DEFRA, which remains responsible for the food industry, and the Department of Health, which is responsible for food safety. Is that no longer their view?

Mr. O'Brien: The support was genuinely given and that remains our position. The Bill does not merely cover food safety. It relates to consumer confidence, choice and rights to information so that people get what they think they are buying. Many people want to support the British rural economy, and farmers markets are doing an effective job in that regard. Food labelling has a double accountability, both for safety and for the broader sector.

Mr. Hutton: Just so that no one is in any doubt, the views that I give will not be just those of the Department of Health. My concerns are also held by DEFRA.

Mr. O'Brien: I am grateful to the Minister for confirming that he will represent the Government view. I am not so reassured by his expression of concern. However, I am sure that we will be able to address that either today or in Committee.

When the former Agriculture Minister responded in the previous debate, she highlighted the Government's belief that the existing law was sufficient to deal with misleading, inaccurate or insufficient labelling. In addition, she feared that the Bill might not comply with the relevant provisions of EU law.

On the first point, it became apparent that the issues surrounding food labelling under regulation are encapsulated by guidance notes given to trading standards officers. They are not enforceable by way of law, but they do govern the expectations as to how trading standards officers should perform their duties. It is not even a statutory code in the same sense as the highway code, a point I made in our previous debate on the issue.

There have been a few moves since we last debated this about 18 months ago. However, there are still many instances of insufficient information on food packaging. Survey after survey shows a large body of opinion and evidence that consumers do not trust food labels. Not only do they find it difficult to find or understand the information contained on certain labelling—they may have to search long and hard to find a very small letter representing the country of origin, for example—but the information is often encapsulated in great wodges of complex, detailed, small-print material, which creates difficulties for people whose lives are busy.

It is of course important to have such information there, not least on nutritional content, but there has been a proposal, which the Bill would facilitate, to consider a certification procedure for the country of origin. Perhaps holograms could be used, but whatever the method, it would be convincing. It would enhance consumer confidence if the labelling contained a kite-mark, certification or accreditation that encapsulated, providing that it was properly publicised, the nutritional, vitamin and GMO content as well as contents and production standards information. I think that that should be considered in Committee because it would help address the very serious points of the hon. Members for Cleethorpes and for Falmouth and Cambourne (Candy Atherton). The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) also raised the very important subject of the allergen content. There is the 1 per cent. rule, but even below a content of 1 per cent. there can be a real risk for young children in particular and anybody who suffers that level of sensitivity.

Shona McIsaac: My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) referred to nut allergies. How will the Bill relate to restaurant food? Growing numbers of people eat out and as far as I can see there is no way that the Bill would give consumers in restaurants any information. The restaurateur would have to choose to say where the food on a menu came from.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Lady is right. Clause 4(2) states:

"Where food is sold otherwise than to the ultimate consumer, the information required by this Act may appear on commercial documents relating to the food, provided that it also appears on the outermost packaging of the food."

Let us take the example of buying a steak in a pub restaurant. How do we know that it comes from Scotland, even though its description on the menu as Aberdeen Angus might be intended to imply that, and not Botswana or Paraguay? Although food regulations govern information provided on the outermost packaging, the difficulty is with the menu. The information necessary to help the consumer choose should be given at the point of consumption and choice.

At the bottom of the menu—not necessarily by every item—there should be a small indication that, for example, the food was not all from the United Kingdom. Then people who were concerned about that would be able to inquire further. If the restaurateur chose, he could say precisely where each ingredient came from—but of course we must recognise that that could be burdensome, given that food is often sourced from different countries.

That was a long answer to the hon. Lady's intervention. I thought that the Minister was intending to say something about it, too—but perhaps he feels that I have covered the ground sufficiently, and it does not need any further explanation. *[Interruption.]* The Minister says that I have muddied the water sufficiently. I thank him; I regard that as a badge of honour.

Shona McIsaac: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the commercial document is the menu?

Mr. O'Brien: If a menu is not a commercial document, what is? Patently, it is an invitation to treat, which I think would be regarded as a commercial document according to most tests, because one cannot treat unless one is intending to undertake, or is in the course of, a commercial transaction. Treating implies consideration under the law. I do not know whether the hon. Lady wishes to pursue the point, but I am dredging into a deep and distant solicitor's background; I gave up practising 13 years ago, so I hope that I attended the right lectures to give her that answer.

Shona McIsaac: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how the provision can apply only when the commercial documents mentioned in clause 4(3)

"accompany the food to which they relate at all times"?

Would the menu have to accompany the food at all times? I am confused by that part of the Bill.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Lady makes a fair interpretational criticism. The meaning is indeed intended and fairly clear—but I hope that she will agree that it would be appropriate for discussion in Committee. I do not think that it represents a fundamental flaw.

Mr. Bryant *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: I shall move on, because I want to ensure that I give the Minister sufficient time to discuss all the points that have been raised, and I hope that the Bill will find favour with him.

We have discussed ministerial accountability, and the value chain between consumers and producers, which we recognise is particularly important to our hard-pressed rural economy—represented not least in the constituency of Eddisbury. If I combine my constituency with that of my hon. Friends the Members for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), the total represents the largest milk field in Europe by a wide margin, in terms of both quality and value. These considerations are of intense importance to all our constituents.

My hon. Friend's Bill contains amendments that address the Government's fundamental criticisms of my Bill, and it is notable that both that Bill, 18 months ago, and the present Bill, have attracted not only the support of the National Farmers Union and the National Pig Association, but the repeated support of the Consumers Association, which has continually said that country of

[Mr. O'Brien]

origin labelling needs to be put in place. That is why it is important to make these points about the need for producer and consumer interests to be tied together.

Notably, my hon. Friend has also enlisted the support of the Food and Drink Federation. That endorsement is a very significant aspect of the presentation of his Bill.

Mr. Bryant: Returning to the issue of menus in restaurants, we might all accept that it is nice to know whether a piece of beef comes from Argentina, Scotland or elsewhere, but I am not sure whether the Bill would mean that the country of origin of not only the steak but the peas, the chips and the onion rings would have to be listed, too.

Mr. O'Brien: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will concede that the issue relates to consumer confidence; that would be the focus, especially as regards meat products. The wording of the subsection—like that of all Bills—is sufficiently general to ensure that, in this case, the detail could cover aspects of normal commercial life. That could include menus as well as other things. The hon. Gentleman's point would be a proper one for Committee. I hope he will agree that it would not form part of his criticism that the Bill was fundamentally flawed and should not proceed. I do not agree with those points and do not think that he substantiated them.

The measure presents the Government with a genuine and easy opportunity to further a matter of deep interest to the constituent interests that I listed earlier. The Bill has been sufficiently well thought through. Clauses 3(1) and 4(1)(e) incorporate changes which address the main concerns articulated by the then Minister of State at MAFF when we debated my Bill.

When the Minister of State, Department of Health responds, it is important for us to understand whether he has genuine concerns about the underlying concepts of the Bill. In the debate on my Bill, the Government expressed sympathy but then went on to explain why they would not support it. That caused much consternation to many of those constituent interests throughout the country and there was a great deal of publicity about it. The matter will not go unnoticed; it is of deep concern to many people.

The issues that lie behind the Bill are of sufficient moment for us to have held a serious debate today. We have to decide how quickly we want to make these improvements: either by means of a Bill or by continuing ministerial negotiations in Europe on various delegated aspects of authority and regulation. Despite numerous warm words—I do not deny their warmth—progress has been marginal and action has been limited. I do not doubt that although the negotiations in the halls of the European Union may look serene on the surface, frantic pedalling goes on below; but for those who are not involved, it is the outcomes that matter. There is no sense that real progress has been made in the various negotiating forums of the EU. It seems that we are being forced to go at the slowest pace—that of those in the EU who have interests to protect.

The UK has some of the best and most developed food labelling and food standards regulation and authorities. It will be a bit of a disappointment and certainly a surprise if the Minister does not want to take this opportunity to make progress. The Government often want to take the lead: the Bill would give them the chance to lead in Europe and to demonstrate that our country can add value to the standards regime throughout Europe. We should do that, because we all want to raise standards. We want to celebrate not only the regional diversity of foods—that could be continued under the existing regulations—but also the countries of origin, so that there will no longer be confusion as to the interpretation of current EU law. We could thus avoid disparity, for example, between the actions taken by France in relation to our beef and our actions on other matters. We can show real leadership, and the Bill offers the Government and the Minister a genuine opportunity to do so.

It is difficult to resist asking: why not try to introduce this legislation; why not send it to Committee; why not let it be the vehicle to explore these issues and ensure that the EU can learn from these debates rather than going through the existing labyrinthine procedures?

One important aspect that has been overlooked so far—it is the only point that my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar did not make in his opening remarks—is that the Bill has a huge advantage which all Governments look for: it does not represent a burden on the taxpayer. To the extent that labels will have to be changed, there is a cost implication for the commercial interests affected, but given the already large number of packaging and labelling regulations, the Bill merely represents an adjustment. There is unlikely to be a cost burden on businesses.

I therefore recommend that the Minister look favourably on the Bill. In pure policy terms, the Conservative party would like to keep this attractive policy for itself because it would cost taxpayers nothing. Surely that must be of interest to the Minister.

Shona McIsaac: If the Bill becomes law and businesses are required to state the country of origin on food labels, how would infringements be dealt with? How does the hon. Gentleman envisage enforcing the Bill? If it is through trading standards officers, that would represent a cost to council tax payers and other UK taxpayers.

Mr. O'Brien: The Government would have to ensure that they were happy with any enforcement regime. One would expect them to give a steer. I hesitate to be presumptuous, but in terms of enforcement, it would be up to trading standards officers using guidelines that would flow from future legislation—

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is right that I did not raise the matter in my opening remarks, for some of the reasons that the hon. Member for Cleethorpes mentioned. The Bill would not create a special category of enforcement officer; enforcement would fall naturally within the existing regime and would fit the job of existing trading standards officers. Admittedly, they would have more to do, but that would represent a de minimis rather than a substantial burden on the public purse, either nationally or locally. It would certainly pale into insignificance compared with the cavalier way in which the Government place new obligations on local authorities.

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Moreover, without the Bill, trading standards officers, for

instance, will continue to have to operate under guidelines that are difficult to interpret because the body of regulation and law that sits behind them is vast, complex and detailed. If existing guidelines are to be properly adhered to and well policed, either the number of trading standards officers will have to be increased to instil the confidence that consumers seek, or this country will have to accept that we cannot deliver for consumers and that existing labelling is sufficiently robust to provide confidence.

If the Bill were enacted, accountability would be in place. Trading standards officers exist in any event and they would simply have a new regime to enforce. I therefore see no serious cost implications.

Mr. Hutton: I thank the hon. Gentleman again for allowing me to intervene. In my experience as a Minister, there is no such thing as a cost-free solution to these problems. I ask the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar to reflect on two matters. I assume that, if the Bill is enacted, there will be a risk of more prosecutions. Can the hon. Gentlemen explain the position of an English retailer who tries to sell on products supplied by a European Union country when the retailer's advice is that the legislation is ineffective at a European level? Does that not expose the English retailer to the risk of prosecution on a matter that is entirely outwith his or her control? Is that not unfair?

Mr. O'Brien: I shall not pretend that I am able to give a knee-jerk response to that point. Serious legal advice will need to be considered. On the point about cross-border infringement and domestic law interacting with EU and international law, I recognise that the point about conflict of law might need to be addressed. More importantly, however, the liability issue affecting the retailer could be excluded by contract, and there may need to representation by a supplier in another country. That is a matter of contract terms, so it would not be covered on the face of the Bill.

Mr. Pickles: It might be helpful if the Minister could arrange for the legal advice on the labelling of British beef, French pork and German poultry to be placed in the Library.

Mr. O'Brien: I am sure that the Minister will intervene immediately if he wishes to accept that offer.

Mr. Hutton: I shall duck that invitation now, but I shall come to it in my remarks.

I am intrigued by the line of argument of the hon. Member for Eddisbury. He seems to be suggesting that the law of contract would supersede the Bill. That is the first time I have heard that argument. Is that how he and the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar envisage the legislation working in practice?

Mr. O'Brien: I will attempt to answer that point. However, I do not want to go too far down that track, because it is highly presumptuous to debate a legal argument on the Floor of the House when we cannot have the benefit of receiving expert legal advice. It would be very helpful if the advice given to Ministers were placed in the Library. In fact, a former Attorney-General, Lord Lyell, has suggested that the legal advice on which Ministers were acting may have been flawed and that their concerns about not complying with EU law should and could be overcome.

Contract terms can apply only within the privity of contract between the supplier and the customer—the retailer in the Minister's example—but general law relates to who would suffer damage. Ultimately, the consumer is damaged if he purchases something that has a false, misleading or insufficient label, but the extent of that damage will always have to be shown.

Penalties relate to the regime of trading standards and to the commercial expectations that will be set up as a result of the Bill's becoming law. The Government will obviously wish to explore that point in Committee, and I welcome that.

Will the EU negotiations or a Bill of this nature be the first to produce the outcomes and results for which consumers and farmers are clamouring? It is clear from the track record to date that the answer is a Bill of this nature. If EU negotiations, however, produced something quicker than this Bill, that would be to the advantage of all European states. It would demonstrate that we have shown the leadership that the Government claim. Parliamentarians in this country have greater expertise, experience and knowledge of food labelling than those in EU member states and we have a responsibility to bring them to bear for the benefit of all member states. That is the nature of partnership. We should show our leadership.

The hon. Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Brent, North made positive, helpful and committed contributions. The technology is rapidly developing to enable the provisions in the Bill to become effective and practicable. I was particularly taken by the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), for Tatton and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). They spoke passionately about the interests of their farmers and constituents. The hon. Members for Falmouth and Camborne and for Cleethorpes also made helpful contributions that should be taken into account when the Bill is considered in Committee.

I urge the Minister to look favourably on the Bill. It is not for any party political or simple knockabout reasons that it has merited being introduced a second time. Many personal experiences have been related today. Hon. Members on both sides of the House recognise that their constituents are anxious about their ability to have confidence in labels and the information that they are given about food when, almost daily in our newspapers, so much of the news throws doubt on the safety and integrity of the food that we eat.

Producers and farmers in Britain are committed to the highest food production standards, especially compared with their competitors in Europe and the world. Pig producers, for example, have had to invest heavily to take pigs out of stalls and tethers while other EU member states manage to get a derogation. We vigilantly police the regulations, which are applied at great cost to a depressed sector of the market that does not receive subsidy from the EU. Its largest competitor, Denmark, has now obtained a further derogation for seven years, to 2014.

There is a deep imbalance in the marketplace. The Bill will go a long way to help redress that by empowering consumers. That is better than imposing measures from

[Mr. O'Brien]

the top down. Consumers tell us that they want to support our farmers and our rural economy in these exceptionally tough times. My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton demonstrated how much farmers' incomes had collapsed. There is great pressure on the farmgate price. The power of distribution and supermarket chains in the marketplace has left farmers and those who use land to produce added value for us at a disadvantage. They need the fairness, honesty, clarity and simplicity that the Bill would provide to label their products in such a way as to give British consumers the chance to make a confident choice. I again urge the Minister to look favourably on the Bill.

1.47 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on introducing the Bill, which raises some important issues. I apologise for having missed part of his speech. I came prepared to speak on a different subject. I am afraid that I always follow my old sea scout motto "Be prepared." I had a speech ready to make on the Bill, which I had to go and fetch, and I am concerned there may be insufficient time before 2.30 pm for me to make all the points that I worked up last night.

It is rather apposite—third time lucky, perhaps—that I have been called to speak this afternoon. Last week I came prepared to speak on the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill and never got my chance because we ran out of time. It is interesting that we have moved from Barney the lobster's reprieve to shellfish and crustaceans, which are referred to in the Bill.

My starting point is to pick up from the last intervention made by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien). He said that enforcement was a de minimis matter for trading standards officers. If it is, why is the Bill being introduced? I should have thought that ensuring that the legislation was properly policed would require considerable extra resources on the part of trading standards officers, which would undoubtedly have an impact on the cost to local authorities and, indirectly, on the council tax payer and the Government.

I was interested to hear about the family background of my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac). She and I have something in common. My father was a chef, and I grew up in the hotel and catering trade, so I also have an interest in matters culinary. Perhaps we could swap some recipes later. I certainly do not intend to test your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by going through some of the issues that we talked about earlier in that respect.

One of my concerns about the Bill is that it does not deal with the dreaded issue of E numbers. We have talked a lot today about the extent to which consumers scrutinise labels on packages. I am less concerned about where food comes from than about what chemicals are in it. We have not addressed that today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) referred to the Bill's relationship to Scotland. As the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar said, Scotland is excluded from the Bill. It would be peculiar if we did not look at the impact of the Bill within the UK, let alone worldwide, as it is not confined to the EU. It would also be peculiar if people were able to sell things in Scotland that they were unable to sell in England and Wales. We could have dumping arrangements, with dodgy products being shipped north over the border to unsuspecting Scots. Do Conservative Members of the Scottish Parliament intend to propose a similar Bill for Scotland?

Mr. Pickles: That is the beauty of devolution. They are masters of their own destiny, as we are in this Chamber.

Mr. Dismore: I can only assume from that that there is no intention on the part of the Conservative party to propose such a Bill in Scotland. Why should the Scots lose out? Are they to have less protection than those of us in England and Wales?

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: Last year, a Member of the Scottish Parliament proposed a similar Bill relating only to meat products. It was discussed at length and has made rather better progress than the original Bill has done here. I hope that, today, we can redress that imbalance with cross-border uniform regulation.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's clarification, as it would be nonsense if we had different provisions in different parts of the United Kingdom. In that context, I include Northern Ireland.

Much has been said about the legality of the Bill in the context of the EU. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda explained the issue fully. As a lawyer, I am aware that my hon. Friend made some important points. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar said that the Bill would comply with European legislation. He may be right, or my hon. Friend may be right. However, I am absolutely certain that the Bill in its current form will provide a recipe for making a lot of fat-cat lawyers a lot fatter in the law courts. It does not really matter who is right, because I can see that there will be a feeding frenzy for lawyers interpreting the Bill, both here and in the European Court of Justice. I will leave the detailed analysis of that to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda.

In terms of our international trading obligations, I wish to refer to the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the relationship between ourselves and the rest of the world. My constituency is multicultural. People who live in Hendon have come from all over the world. We have food shops selling produce from all over the world that my constituents require for their recipes and cultural requirements. I ask the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar to consider the implications of the Bill for people using food products from the Indian subcontinent, for example, who may find great difficulty in complying with requirements.

I do not know whether the Bill will comply with GATT. We have had the analysis of EU law, but article 22 of the 1947 treaty says:

> "Subject to the requirement that such measures are not applied in a manner which would constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination between countries where the same conditions prevail, or a disguised restriction on international trade, nothing . . . shall be construed to prevent the adoption or enforcement by any contracting party of measures:
>
> (a) necessary to protect public morals;
>
> (b) necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health".

I am not sure whether what is proposed by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar falls within that general exception. If it does not, we could fall foul of much wider international obligations—going way beyond the EU.

The Government have worked hard to try to deal with the matter in the interim through the publication of guidance notes, a copy of which I have here and from which I was going to quote at rather more length than I have time for. Perhaps I can make the point by referring only to paragraphs 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. I do not intend to go through the notes in detail, but the point that arises from them relates to our earlier argument:

"The true place of origin of a food should always be given if the label as a whole would otherwise imply that the food comes from, or has been made in, a different place or area. Consumers are, however, unlikely to expect products such as Chelsea buns, York ham, Madras curry or Frankfurters to come from those areas in the absence of other material on the label suggesting that they do."

I challenge the guidance with regard to York ham. The point that arises from the guidance is that we must adopt a common-sense approach to such issues. The notes go on to refer to the sort of things that might mislead people, such as flags on labelling.

There is nothing to stop the voluntary labelling of products or to stop British producers putting a Union flag on British produce so that people can be assured that what they are buying is British. That is a far more sensible way of proceeding in the absence of international agreements. I have much sympathy with the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar in promoting the Bill, but he needs to keep a sense of proportion in that respect.

Brent Cross shopping centre, which is one of the country's largest premier shopping centres, is in my constituency. The British Retail Consortium has many members at Brent Cross and I consulted them on their views on the Bill, which were clear. They said:

"There is already a very effective labelling system in place which people understand and is clear.

There are universally set standards which everyone must adhere to . . . not different standards in different countries."

They say that, because retailers apply universal standards regardless, people can have confidence in such standards. They consider that

"Country of origin should not make a difference."

They also make the important point that

"All surveys show that top of the agenda for consumers is price".

They say that better packaging, as sought by hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar,

"would push up costs and would put consumers off. It is price over country of origin."

They add:

"'Buying British' slogans"—

and, for that matter, packaging—

"are a nice bonus if they work—but consumers are generally not taken in."

The supermarkets are prepared to work when there are issues of public health, as their work on pigmeat and their co-operation on the little red tractor scheme, to which the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) referred, shows. I am not sure whether the little red dragon symbol is an attempt by the Welsh community to pass off goods as Welsh, or whether one can have a little red dragon riding a red tractor in order to make both points. The fact that the little red tractor scheme has been so successful is an indication of what can be done voluntarily.

Mr. Pickles: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why the National Farmers Union supports the Bill?

Mr. Dismore: I have had no discussions with the NFU about the Bill, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point. The NFU is of course on the side of producers; I am on the side of consumer and I am making points on behalf of the retail trade, which has a more direct relationship with the consumer than the farmer.

Mr. Pickles: Can the hon. Gentleman tell me why the Consumers Association supports the Bill?

Mr. Dismore: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the information that I have just cited from the retail trade. I do not have the time to go through many of the arguments. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I can have a discussion over a cup of English tea—which, presumably has come from India; I am not sure how it would be labelled—and I can go through the remainder of my evidence in more detail.

The point that the hon. Gentleman made earlier about the schemes that have been set up overseas is important. I have quite a lot of information about the labelling systems for French pigmeat and German poultry. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, but what is important is that those schemes have been able to be produced within the existing legal framework of the EU, and there is no reason why we cannot do the same. It is interesting that French production is covered by what is called the pigmeat identity guarantee—PIG for short. I am surprised that in such a francophone country, it is not called something that spells out as "COCHON", but there we have it.

I challenge the hon. Gentleman on a major point on behalf of my Jewish constituents. They have raised a number of issues, including how kosher labelling would be affected by the Bill. This goes back to the 25 per cent. rule. The Federation of Synagogues, which is based in my constituency, has written to ask me to ensure that nothing in the Bill would in any way undermine the use of the word "kosher". It is concerned about the 25 per cent. threshold.

This goes back to the discussion on nuts. Certain food products contain small amounts of ingredients—under 2 per cent.—that are not listed on the packaging. If those ingredients are non-kosher, they can render the entire product non-kosher and unsuitable for consumption by orthodox Jews. The federation would be interested in ensuring that food labelling lists all ingredients and their percentages.

Mr. Pickles: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dismore: I am afraid that I have to make progress.

The federation is also concerned about the potential impact of the parts of the Bill that relate to animal welfare standards on shechita, the method of slaughter of meat for the Jewish community. It says that there is often much misunderstanding about that. Conventional slaughter can often create far more problems for animal welfare than shechita, for which a Jewish slaughterer needs six years training. The federation is concerned that the Bill could undermine the whole market for shechita products.

The most important issue that I raise on behalf of the Jewish community is the impact in relation to Israel. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is aware—if he has been studying *Hansard*, he will be, because the matter has

[Mr. Dismore]

been raised in the House on a number of occasions—that there is a live issue in relation to the labelling of produce from settlements on the West Bank. At the moment, those products are labelled as produce of Israel. That is a result of quite a lot of negotiation between the Israelis and the EU. A modus vivendi has been reached.

According to the declaration of principles signed in 1993 by the Government of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, and witnessed by the United States and the Russian Federation, the status of settlements is an issue that remains to be dealt with and considered in later negotiations. Until then, it was agreed by the EU directive of customs that goods produced there will be treated as all other Israeli goods.

The issue of rules of origin for a narrow group of Israeli products manufactured in various parts of the country is under discussion continually between the EU, Israel and the Palestinian National Authority. Pending a restart of the status negotiations—obviously, one hopes that there will be a successful resolution—the Bill could open a major can of worms, in that there are elements within the Palestinian National Authority who would not like products to be labelled as produce of Israel, but who demand that they be labelled produce of the occupied territories.

If the Bill were to go through, it could have a major impact on the situation in the middle east. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the Conservative Friends of Israel, has not thought through the implications of the measure. I think that he should reflect on the perhaps unintended, but worldwide implications of his proposals.

I would like to raise a series of detailed questions. However, there is not time to do that in detail, although I ask the hon. Gentleman to let me know, perhaps afterwards, why the Bill does not apply to regulations 26, 27 and 28 of the Food Labelling Regulations 1996, nor to regulation 29, which deals with items from vending machines. It is probably more appropriate that it should apply to regulations 26, 27 and 28.

The Bill would require labels to refer to production standards that are lower than those in this country. What is the position regarding production standards that are different from ours and in which some elements may be lower and others higher? Why is clause 4(1) conjunctive rather than disjunctive? To return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda, conforming with paragraphs (a) to (e) of that measure would necessitate so much labelling and packaging that it would undermine some food producers' financial viability. Clause 4(2) refers to commercial documents. Does that include those in electronic format? I ask because much trade is carried out using computers rather than paper transactions.

I have a huge amount of information about the Bill and many questions to ask the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, who has made some important points, but I know that the Minister wants to reply to the debate, so I hope that I will be able to put my points to the hon. Gentleman in more detail in Committee or on Report.

2.6 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): One of the unfortunate consequences of being the Minister responding to a debate on a private Member's Bill on a Friday is that, because of the nature of the debate and the commitments of right hon. and hon. Members, most Members have gone by the time one gets to speak. That is unfortunate on this occasion because we have heard 12 good speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House: my hon. Friends the Members for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), for Stroud (Mr. Drew), for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), and the hon. Members for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) and, of course, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), the promoter of the Bill. He spoke very well and I will say a little more about his remarks in a moment.

As we all know, this is the second time round for the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), who spoke for the Opposition, so I assume that he needed less time to prepare for the debate than the rest of us, particularly myself. When the hon. Gentleman introduced his Bill, he spoke for an hour and 10 minutes, but today he managed to condense his remarks into a pithy 37 minutes. That was quite an achievement because, naturally, he and many other hon. Members feel very strongly about the subject.

I was struck by the high quality of the contributions. There is obviously a great deal of expertise on the subject among hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber, and that knowledge was on display. I was struck also by a fact that will determine my subsequent remarks, which is that it would be wrong to characterise the concerns about the Bill, particularly those expressed by Labour Members, as representing a lack of concern about animal welfare or consumer safety and choice.

My hon. Friends have sought to emphasise the point that any disagreement is about means, not objectives. My concern about the Bill is not about its content, on which there is broad general agreement. We want to improve consumer choice, and I shall set out some of my arguments about that in a moment. However, we must try to achieve that aim within a framework that is compatible with our treaty obligations and the agreements that we have entered into with European Union member states. Most of the legislation that governs food safety, and food labelling in particular, was introduced by the Conservative party. In a nutshell, my concern about the hon. Gentleman's Bill—on which I shall expand, as he would expect me to—is that his proposal for dealing with genuine consumer concerns would take the United Kingdom outwith the framework of European obligations and legal requirements into which we have freely entered. Generally, that is a bad way to make policy.

Mr. Pickles: The Minister ducked a question of mine earlier, but I shall put that to one side. He will recall that I said that I did not mind how the Bill's objectives were achieved. I am not suggesting that we break our treaty obligations. The Minister may surprise me and conclude his speech before 2.30 pm; the Bill will go into Committee and he can put his valuable expertise to good use. Alternatively, he can use his expertise to pursue the Bill's objectives via another route. I do not mind which route is taken; I just want the matter to be addressed.

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. My preferred way, and certainly the Government's preferred

way, of making progress on these issues is to do so within the framework of European law, as we are required to do. I shall deal later with the hon. Gentleman's challenge to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda about an hour ago, on the precise legal framework in which that debate needs to take place. However, his intervention is helpful and shows a generosity of spirit about the eventual fate of his Bill, which may not reach Committee. If he makes further interventions, it is unlikely to help his cause; he will be disappointed to learn that I am more than happy to give way if he wishes to make such observations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North told us about his encounter with a clam in New York and its unfortunate consequences for his stomach; I do not want to say anything more about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud made an effective and well informed speech. I am glad to see that he is in Chamber; he speaks out consistently and effectively in the House on his constituents' behalf. The hon. Member for Tatton demonstrated his charming and urbane nature. If the new shadow Leader of the House has his way in relation to Back-Bench Conservative Members, particularly new Members, he will not have done himself any harm at all.

In an otherwise good speech, the hon. Member for Leominster came close to spoiling what the hon. Members for Brentwood and Ongar and for Eddisbury described as a consensual attitude by questioning the values and assumptions of those of us who have reservations about the Bill. It is not because we have less enthusiasm or commitment to securing the principles of animal welfare and so on to which the hon. Member for Leominster alluded that we air those reservations. It is usually a bad idea for Members to claim a monopoly on concern or compassion in these issues; unwittingly, I suspect, the hon. Gentleman overstepped the line. However, I was glad to hear what he had for breakfast; I, too, am a Weetabix fan. From his remarks, and the frost with which he delivered them, he must have had three; I tend to stick to one.

Mr. O'Brien: That might explain why he is not in his seat.

Mr. Hutton: He is not in the Chamber now; perhaps it has something to do with the clams that my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North talked about.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne spoke effectively on behalf of her constituents, as did the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes referred to her nether regions, which made me slightly anxious. However, she meant the nether regions of her fridge, which is an important clarification. Thanks to her, I know a great deal more about low-fat mayonnaise than I did at the start of our debate. Perhaps she will let me have some of her recipes at the end of our proceedings.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge is not here now and was not here for most of our debate. It is appropriate that he made the shortest speech today—three minutes—as he was in the Chamber for the shortest period.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda spoke very well, and was the first Member to express concern about the Bill's legal basis. I thought that he struck the right balance between wanting to see improvements on the issue, as do we all, and finding the right legal vehicle to realise that ambition. For reasons that I shall explain in a moment, I tell the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar that his Bill is not the right legal vehicle to reach that goal.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda for allowing the House to learn a little more about Mr. Creamy, whoever he is. I have not had any Mr. Creamy products, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will let me have some eventually.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon—as always the voice of common sense in our Friday debates—made one of his shortest ever Friday speeches, although it was not short on quality. He was certainly right to take us outside the narrow confines of Europe in our discussion of the Bill's legal basis. He also quite properly raised issues on the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the world trade rules. When he mentioned those issues, I frantically searched through my speaking notes to see whether there was some mention of them there. Sadly there was not. However, I am quite sure that, as a distinguished lawyer, my hon. Friend was probably right in what he said about them.

I should like now to deal with the Bill itself and the Government's concerns about it. I very warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar not only on his success in the ballot—I thank him for sharing his tips on how to succeed in the ballot—but on the very thoughtful and dextrous way in which he presented his arguments. He has introduced his Bill very effectively indeed.

The Bill certainly raises important issues of consumer choice and public information about the food that we choose to eat. Those are important matters to which all hon. Members rightly attach priority and concern on behalf of their constituents, as do the Government. We are all consumers and we expect clear, honest and accurate food labels so that we can make properly informed choices when we go shopping. The Government are committed to improving the accuracy and content of food labels so that they better meet consumers' needs. Consequently, we are not content with the current arrangements for food labelling, and we have submitted detailed proposals to the European Commission, to which I shall return shortly.

The Government know, because we have asked for consumers' views and conducted consumer research, that consumers are concerned about origin labelling, which is largely the Bill's subject matter. Consumers do not trust some of the declarations that they see, and too often they cannot find origin information when they want it. That has certainly been my own experience.

The Government therefore share the objectives that have prompted the Bill. My concern is not about the Bill's content or objectives but about its compatibility with the current legislation regulating food labelling requirements, and therefore about the very credibility, enforceability and reliability of the proposals. If passed, the Bill would conflict entirely and be inconsistent with European law. Without any doubt at all, the Bill would be successfully challenged in the courts both by companies and by member states of the European Union and leave the United Kingdom Government exposed to extensive claims for compensation. It would be a pointless act of law making that could not succeed in realising its noble ambitions.

[Mr. Hutton]

I should therefore like to do two things in my remarks: spell out in a little more detail why we have arrived at our view on the legal deficiencies that fatally scar the Bill; and set out the wider context in which we can take forward, and I believe will be taking forward, some of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar.

Parliament has rightly decided that responsibility for developing advice on food labelling should fall to the Food Standards Agency. In a moment, I shall describe the agency's strategy on origin labelling and its work on other labelling issues and what the Government are doing both within and beyond Europe to improve the effectiveness of food labelling arrangements.

European Union and United Kingdom legislation already seek to provide general protection for consumers from false and misleading labels. The protection takes the form of a general requirement that the label must not mislead a purchaser on the characteristics of a food, such as its nature, identity, properties, composition, quantity, durability, origin or provenance, or method of manufacture or production. The protection applies also to the presentation of food, in particular its shape, appearance and packaging and the setting in which it is displayed.

Additionally, there are extensive and detailed food labelling rules which are harmonised currently at European level. The current rules are in directive 2000/13/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, consolidating the earlier food labelling directive 79/112/EEC. The clear objective of that legislation is to tackle differences between regimes in different member states to facilitate the necessary free circulation of products.

Those EU rules specify the minimum amount of information required on food labels and prohibit misleading claims. EU food labelling rules already require food to have a name, carry an indication of its weight, a list of ingredients and so on. Particulars of the place of origin or provenance of a food must be given where failure to do so might mislead a purchaser to a material degree as to its true origin or provenance. These requirements are directly reflected in our own legislation, principally the Food Labelling Regulations 1996, as amended, which were introduced by the previous Conservative Administration.

In addition to this horizontal legislation, there are specific EU rules on origin labelling for a number of commodities, including most fruit and vegetables. Of course, from next January there will be detailed origin information on beef.

The food labelling directive severely restricts the scope of all member states for taking action to extend the rules already agreed, which the Bill would clearly do. It is not open to member states to take further action except in so far as it is authorised by the directive or other sector-specific EU legislation.

There was a quite controversial debate about which provisions of the treaty of Rome were relevant. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda rightly identified, articles 226 and 227 are about enforcement procedures and become relevant where there is a breach of European law. I believe that the Bill would exceed the labelling directive. It would also breach article 10 of the treaty of Rome—the duty to ensure fulfilment of Community requirements—and article 28 on quantitative restrictions on imports. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar might be aware, although he did not refer to it in his speech—I should make it plain that I have only just become aware of this—that in 1985 the UK lost an origin labelling case under article 28. In a moment, I shall say a few words about the so-called Italian pasta case which is directly relevant to the legality of his proposals.

We know from the jurisprudence from the European Court that labelling as proposed in the Bill is equivalent to a quantitative restriction on trade—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar does not like that, but it is the current legal advice that the Government have. On the French beef point, the Advocate General's opinion is that France is acting in contravention of EU law when banning imports of British beef. I know that it is not to the hon. Gentleman's liking, but the legal framework—

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: As the Minister is rightly placing a lot of reliance on the legal provisions, on behalf of my hon. Friend and myself, I repeat my request that the legal advice should be placed in the Library. Clearly, as so much of the Government's argument turns on that advice, it would be exceptionally helpful for us to have it.

Mr. Hutton: I am happy to write to both hon. Gentlemen setting out the details of the legal argument that we have received, rather than depositing the legal opinion in the Library, as we do not usually do that. I know that the argument has rattled around today about whether the Bill is within or without the European Union legal requirements. We have clear legal advice, not only to my Department, but to the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, that the proposed legislation would take us outwith those requirements.

The Bill proposes that the present origin labelling requirement be replaced with more extensive labelling rules that would make country of origin labelling compulsory in all cases. Clause 1 would extend that requirement to apply to any ingredient that forms more than 25 per cent. by weight of a food. The country of origin, as well as the country of processing or packing, would be required to be given equal prominence, and food produced to less demanding production standards than those applicable in England would need to be appropriately identified. That, in summary, is the hon. Gentleman's proposal today.

I believe that the measures introduced by the Bill on origin labelling of all food are in clear conflict with our Community obligations under directive 2000/13/EC and amount to measures having equivalent effect to a quantitative restriction on trade in breach of article 28 of the treaty.

The measures are also in conflict with article 10 of the treaty, which requires every member state to take all appropriate measures, whether general or particular, to ensure fulfilment of the treaty obligations and legislation made under the treaty, and to abstain from any measure which could jeopardise the attainment of the objectives of the treaty. By virtue of section 2(1) of the European Communities Act 1972, the provisions of the EC treaty take precedence over incompatible domestic legislation.

For all those reasons, if the Bill were to proceed, it would be unenforceable. It would be subject to successful legal challenge by the European Commission, member states, manufacturers, importers and exporters. It is likely that the UK Government would be liable to pay substantial damages to affected interests. There is an unfortunate precedent for that, and I am afraid that I have to remind Conservative Members of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988. The Government found themselves in that situation and the taxpayer had to fund compensation for those basic and fundamental mistakes when the true extent of the treaty requirements was realised.

Although the Government share the Bill's objectives, we recognise our responsibility to uphold the law as it underpins the European single market. We take that responsibility seriously, as I am sure hon. Members do. Although we agree with the Bill's broad intention to improve labelling, its proposal for unilateral action in England in breach of EU law cannot be countenanced.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: Just in case the Minister does not reach his peroration, will he give an idea of how quickly our requirements can be achieved in Europe if the route outlined in the Bill cannot be followed?

Mr. Hutton: I thought I had reached my peroration. I can place in the Library a copy of the detailed proposals that have been sent to the European Commission outlining how the Government want to improve the origin labelling requirements that we believe are not strong enough. I am not master of the timetable, but we are pursuing the proposals with vigour in the European Commission because we are not satisfied with the extent of consumer protection and how it supports consumer choice. If the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members want to see details of the proposals, I shall make them available to the House. Although I cannot be specific about the outcome in terms of changes to EU legislation, we are up for this challenge and going at it as quickly as possible.

The advantage of acting at EU level is explicit. EU rules exist for good reasons. European laws avoid inconsistency and therefore consumer confusion. They ensure that consumers are provided with clear consistent information on labels about the foods that they find on shop shelves, wherever those foods come from. They also promote free trade, which benefits producers and manufacturers as well as consumers, and prevent other countries from applying national rules that might block our exports. It would not be a good idea to chuck out those benefits in haste because of a concern about the adequacy of food labelling requirements. We have much to lose if we take the advice of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar.

It was argued that with revision the Bill might be legal and effective. I do not think that that is so. There is limited scope under the food labelling directive for national action to be taken to require additional labelling particulars that are not required by the directive. However, that is only for specified foods and not for foods generally. The Bill's measures would apply across the board to all foods and so are not allowed. Its thrust would be reduced if the proposed measures were revised to apply only in respect of specified products rather than foods generally.

Moreover, it is necessary for proposed national measures to be notified and justified to the Commission and other member states in advance, and that simply has not happened. Such notification is required under the terms of the food labelling directive and technical standards directive 98/34/EC. The Commission and other members states then scrutinise national provisions to see whether they impede the free movement of goods in the single market. The process is likely to result at the very least in the inclusion of a mutual recognition clause allowing imports that do not comply.

Revising the Bill's proposed measures to confine its application to home produce—the only way in which it would sustain or survive a legal challenge—would result in the loss of most of the benefits that the hon. Gentleman seeks to secure for British consumers, as well as unfairly placing a cost burden on our food processing and manufacturing industries alone.

The European Court of Justice has ruled on national origin labelling provisions in case C32/90, the EC Commission *v.* Italy—the so-called Italian pasta case. Italian national legislation required manufacturers of extruded pasta products—I am not quite sure what those are—to state on the label the date of manufacture and the place of origin or provenance of the product. The European Court of Justice—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 15 March.

Remaining Private Member's Bill

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath): Moved.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Not moved, actually.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) was not in his place and must accept my ruling that the Bill was not moved at the operative time.

Policing (Hampshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

2.30 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I am delighted to have secured this debate on policing in Hampshire. As is my custom in Adjournment debates, I have given the Minister a rough idea of the points that I intend to make. They are not partisan—indeed, the only party political references that I shall make are at the beginning.

The Government's heart is in the right place on low-level community crime. The 1997 new Labour manifesto said:

"We will tackle the unacceptable level of anti-social behaviour and crime on our streets. Our 'zero tolerance' approach will ensure that petty criminality among young offenders is seriously addressed."

In 1998, the then Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael), stated:

"'Zero tolerance' policing is one of the tactics available to the police to tackle criminal activity . . . We have given our full support to such strategies, whether they operate under the term 'zero tolerance' or not."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1998; Vol. 305, c. 716W.]

In 1999, the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), declared:

"We are insisting on . . . zero tolerance of anti-social behaviour."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1999; Vol. 340, c. 21.]

In the 2001 Labour manifesto, however, there was no mention of zero tolerance. Perhaps the Government thought that the deed was done and that the problem had been solved. It was not, and it has not been.

I refer to two very different stories from the national press. On 26 September this year, the *Daily Mail* ran an uplifting story entitled "Supercop" and described the

"PC who slashed sink estate's crime rate by 80 per cent. in a year".

Police constable Tony Sweeney took over the beat on a rundown estate. Within a year, he had slashed crime on the Lincoln Green estate in Leeds by a staggering 80 per cent., thanks to walking the beat and an old-fashioned approach to law and order. He said:

"I contacted the local council and the other agencies because people who are prepared to break into cars and rob people are also generally the sort who are prepared to claim benefits when they are doing a bit of work on the side, or not pay their road tax.

It was a question of looking for every avenue that allowed us to apply pressure to these people—to show them we meant business and that their anti-social behaviour would not be tolerated."

He added:

"It was high visibility policing. The idea was to reassure the community, the law-abiding people, that we were taking action.

Around 30 people were arrested in the first week and nearly 100 vehicles found to have defects.

It led to a great many prosecutions and many people's benefits being stopped where they were found to be cheating."

So far, so good. The Government recognised Constable Sweeney's achievement. The article described how that week he was congratulated in person by the Prime Minister at a reception held at Downing street.

Let us contrast that story, however, with "Tormented to Death", a story in the *Daily Mail* today:

"Night after night, for seven years, the youths gathered on the playing fields behind Ronald Gale's house.

They drank, shouted and screamed, and threw things about. Several times vandals damaged his fence.

When the pensioner told them to go away and stop disturbing him and his wife, he was met by a volley of abuse . . . The final straw came when the fence was burned down for a second time. Three weeks later Mr. Gale hanged himself at home".

His wife said:

"Ninety-five per cent of the people living on the Nunsthorpe estate are honest and hard-working but it's just a small element who ruin it for everyone."

The local inspector from Humberside police, in whose jurisdiction this took place,

"denied that officers had failed to take anti-social behaviour seriously. He said: 'The problems on this estate are no worse than anywhere else in the country. We deal with problems of youth nuisance as they arise in a positive manner'".

There is the nub of the problem: those two very different approaches to policing. There are the people who go out, are proactive and take firm steps against youngsters who are causing disruption and distress, and there are the people who wait for things to happen and then react as best they can, instead of deterring the menace in the first place.

Let me move the debate into the context of my New Forest, East constituency, 80 per cent. of whose population live in the town of Totton or in the villages along the waterside. I have here a note written as an open letter to unknown parents by a waterside pensioner who lives in Hythe. She asks them:

"Do you know where your child is at night or what he or she is doing. I know and I am going to tell you. A large group of youngsters gather outside 'Fairview Parade Shops'. They use the telephone booths as shelters, yelling and shouting all night long. They take over the pavements, kerbs etc. intimidating local people. As the evening progresses so does the noise as they get more and more high on drink and possibly drugs . . . your wonderful child or children, apart from all the noise and broken bottles . . . take a great delight in using my front garden as a toilet, quite openly, and the steps to the flats above the shops are used for free for all sex shows, urinating onto my kitchen window, banging and spitting onto my front windows, just making my life hell . . . The 'Police' do come when called but they say there is not much they can do."

This is not a party political matter. The local Liberal Democrat district councillor for Hythe, Maureen McLean, has been quoted in the local press as saying:

"There's a rather volatile situation at Hythe, where children aged between six and eleven are intimidating a lot of elderly neighbours".

I have a file full of similar individual complaints, but lest what I say be dismissed as anecdotal, I shall refer to one or two of the letters that I have had from more organised sources. The Marchwood parish council deputy clerk, Mrs. Jane Kitcher, wrote to me as follows:

"The members of Marchwood Parish Council are very concerned and frustrated regarding the constant vandal damage in Marchwood. Large groups of youths gather late at night at Lloyd Recreation Ground causing a long list of damage to the play area, football pitch, all-weather courts and sports pavilion and being generally abusive to the neighbours. Many phone calls have been made to the police but mostly no-one arrives. Neighbours fear that drug dealing takes place in the car park as a large number of youths gather around a vehicle many times a week."

So it is hardly difficult to spot those people or take action, if one is so minded. The letter continues:

"The Council has expressed its concern"—

to the police at Hythe—

"but there are never enough officers to cover this area".

At the other end of the waterside is Fawley parish. In *The Southern Daily Echo* of 10 October, Eddie Holtham, an independent parish councillor, listed the events that take place in "A week in the parish of Fawley". Day by day he sets out the gangs, the troubles, and the ineffective response of police when summoned.

The Totton and Eling Community Association has written to me saying:

"At our executive meeting held last night the question of policing in Totton was discussed. We have only one community beat policeman (PC Derek Warwick) and he is excellent but with the best will in the world he is not able to be in all places at all times. We hear from our members quite frequently that a visible police presence on the beat is required and would make them feel safer".

I shall pass over the other individual cases, but I assure the House that I have plenty more in that vein.

I do not accept that the police cannot do more. There is a tendency towards centralisation. There is a tendency to see loutish behaviour as a relatively low priority, and to be reactive rather than proactive. That means that the trouble occurs before the police are seen, instead of visible policing deterring the troublemakers in the first place. The police cannot be on beat patrol everywhere all the time, but that does not mean that they should not be on beat patrol somewhere some of the time.

A proactive strategy, involving selective strikes against known troublemakers and gangs, would pay dividends in terms of deterring crime and reassuring my long-suffering constituents.

I accept that there cannot be much incentive for undermanned police units to take action against low-level community crime if the end result of all the preparatory paperwork that they have to undertake is an ineffective court punishment, laid down by people who have little direct experience of the misery caused to ordinary folk. If that were not enough, the judicial framework has so been twisted in recent years that if a policeman or teacher is accused of using even the most limited physical chastisement on a misbehaving child the result is likely to be suspension, prosecution and professional ruin.

I know that the chief constable of Hampshire, Paul Kernaghan, is fighting hard to improve recruitment by stressing the inadequacy of the outer London allowance of £1,000 granted after the abolition of the rent allowance. House prices in Hampshire are high. My right hon. Friend the Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) has endorsed that view, pointing out that policemen are drawn either to London with full housing allowances or to areas such as the south-west where housing costs are lower than in Hampshire.

I repeat that this is a cross-party issue. My near neighbour, the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), does not dissent from my view that there is serious concern in the community about the adequacy of grass-roots policing. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) tells me that only two policemen are responsible for 50,000 residents at night in the western half of the town. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) adds that police numbers in the Forest area have declined from 80 to 60 during the past four years and that the task of those remaining is not made easier by what he describes as

"the Human Rights culture which constrains the ability of the Police to meet the legitimate expectations of the public".

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) reports that the chief constable

"is having great difficulty recruiting officers to the island"—

and that—

"burgeoning paperwork wastes the time on duty of those whom he can recruit and retain".

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) has had some success in addressing the problem in his constituency. Before I conclude and enable the House to have the benefit of his experience, I refer to one further matter of which I gave the Minister notice. It relates to the Netley Marsh steam and craft show, which is held annually and is one of the biggest voluntary events in my constituency. The show's chairman, Brian Shillabeer, and its secretary, Tony Greenham, raise more than £20,000 every year. The money is donated exclusively to local charities, sometimes including the police benevolent fund and the police sports and social fund.

In 1996 and 1997, it cost only £840 a year to police the event. In 1998, the figure jumped to £1,536. In 2000, a further increase to £1,920 put a stop to the additional donations made to the police funds. This year, a massive £3,574 is being extracted. The rally organisers have been told to expect that ratchet to continue to tighten until the horrendous total of £12,000 a year is eventually required. That would remove between a third and a half of the money that is raised for charity by that event.

I am unhappy that such events are, frankly, being over-policed, at a price that the organisers cannot afford, when constituents who are genuinely in fear for their safety are not getting the community policing service that they are entitled to expect. I hope that the Minister sympathises with what I have said, and that he can say something positive to reassure my long-suffering constituents.

2.44 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) for allowing me to intervene for a few moments to share with him and the House my own experience of spending time with the police constabulary in Gosport. I have always found the officers there extremely efficient and courteous. It is one of the more enjoyable and interesting aspects of the role of a Member of Parliament to spend time with such splendid men and women.

I have found that when antisocial behaviour is drawn to the police's attention, they undertake a range of activities. Operating under the acronym SCARE, in the case of Hardway in my constituency they carried out a survey of 400 houses; put in a covert vehicle to film young people engaged in antisocial behaviour; and observed people glue sniffing. They took the issue up with the individuals concerned, their parents and teachers, and were able to win the support of parents and teachers in clamping down on that antisocial behaviour.

I also have in my constituency the Hampshire constabulary aircraft, which is now a twin islander. My constituents will be pleased to hear that it is rather quieter than its predecessor aircraft. It can be extremely valuable in carrying out heat-seeking surveillance.

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

I should like to pay tribute to the police. In Gosport, policemen Gary Boud and John Snow have set up six-a-side football teams. Two hundred teams take part and they operate a yellow and red card system. They deal with antisocial behaviour not on the football field but elsewhere, so that if a star player has one yellow card his mates will be anxious that he should not get another yellow card, which would mean getting a red card and being disqualified. The police also operate the so-called "Snap" discotheque for 11 to 16-year-olds. It is over-subscribed, with more than 400 people attending it.

I pay tribute to the police for all that they do, but there is a very thin blue line. My hon. Friend rightly drew attention to the fact that the housing allowance in the Hampshire area is only £1,000, whereas in Surrey it is £2,000 and in the Metropolitan police area it is £6,000. We are losing policemen to those areas and to areas with cheaper housing, such as Norfolk and the west country.

It would be so very good if the police could be made eligible for the Jubilee medal to pay respect for the work that they do in defending all of us—much in the same manner as the armed forces, who are eligible for the Jubilee medal.

2.46 pm

The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley): I congratulate the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on obtaining this debate on policing in Hampshire. It provides a useful opportunity to air some of the issues surrounding policing in Hampshire and discuss Government policies to reduce crime and make Hampshire a safer place in which to live. I also welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers).

Given the limited time available, I may not be able to cover all the points raised by the hon. Member for New Forest, East, but I shall write to him on any points that I cannot cover.

Let me put the debate into an overall context. Police recorded crime in Hampshire fell by 1.2 per cent. in the 12 months to March 2001, according to the latest statistics published by the Home Office. Recorded crime in the south-east as a whole has fallen by 7.6 per cent. since 1997 and in Hampshire alone, recorded crime has fallen by 12.4 per cent. since 1995.

The latest British crime survey shows that, in 1999 and 2000, an average of 11.7 per cent. of all vehicle-owning households across England and Wales were victims of vehicle-related theft. The south-east Government office region was well below that figure at 9.4 per cent., making it the second safest region for vehicle-related theft after East Anglia, at 9 per cent., in both 1999 and 2000. In the same survey, the south-east was also below the national average for burglary. In the 12 months to March 2001, Hampshire had the highest detection rate in the south-east.

The Government are committed to raising police standards and believe that we must bring every police basic command unit up to the standards of the best. That is why the Home Secretary is setting up the new police standards unit, which will work closely with BCUs and local crime and disorder partnerships to identify and promulgate best practice, overcome obstacles to success and drive up performance throughout England and Wales. As the hon. Gentleman said, this is an all-party concern and there is all-party support for raising those standards.

The Government are also continuing to make the biggest ever investment in crime reduction. The crime reduction director for the south-east tells me that £15.3 million has so far been allocated by the Home Office towards the capital costs of closed circuit television in 95 schemes across the south-east, including Hampshire. Moreover, £6.8 million has been allocated this financial year alone to local crime and disorder reduction partnerships across the south-east to disrupt drugs markets and tackle drug-related crime.

The hon. Members for New Forest, East and for Gosport both referred to antisocial behaviour. I understand and share their concerns about it and other offending behaviour by young people. I listened with great interest and sympathy to the stories that they related. Every Member can give similar examples of such behaviour disrupting communities and causing misery to the people who live in them. We all want to tackle the problem in the most effective way possible.

Responsibility for tackling antisocial behaviour on a day-to-day basis is an operational matter for chief officers of police. However, other agencies have a role to play as well. The most effective way to tackle problems is through co-ordinated preventive action at local level involving all the other relevant agencies—including local authorities, schools and local bodies—in addition to the police. Problems have to be identified locally and a plan of action drawn up with local needs in mind.

The constabulary informs me that officers in the New Forest division have excellent working partnerships, including with the local district council, youth organisations, the Forestry Commission and many other diverse groups. They take a proactive stance in those partnerships.

Antisocial behaviour is being tackled by Hampshire constabulary. For example, in the constituency of the hon. Member for New Forest, East, seven local youths have been identified as being responsible for causing general nuisance in and around the Netley View estate. All the youths have been visited by the police and are now the subject of acceptable behaviour contracts, which are voluntary agreements that aim to address their behaviour. That is part of the process towards their being made subject to antisocial behaviour order—ASBOs—if there is no improvement in their behaviour.

We introduced ASBOs under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which was aimed specifically at preventing the persistent harassment and intimidation that can make people's lives a misery in the way that the hon. Gentleman identified. They prohibit individuals from specific antisocial actions and are available for any person over the age of 10 who has acted in an antisocial manner likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress or who is likely to do so again. Three have been issued in Hampshire this year, and we are currently considering the operation of ASBOs to ensure that they are being used as effectively as possible.

I urge the hon. Gentleman to visit officers in the New Forest division of Hampshire constabulary. I understand that they would be only too pleased to welcome him so

that he can see the good work that they are doing in conjunction with local partnerships to tackle antisocial behaviour in his constituency.

I wish to comment briefly on the work that the hon. Member for Gosport said was being carried out in his constituency. There have been some very successful Gosport police operations and I welcome his support and praise for the police in their work to tackle low-level crime in that area. The work is being carried out by Superintendent Baldry, the divisional commander for Gosport, and his team. The hon. Gentleman referred to the SCARE projects—an acronym for survey, collate, action, respond and evaluation—and they have been a particular success in his constituency.

Gosport is also home to very successful working partnerships, with the police playing a highly proactive role in initiatives such as the "Townwatch" and "Pubwatch" schemes. We must learn the lessons from good practice and ensure that they are disseminated not only throughout Hampshire, but throughout the country. We must recognise the incredibly hard work that the police do to try to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. We all welcome that.

The hon. Member for New Forest, East also raised the issue of local police numbers and funding. The Government-supported funding for Hampshire police authority has consistently been above the average in England and Wales in recent years. In 2001-02, funding increased by £11.2 million to £213.9 million. That is a 5.5 per cent. increase in cash terms or 3 per cent. in real terms. The average cash increase in England and Wales was 4.9 per cent. By any standards, it can be recognised that Hampshire had a reasonably good settlement.

In addition, Hampshire will receive this year around £1.7 million from the crime fighting fund and more than £220,000 from the rural policing fund. Hampshire police authority set a budget for 2001-02 of £216.2 million. This is an increase of £11.5 million, or 5.6 per cent. over previous years.

Police numbers are also important as part of a comprehensive package of measures to ensure modern and efficient police services. The public rightly feel reassured by the visible presence of police officers on our streets. It helps to reduce the fear of crime. Hampshire had 3,485 police officers at the end of August 2001. That is 50 more than in March 2001 and 33 more than in March 1997.

Dr. Julian Lewis: The problem is not lack of visible police numbers when it comes to policing the steam rally. The problem is whether the police are visible when people feel intimidated late at night in their local area. Is the visibility in the right places?

Mr. Bradley: That is an important operational matter for the local police in Hampshire. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will make that point directly on his next visit to them. We all know from our own communities that the fear of crime is as important as crime itself. The visibility of police on the streets is only one element, but it helps to overcome the problem.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned again the Netley steam rally, and in the short time that I have left, I should mention that event. The allocation of police resources to particular events is an operational matter for the chief constable to decide. He must determine within the overall policing priorities for the area and the needs of the particular event the level of resources that can be devoted to it. Where special police services are provided, the Police Act 1996 enables the police authority to make a charge for those services. The rationale for this is that the taxpayer should not be expected to pay for police services at private events or events that benefit only a small section of the community.

However, I accept that Netley Marsh steam rally raises significant funds for charity. It is also a commercial opportunity for other organisations. At the same time, the police have to consider their own set-up costs, including adequate safety and security measures. The cost of policing the rally this year was £3,500. I understand that the local police have been meeting the rally organisers to help put strategies in place to reduce future policing costs for the event. Many useful suggestions have been made, including high-visibility stewarding, that have been favourably received by the organisers. Costs for next year have not yet been agreed and will depend on the outcome of the discussions with the police. I understand that a further meeting has been arranged for 8 November, where I hope that satisfactory arrangements can be agreed. This is clearly an important local event and the cost of policing should not impede its continuing. These are complicated matters, and we have to recognise that local arrangements and local operational needs should be the guiding principle.

Policing throughout the country is a high priority for the Government. We are putting extra resources in and extra police on the street, but the important thing is that we all work closely together to ensure that in local partnerships between all the relevant agencies we have a common view about how we properly tackle the important issues that the hon. Gentleman raised today.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 23 October 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Airport and Aircraft Safety

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Stringer.*]

9.30 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the opportunity for a topical debate on aviation security; it is an issue that involves many Departments. The 1988 Lockerbie bombing provided the impetus for great changes in security and aviation. Similarly, the attacks of 11 September should make us think again about aviation security. That is not to say that there is a crisis in British airport security; in fact, we probably have the best security in the world, after Tel Aviv. Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports are among the safest in the world, and use measures such as 100 per cent. whole baggage screening.

The reports of the lack of security on the flights involved in the tragedy of 11 September made shocking reading to those in the UK because we are used to taking precautions against terrorism, and have done so for many years. To UK travellers, it seemed that essential security precautions were missing. British aviation is not guilty of basic safety failings, but we should nevertheless re-examine our precautions in the wake of the attacks. It has been said that the events of 11 September have changed the world; the changes must include alterations to our approach to the prevention of terrorism in our skies.

The events of 11 September, and the war against terrorism that has begun since then, must change the way that we think about aviation safety in two ways. First, if the fight against terrorism continues for long, we must take into account the fact that we may need heightened security in the air for some time—possibly forever. How could we maintain that level of security? Secondly, the attack must make us change our tactics with hijackers. In the past, we have co-operated with them, because the motivation for hijacking was different. Many will recall the success of co-operative tactics in the case of the Afghan plane that was hijacked in February 2000 by asylum seekers who had fled the Taliban regime. The 40-minute internal flight from Kabul became a three-day hijack, which was resolved after a two-day stand-off at Stansted airport.

After the events of 11 September, we can no longer assume that co-operation will lead to a peaceful outcome. We must make changes that take new risks into account. We should consider aircraft and airport security. There are many ways to improve aircraft security, some of which have been raised in recent weeks. Some companies are considering installing double cockpit doors to create a cordon sanitaire. They are also considering strengthening existing doors with internal bars.

If we adopt a policy of non-co-operation, we must prevent hijackers from gaining access to pilots, since the policy cannot work otherwise. Similarly, there is little point in armoured doors unless we have a non-co-operation policy. A non-co-operation policy, combined with a secure area for pilots, would take power from hijackers and act as a disincentive, but pilots do not like the idea of cutting off the cockpit crew from the rest of the aircraft. If such a long-term or permanent measure were introduced, wide consultation would be needed with pilots and air companies, or the policy might prove to be unworkable.

Many basic issues would have to be addressed, such as calls of nature for pilots and how they would receive their meals. Whether airlines adopt a policy of co-operation or non-co-operation, we need consistency, which is currently lacking. Although some UK airlines have reviewed their procedures and abandoned co-operation, others are still using the co-operation procedures by default. Can the Minister say what efforts the Government are making to standardise those procedures, or is he satisfied to allow each airline to draw up its own procedures? Discrepancies or inconsistencies in the way in which different airlines operate would undoubtedly arise in a hijack as a result of the latter approach.

On 16 September, *The Independent on Sunday* quoted the Secretary of State as saying that Britain would consider deploying armed guards on aircraft, which would be another way of improving security. Some countries—notably Israel and the United States—are already planning to do that. That idea has some good points, in that if sky marshals were on board, they would be able to intervene in an incident and could act as a deterrent.

It would appear, however, that placing armed sky marshals on board would create as many problems as it would solve, if not more. Conversations with pilots and others in the industry suggest that the idea causes great unease in the UK. They can visualise bullets flying around in a cabin and imagine the risk of the aircraft depressurising. That would incapacitate the sky marshal, who would be there to protect the passengers, and could also incapacitate or kill many others. There is also the risk of hijackers using the on-board gun as their weapon of choice, instead of attempting to get their own weapons on board in the first place.

Figures from the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States show that 52 police officers have been killed with their own weapons over 10 years, which is 9 per cent. of the total number killed. We can only assume that in certain cases the sky marshals would find themselves being relieved of their weapons, which would be used against them or other passengers on board. The idea is still worth considering, however, as, for a number of years, the Israeli airline, El-Al, has used plain-clothed armed guards, who step in when necessary.

Those are two major issues about aircraft security. Another more minor measure that could be effective would be to remove the facility that is available for pre-booking specific seats on planes. Terrorists' ability to spread themselves throughout a plane may have been a crucial factor in the terrorist operations on 11 September. The airlines may need to look again at that facility to see whether they want to give passengers who are in a group the ability to place themselves strategically throughout an airliner, with all the associated risks if they are planning an attack.

[Tom Brake]

On airport security, it is worth remembering that whatever measures are introduced, the hijackers focus on the weakest link. All measures must be considered and implemented with equal vigour.

The issue of security and vetting of workers has been in the newspapers recently. There has been a history of security lapses. One of the most recent was in January 1999. An undercover reporter secured a pass to work for a cleaning firm at Heathrow despite giving bogus references. In May 1999, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions announced more stringent requirements for the issue of passport passes and an extension of a programme of tests to look for possible loopholes. In November 2000, another newspaper managed to get a reporter wearing a pilot's uniform into a British Airways aircraft cockpit at Birmingham airport with a genuine airside passport for £10. He even managed to pose for photographs on the steps of an aircraft at Gatwick. In the same month, DETR issued further general directions that had been planned before that incident. On 26 September 2001, a new heightened security directive was issued. On 16 October, *The Times* reported that staff at the largest aviation security company had worked at Heathrow without compulsory counter-terrorism clearance.

The vetting situation is extremely complex and is a problem that must be addressed. Airports are divided into two parts: groundside is where the public are, and airside is where the aircraft are. BAA and the authorities of most of the larger UK airports are responsible for overall security groundside and airside. Any security staff working airside must be counter-terrorism cleared and are then free to go anywhere airside. The airport authorities do not do security checks on anyone else as that is the responsibility of the airlines. Reliable industry sources have raised concerns about BAA not independently verifying the airlines' clearances. Does the Minister share the industry's concerns?

The airlines do normal security checks on their airside staff, for instance cleaners, refuellers and the security staff who check passengers boarding aircraft. That is a five-year work check, and the airline has one person who is authorised to pass that information on to the airport authority, which can then give workers their passes. Most airside staff working for an airline are contractors and are not employed by the airline directly. It is the job of those airport authority security staff who enact counter-terrorism checks to ensure that the other airside staff remain in the area where they are authorised to work, as they should not be working in any other area. The cleaners on aircraft are split into two categories; some are counter-terrorism checked and it is they who check for bombs or any other material that should not be on the plane. All staff who carry out baggage screening are also counter-terrorism checked. However, *The Times* article revealed that the counter-terrorism checking of staff employed in a security role or as contractors causes problems. With delays of between four and six weeks in completing checks, some airlines let staff go airside with a temporary pass if accompanied by a full pass holder. Has the Minister considered whether that is a satisfactory arrangement after the events of 11 September? Should not all security and contracted staff be counter-terrorism checked before they are able to go airside?

My summary—it was not much of a summary—of the way that the vetting procedures work, and the question of who has responsibility for vetting staff, highlights an area in which some clarification is required. There must be clarification about who is responsible for the supervision of contractors. Perhaps there should be a single body responsible for that, to reduce the likelihood of mistakes. For instance, one of the household names of the UK airline industry has 19 contractors working airside, and I am sure that others have a similar number working for them.

There is also the question of access to aircraft on the ground. The directive on heightened security measures issued on 26 September says that

"the aerodrome manager shall ensure that: ... the passes of persons observed on or approaching an aircraft in a restricted zone shall be randomly checked".

I take it, therefore, that not all people approaching aircraft are security checked. Clearly, they will have had to go through a security point to have got there in the first place. However, the recent examples of relatively lax security airside suggest the need for not only random checks but checks on every individual approaching an aircraft, as that may be the most vulnerable point of a journey. Would it be feasible to check the passes of everyone approaching an aircraft, or would that be unworkable? If so, what percentage of passes should be checked—10 per cent., 20 per cent. or more? Has that figure changed in the past five weeks?

There is also the question of hand luggage on aircraft. Following the tragic incident, a new list was issued of items, including household cutlery, that were not allowed to be taken on board aircraft. I cannot go into detail because of time considerations, but it is worth noting that passengers returning from Australia to the UK can use metal cutlery until they reach Singapore, where it is confiscated and replaced with plastic cutlery. Clearly, the Government need to work on international consistency.

The next question is whether we should be allowed to take any hand luggage on board. From a business point of view, a ban would have a major impact. Obviously, there could not be a blanket ban on anyone carrying anything, as people need to take on board passports, any necessary medication, wallets and so on, but do passengers really need to take on board the current volume of hand luggage? It concerns me that some airlines introduced quite stringent policies on hand luggage immediately after 11 September but have already relaxed them.

Has the Minister considered the use of transparent bags for hand luggage and to facilitate the checking process? Has he considered requiring people to put most of their hand luggage into the luggage hold so that it can be properly screened? Perhaps we should move to a debate about what people can take on board as opposed to what they cannot.

What about hand luggage screening? The testing of staff is being increased. In other words, there will be random checks, but that can operate effectively only if staff are rotated often. I should be interested to hear the Minister's view on how long staff can concentrate

effectively when watching things fly past on a screen. Should they work a shift of 30 minutes, an hour or two hours, and should they have 30 minutes or 10 minutes off? The Minister is nodding; he must be getting the gist of what I am saying.

I should have liked to cover many more issues, including the security around baggage holds; however, I know that several hon. Members wish to speak. As the parliamentary sponsor of the air safety group—perhaps I should register an interest—I have been told that, apparently, all the baggage holds for most of the planes can be opened with the same key. Someone working airside can access most of the baggage holds, although some are fairly inaccessible and require steps to access them.

Do we have in all UK airports a system for dealing with clean and dirty passengers? Could not someone coming in from abroad, where the security standards are not as high as those in the UK, mix with clean passengers—those who have been through our security checks—and hand over something that they might have brought into the country with them?

I would have liked to deal with the different security standards that apply at smaller airports, the more sophisticated CCTV monitoring of passengers at airport departure lounges, and the role of passenger profiling. Some companies now use advance information, such as how the payment was made and where the passenger comes from, to do some preliminary checking. My hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) will discuss some of those issues shortly.

I mentioned the need for consistency at an international level. It is all very well having the best possible standards here but, if risks can enter the system from abroad, that remains an issue for us. I understand that the option of using autopilots to land an aircraft in a case of hijacking is not yet an option for technical reasons, but it cannot be many months or years before that would be possible. There is the commercial issue about who will pay the costs associated with security measures, and the issue of general aviation, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bath will discuss.

I know that the Government and the industry are not complacent. However, the tragic incident on 11 September means that, even in the UK, we must ratchet up our security even further and ensure consistency of security standards across the country. I hope that the Minister will set out the response of the Government and the industry and provide answers to some or all of my questions.

9.53 am

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I raised the issue of security clearance of Heathrow staff in January 1999, after learning that a journalist had been recruited to work airside at Heathrow in a secure area, despite having no security clearance. I raised it again in November last year during our debate on air traffic control and expressed concern about rumours that the practice of hiring staff without security clearance was continuing. At that stage, I believe that the Deputy Prime Minister had twice in one year reminded BAA of its responsibilities and had also launched a review of security measures at our airports.

Last week, I raised with the Leader of the House the "exposé" in *The Times* about the activities of Securicor ADI. I had given him notice that I would raise it during business questions and ask for a response from the Government, because I thought that it was a significant issue for my constituents and the country overall. The response of the Leader of the House was not acceptable to me or to many of my constituents and smacked of complacency. He argued that in the aftermath of 11 September we had a choice: we either recruited more people without security clearance or had no more staff at all. That is unacceptable because people who have not been security cleared should not be able to work in secure areas at Heathrow airport and put my constituents who work there and the general travelling public at risk.

We thought that the issue exposed in *The Times* had been resolved 18 months ago. The solution to delays on security clearance was seen as speeding up the process rather than allowing non-security-cleared staff airside. Companies allowed such staff airside through exploitation of a loophole in the regulations that permits one security-cleared person to supervise others who are not. Anyone who has visited baggage handling or other secure areas at Heathrow will understand the complexity of the operation and the difficulty of managing staff in any case. Having to manage regular staff is difficult enough, but managing staff who have not been security cleared is virtually impossible.

The GMB union is meeting a group of Members of Parliament today. It has prepared a dossier of instances in which Securicor ADI and other firms flouted the spirit of the Heathrow security regulations, putting the union's members and the travelling public at risk. The union would welcome access to the team at the Department that reviewed security at Heathrow, and seeks a straightforward explanation of last year's incidents. The review team should be able to meet groups of staff informally without prejudice to the staff, to enable the truth to emerge.

Many frightened and worried families living around Heathrow fear that their loved ones who work in secure areas at the airport are at risk because of company exploitation of loopholes in the regulations. We must ensure that the regulations are tightened and that companies that exploit loopholes cannot operate at Heathrow. Their staff should not be allowed to work in secure areas.

If the answer is to review the regulations once more, will the Minister explain the process by which such a review will take place? Will Members of Parliament who have constituents living or working in the Heathrow area be consulted? Will the trade unions be consulted and will staff have an opportunity to meet the review team informally as I suggested? If we want to restore confidence among the travelling public and those who work at Heathrow, we need a more open discussion about security there and about the review process.

I should like to raise a final ironic point about security at Heathrow. At the same time as we are identifying security lapses in respect of staff who have not been security cleared, the Home Office is liaising with BAA about Sikhs who wear the kirpan working airside at

[John McDonnell]

Heathrow. Following the Sikh religion means following the five Ks, one of which is wearing the kirpan, a small ceremonial dagger.

In the 1980s, an agreement was reached between the Home Office, BAA and the Sikh community that, on condition that the blade be no more than 3 in long and remain a ceremonial object rather than a weapon for use, the kirpan could be worn airside in secure areas by staff who had been security cleared. That has pertained for more than 16 years, yet suddenly there is a threat to withdraw that concession from Sikhs working at Heathrow. That is bizarre because there is a lack of concern about non-security cleared staff working at Heathrow, while a group of security-cleared staff are being penalised for practising their religion, in spite of an agreement that has been honed over the years by the Sikh community, BAA and the Government. The Home Office should liaise with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and BAA to ensure that Sikhs working at Heathrow are not discriminated against as they were before the agreement was reached in the mid-1980s.

For my constituents, security at Heathrow is of prime importance. If it is a matter of speeding up security clearance, resources should be put into resolving that problem. Companies should not be allowed to avoid keeping to the spirit of the detailed and precise regulations on security clearance introduced by the Government to make the travelling public and workers at Heathrow secure. Any company that breaches those regulations must never again be able to employ staff in secure areas at Heathrow.

10.1 am

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): There is an airport in the heart of my constituency, from which I commute every week. Several passengers have raised with me their concerns, which were mentioned earlier.

In Scotland, an important issue is concern about the delay to the new air traffic control centre, which was recently confirmed by the Government, but which would give Ministers the opportunity to consider improvements to the security at air traffic control centres in the light of the events of 11 September. The prospect of sky marshals or armed guards on aircraft does not fill commuters with confidence, but prior to 11 September, the number one issue was not terrorism but the risk of an accident caused by air traffic control problems. Given the delay in the construction of the Prestwick air traffic control centre, I want to ensure that consideration is given to improving security measures at the centre when it is built.

10.2 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): My constituency, like many others in London, lies under the flight path for arriving and departing aircraft, which has worried residents for some time, as there have been incidents of objects—including, in extreme cases, bodies—falling from aircraft. London has not had anything like the appalling accident that occurred in Amsterdam, but there is apprehension about the high volume of Heathrow traffic that lands and takes off over built-up areas; if there were a crash, the consequences would be appalling. Such anxiety was heightened after the Concorde accident close to Charles de Gaulle airport.

Two considerations that arise from the events of 11 September have added to the sense of insecurity: first, the appalling fact that aircraft are being used as weapons, and, secondly, the story, which I suspect may well be true, that the Government have authorised the Royal Air Force to shoot down hijacked aircraft before they reach the most sensitive destinations. If either were to happen over London, the consequences would be enormous.

There is no absolute, foolproof, no-risk solution, short of grounding the entire aircraft fleet, which is not acceptable, as life must go on. However, I want to ask the Minister whether consideration has been given to minimising the risk of such a catastrophe occurring. Risks could be minimised if some flights were re-routed over less populated areas. Re-routing could involve switching between airports or, more likely, between runways. Such flexibility now exists because demand recession in the industry means that some slots are not being utilised. Does the Minister acknowledge that there is a risk, albeit small, and if so, are there mechanisms in air traffic procedures and Civil Aviation Authority rules that could give people on the ground a greater sense of security by the reallocation of flight lines?

My next point concerns the more general issue of the financing and economics of aircraft and airport security. There will be an additional cost and the question is who should pay for it—the airlines, airport authority, passengers or taxpayer? Many hon. Members, as constituency MPs in the London area, hear both sides of the argument. I have many aircraft workers, particularly aircrew, in my constituency. Many are anxious about their jobs and, reasonably from their point of view, believe that the Government should be helping. I tell them that that is not the correct approach and that the robust response given by the Government to the requests for funding from the airline industry is right. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) and I have written to the Chancellor to that effect.

The broad context is that the airline industry was in substantial financial difficulty anyway, for reasons wholly unconnected with the events of 11 September. A serious slump was on its way because of over-investment and misestimation of demand, and some major flag carriers were already in considerable trouble. Many smaller airlines, particularly the budget airlines, are still competitive and keen to expand into the slots that the bigger airlines cannot fill. It would be unfair to them to bail out any of the big carriers. There is also a broad principle that enhanced security is primarily for the benefit of airlines and their passengers, so it would be appropriate for them to meet the costs.

One small qualification is that we must recognise, even if we are not airport MPs, that there is a crisis in the industry. Although bail-out and state aid are not the right solution, there might be various ways in which the Government, acting in a European framework, can provide some assistance. It would be reasonable to compensate the airlines for compulsory groundings, and the airline industry could be helped with its cash flow by the retiming of tax measures. However, on security, the

right solution is for the Government to insist that it is a proper charge on airlines' shareholders and passengers, rather than on the taxpayer.

10.8 am

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): This has been a brief but interesting debate. I want to place on record my thanks to several people working in both airline and airport security, for their briefings. From those briefings, it was clear that my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) was right in saying that, perhaps with the exception of Tel Aviv, we have some of the safest airports in the world. I was interested also to learn that much is going on about which it would be inappropriate to comment in public. Providing information about airport security arrangements will merely make it accessible to the very people to whom we want to avoid giving access.

I was heartened to hear what was happening in air security, although, as my hon. Friend also said, our system is only as strong as the weakest link. Although we have some of the best security systems at our airports, that does not mean that all airports around the world are as secure. It is interesting to note that while the Civil Aviation Authority may have the power to stop an aircraft landing at a UK airport because of concern about its airworthiness, it does not have similar powers when there are concerns about security at the airport from which the plane took off. We must consider airport security not just in relation to this country, but at an international and European level to ensure that it is increased worldwide.

I am therefore delighted that the Government have sought to play a key role in the European Civil Aviation Conference. I also welcome the joint ministerial statement made on behalf of US and EU Ministers on 21 September. A number of security improvements to UK airports were announced on 26 September, which brings us nicely back to the issue of our own security. While we should work with others to improve security at other airports, just because we already have a fairly good system does not mean that we should not seek to find ways of improving it still further. I noted with interest that the Home Secretary announced that

"the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and The Regions, will strengthen security at airports and for passengers. Powers both within restricted areas at airports and aboard aircraft will all be strengthened."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 924-25.]

I hope that the Minister can give us some idea of the plans that are afoot, although I acknowledge that he will not wish to put on the public record all the measures that may be planned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington raised many important and interesting issues, ranging from the advantages and disadvantages of locked cockpit doors to the need to reduce the amount and type of hand luggage that is taken on board planes. He mentioned the problems caused by there apparently being a universal baggage lock to most planes from different airlines and spoke of the possible removal of the facility to pre-book seats. He also raised important issues about the security arrangements for airport staff, a point picked up by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) who has a long record of following these matters. They both referred to issues that had been raised previously and to the particular concerns raised most recently in *The Times* about the issuing and use of passes for people working airside.

I hope that the Minister can give us some indication of plans to change the regulations and the checking systems. I hope that he will also pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington about meeting representatives from the unions to look at their list of examples of breaches that have taken place. I have one specific question for the Minister. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington made clear, the system is already complicated. The airlines are, in effect, responsible for the issuing of passes. The airline decides which person shall be given a pass and then on the basis of an authorised signature, BAA issues the pass. BAA is then responsible for carrying out random checks on whether the passes have been issued appropriately. It would not be sensible to put on the record the percentage of passes that are randomly checked in that way.

As my hon. Friend said, some people are urging the need to increase the percentage of passes checked by BAA. Has the Minister's attention been drawn to any difficulties that BAA might experience in carrying out further checks, as a result of the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998? In checking a pass, it is important to check the references used to issue it. It has been suggested to me that the Data Protection Act makes it impossible for BAA always to check such references. There could be a situation in which many pass applicants use the same person as a reference; that might be one way of uncovering problems. BAA provides the security passes for staff who have access to all parts of the airport to check on what is happening, and those people are, quite properly, required to undergo counter-terrorism checks. Inspectors from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have responsibility for checking whether that system, and all other aspects of airport safety, work properly.

It has been put to me—I have no way of checking whether it is accurate—that there are concerns about whether those inspectors are well enough trained, not only to check whether the regulations are complied with, which is relatively easy, but in looking wider afield to problems outwith existing regulations, which might draw attention to the need for regulations to be made. It has been suggested that they are good at counting whether the right number of paper clips are in the right place but not so good at looking at issues that fall outside the regulations.

My hon. Friend also made passing reference to the development of systems to help identify potential criminal elements who seek to board planes. Several such systems have been developed following the legislation on football hooligans, for example, such as the matchmaker borderguard system, which has been well developed and which is being considered in respect of passengers seeking to board aircraft. The Government intend to carry out trials of the system in the near future. I understand that Go is to be one of the trial airlines but decisions have not been made on which long-haul airline is to be used. I note with interest that the system was developed in conjunction with Virgin Atlantic. I know that that company is very keen, having already been involved in the scheme, to be the selected

[Mr. Don Foster]

airline. The Minister must obviously look at all the offers, but it would be helpful if he could give us an idea of what progress has been made on the issue. Another question on the development of that system relates to the Data Protection Act 1998. Will the Minister look at whether that Act might present any difficulties in the use of the matchmaker borderguard system on airlines with international passengers?

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) raised understandable concerns about whether the second air traffic centre at Prestwick is to go ahead. He, and I suspect all hon. Members, would be interested to hear from the Minister what the current plans are. The dual centre system was intended not merely for ensuring that sufficient facilities are available, but as a security measure in the event that one or other of the two systems went down. My hon. Friend's concern about the future of Prestwick will have been heightened by the revelation in the past 24 hours of a possible financial crisis in the National Air Traffic Services. Will the Minister comment briefly on whether those reports are true and on whether NATS has been or might be planning to discuss the issue with him?

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) rightly raised the concerns of his constituents and of others who live on the flight paths, and I am sure that he will be interested in the Minister's response. He also rightly raised concerns about who will pay for increased air security. We could ask several questions about that, but will the Minister tell us what action the Government are taking, as distinct from the EU, to investigate concerns about whether the immediate and significant increase in premiums by insurance companies was permissible under UK legislation?

My hon. Friend rightly said that it is important that the Government work within existing EU arrangements as regards any help that the airlines might be given to increase air security. He also referred to support with cash flows, and I entirely support his remarks on that.

Finally, I want to raise a concern that has not been touched on. Much of the debate has been about security on aircraft and at airports, but no mention has been made of the difficult issue of aerodromes and general aviation. I am talking not about aircraft on regular flights, but about aircraft that members of the public can hire and fly from aerodromes. The Department's document "The Future of Aviation" of December last year described general aviation as comprising

"a wide range of activities, including flying training, leisure flying by private individuals and use of aircraft owned (either outright or on a shared basis) or chartered ('air taxis') for business. This includes both fixed wing aircraft and helicopters."

When I looked into the issue, I was given a helpful brief by the Library. It stated:

"Anybody flying into an airport"—

and, in this case, aerodromes used for general aviation—

"has to get permission from the aerodrome operator and file a flight plan. It is up to the aerodrome operator to inform HM Customs & Excise and the Immigration service".

Those bodies

"then decide whether to come and check the arriving aircraft."

The issue is therefore what checks are made on passengers of aircraft that land at aerodromes? If the Minister has better information than me, I would be grateful to hear it, but it appears that all that is necessary in the majority of cases is for the passengers to provide the operator with copies—often faxed copies—of their passport details. It is the pilot's responsibility to check whether those are accurate and to forward them to customs. In the light of that information, customs will decide whether even to go to the aerodrome to check the passengers who get off the aircraft. I have details of several companies that operate under such arrangements and which give people the opportunity to board flights to the United Kingdom from as far away as Serbia.

There could be 13 passengers and two crew members on board a plane. In the past, it was thought that members of a group that hired an aeroplane would be unlikely to shoot or harm each other. However, after the appalling incidents of 11 September, we know that some people are prepared to do almost anything with an aircraft itself, so a loophole related to general aviation may need to be filled rapidly.

I have raised several issues and look forward to the Minister's response. I end by repeating what I said when I started: notwithstanding the concerns raised, I genuinely believe that the United Kingdom's airport system is probably one of the most secure in the world.

10.25 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am delighted to participate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on having secured a debate on such a timely matter.

I start where the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) finished: I believe that we have one of the most secure safety records in the world. It has perhaps not been said so far, but it must be said loud and clear, that the terrorists will have won if we allow the threat of terrorism to deter people from going about their normal lives, including travelling on aircraft. People should feel safe and it is the duty of us all, especially the Government, to ensure that there is that feeling of safety among the travelling public. The debate will play a part in that.

Perhaps we should put the matter in context and consider the scale of aircraft travel. Air traffic has increased rapidly. In 1988, 93.2 million passengers passed through British airports, of whom 21.7 million had travelled on domestic flights. Ten years later in 1998, the figures had risen to 159 million and 33.6 million respectively. That was a 55.3 per cent. increase, and air traffic is forecast to increase by 50 per cent. during the next 15 years. A huge number of people travel by air, so aircraft and passenger safety must be paramount.

The report of the Transport Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs in 1999, long before the incident on 11 September, made several important recommendations. Before I go into the post-11 September scenario, it is worth looking back at the report to see what it highlighted. Richard Profit, the group director of the Safety Regulation Group, told the Committee that the recent emergence of low-cost carriers was

"stretching our resources in so far as we have to put specific regulatory effort into these new startup and low cost airlines".

He recommended that if the Safety Regulation Group continued to experience staff shortages, which could not be in anyone's interests, the Government should relax

the pay restrictions that they impose on the Civil Aviation Authority. I know that that is controversial, especially in view of 11 September, but we cannot tolerate the safety group experiencing staff shortages.

The Committee also considered aircraft inspections, with special regard to the Malaysia Airlines Boeing 747 that landed at Heathrow with only 3.4 tonnes of fuel in its tanks. That was not enough to divert to another airport or to hold its position for any length of time if its approach to the airport had been delayed. The incident is important in terms of aircraft safety. Responsibility for inspecting foreign-registered aircraft that land in the United Kingdom—so-called ramp checks—rested with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The Committee stated:

"We were surprised to learn that only 59 ramp checks were carried out"

in the UK

"in 1997-98, and 63 in 1998-99."

Again, that problem needs to be tackled.

The Committee identified two other issues. The Royal Aeronautical Society told the Committee that

"in the last ten to fifteen years we have seen a massive degradation in the amount of skilled staff, both pilots and engineers, in this country."

Clearly, we need to deal with that. Continuing about the lack of engineers, the society said that there was

"a significant shortage of appropriately skilled labour due to a contraction of the supply of skilled personnel from the armed services, manufacturing sector and the traditional airline apprenticeship schemes."

If we are compromising on the number of engineers, aircraft safety is being compromised.

We know that BAA spends £100 million a year on security, and that is to be greatly welcomed. We also know that since 11 September it has considered a number of security measures. For example, cockpit doors are now being locked and armour-plated doors with reinforced locking mechanisms are being installed to all aircraft types at a cost of more than £1 million. Secondary searches have been introduced for a proportion of passengers. Flight deck visits for commercial passengers have been stopped. Flights were immediately re-routed to avoid Afghan airspace. Obviously, services to Islamabad have been suspended and plastic cutlery has been introduced on all flights out of the United Kingdom. I also travelled on China Airlines recently, and all the cutlery on that flight was plastic.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) rightly focused on the issue of staff at Heathrow. It is an important part of the consultation process that the GMB should be involved in all groups that are discussing aircraft and airport safety. I hope that the Minister will be able to take that on board.

Much has been said about the staff who check both passenger luggage and airport hold luggage. That is an important subject, which was raised, I think, by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. How well trained are the staff who check the luggage using X-ray machines? I have heard of students with only minimal training being employed by airlines. That is a major lacuna in safety inspection systems at airports. We should expect all staff who are employed by airports and airlines to check baggage—whether it be hold baggage or hand luggage—to have a minimum level of training. That is the first and paramount step that we could take.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington raised the issue of the length of baggage-checkers' shifts and how much rest they should have between those shifts. Anybody who has worked on a production line will know that the required level of concentration can be maintained for only so long. We need to consider that carefully.

We know that the Government are raising £1 billion a year in airport tax and we know that the American Government have given specific help to their airlines, which are in trouble because of the huge increase in security costs that they have had to meet since 11 September. The Government need to examine carefully—within a European regime, because that affects what we can do with state aid—whether some of the airport tax revenue might be recycled and used to improve long-term safety at our airports and on our aircraft. I would like the Minister to comment on that. I recognise that it is outside his brief to an extent, but the issue of finance for security is within his brief and he might be able to say something about it.

We need to consider how we screen luggage. During a trip to Australia last year with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, we were met at the airport by Australian customs and asked if we had any food in our luggage. We all said no. Dogs were sent round the luggage and a New Zealand apple was found in the luggage of one of our Labour colleagues, who shall remain nameless. That shows how careful the Australian authorities are. They screen every piece of luggage using dogs.

It may not be possible or practical to do that here, but what I have described suggests how we need to tighten our random testing of hand luggage and hold luggage. I know that that would cause increased delays, but if it becomes clear that we are taking a stringent and firm stance on airport safety with respect to luggage, and if it is widely known that detailed random checks will be made, there could be a deterrent effect.

We also need to be more stringent in the questions that we ask passengers. The other day I went on a domestic flight to Edinburgh. Somebody had checked in for me and the luggage awaited my arrival at the desk. The desk officer fired three quick questions at me, asking, "You haven't done any of those things, have you?" I said, "Of course not," and that was it. Somewhat more stringent questioning seems to be needed. Those are elementary and simple methods of improving aircraft safety.

I understand that there are problems with various aspects of airspace control. One of those is military aircraft. A Tornado collided with a Cessna over a midlands airfield two years ago. Clearly, no compromise should be made with regard to safety, where fast military jets are concerned. That is an elementary matter, which needs to be sorted out.

The Europeans are taking more and more control of our airspace, and that needs to be considered carefully. An issue that needs to be dealt with is aircraft control above 35,000 ft, which the Europeans regulate. We need to ensure that the European standards in all countries are as good as ours in this context.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

We need to study carefully our arrangements with other countries on airspace control. For example, following the incident on 11 September the United States has tightened its safety regime considerably. That process has included the screening of passengers, hold luggage and cargo, as well as aircraft searching and guarding. No consultation took place, but the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions worked closely with the United States authorities and it was commendable that air traffic between the UK and the US could resume so quickly.

However, that happened on a purely bilateral basis, without the involvement of any particular regulatory bodies. In future it would be sensible if well established mechanisms of communication with countries around the world were available, so that when a rapid change in safety standards becomes necessary following an incident, systems are in place. That applies also to our European colleagues. Through the Joint Aviation Authorities and the European Civil Aviation Conference, the sort of bodies to which I am referring are beginning to emerge. However, they are not quick enough on their feet yet to be able to deal with incidents such as that of 11 September.

We have covered a lot of ground this morning, and I do not intend to repeat it. Many safety arrangements obviously cannot, and should not be, put into the public domain. The British have a record of safety measures among the most stringent in the world, along with the Israelis. An incident that occurred when I travelled to Israel exemplifies everything that I have said this morning. When I left Israel, not only was my case completely taken apart—every single thing in it was inspected—but I was subjected to a rigorous verbal examination. I had to produce travel documents to show where I had been in Israel, I was asked why I had been there, why I was leaving for the UK at that particular time and why I had visited Saudi Arabia the year before. If the Israelis can run that sort of security operation, the United Kingdom should be able to make more random checks of luggage and passengers.

We need to use modern IT equipment to check passengers more rapidly. The hon. Member for Bath referred to the problems of the Data Protection Act 1998 and to the other international security mechanisms that protect individuals. We must find a way around those problems. Every aircraft should have an IT system, so that passengers can be rapidly checked against an international blacklist should an incident occur. Again, such systems need to be developed.

We need to consider whether sky marshals should be on aircraft. I do not advocate that they should be on every aircraft, but they might be used on a random basis. They should not be armed, because that would merely give terrorists another way of obtaining arms. However, the police are testing new developments, such as stun apparatus, that could rapidly disable terrorists. We need to consider all those methods and to come up with a global system to protect air passengers.

I end where I started: let us not allow the terrorists to win this war. Let us ensure that the worldwide public have full confidence in aircraft travel, so that they can travel in safety and with enjoyment. That is the purpose of our debate and of the Government's action. We look forward to the Minister's reply.

10.41 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) not only on securing this debate and choosing this subject but on the measured way in which he conducted the debate. Indeed, that point applies to all hon. Members who spoke this morning.

As the hon. Gentleman said, this is a most important matter. In the end, the debate was more about security than safety, but the safety of passengers and others is at the forefront of our minds. He started by saying that there is no crisis in the United Kingdom security system, and I agree. He went on to speak about the high levels of security that obtain in our airports, as did the hon. Members for Bath (Mr. Foster) and for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). They are absolutely correct. However, the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington was right to say that there is no reason for complacency. I assure him that the Government are considering all systems to ensure that they meet the standards of which he spoke.

I shall try to answer as fully and frankly as possible all the points raised today. However, as several hon. Members said, some matters are more difficult to talk about in detail because of the nature of the problem and because the answers are best not put into the public domain. If I do not cover some of the issues in the detail that hon. Members would like, I undertake, as always, to write to them about the points that they would like me to answer.

It may help if I put the debate in its context. There is no question but that the security and safety of our airlines and airports has been uppermost in everyone's minds since the appalling events in the United States of America on 11 September. I am sure that the awful images of that day will live for ever in the minds of those who witnessed them on television and especially in the minds of those who witnessed them first hand. We are determined to do everything humanly possible to ensure that nothing remotely similar happens again. I am sure that those feelings are shared by everyone in the Chamber, as has been evident from the quality and commitment shown in the speeches made today.

I assure hon. Members that the staff in my Department who have responsibility for transport security and safety have worked tirelessly since 11 September to review and improve levels of security, along with colleagues from other Departments, the Civil Aviation Authority, representatives of the transport industry and colleagues in overseas Governments and organisations such as the International Civil Aviation Organisation. I thank and congratulate the staff of all those organisations, who have worked extremely hard on this important issue.

New measures have been identified and are being implemented in response to the attacks on the United States. Hon. Members will understand that it would be inappropriate to discuss all those measures in detail but, before I address the specific points raised in the debates,

I can reassure everyone that all that can be done is being done to provide the proper protection of all those working in the aviation industry, those who travel and others who might be affected by the workings of the industry.

It is impossible to discuss aviation security without recalling the terrible tragedy that struck Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in Scotland in December 1988. That disaster marked a tangible turning point for aviation in the country—indeed, in the world. That is not to say that before 1988, aviation security was not taken seriously in the United Kingdom, but Lockerbie was a watershed that changed the world's perception of how terrorists might attack aviation. We went from a world in which the terrorist threat was concentrated on hijack to one in which it concentrated on sabotage. The events of 11 September have moved us on yet again, to a world in which the previously unthinkable threat of a suicide attack, with an aircraft being used as a weapon, has become a reality.

As a result of that attack, much work has been done and much remains to be done, in both domestic and international arenas. The progress that we have made in aviation security since 1988 has been remarkable, although I do not want to sound complacent. The Government are not complacent, but we have great confidence in the state of aviation security in this country. Because our security has moved on so far in the past 12 years, we face a far shorter journey than some other countries in dealing with the new threat.

I will address some of the issues that were raised in debate. First, questions were asked about how we could make aircraft more secure and about the screening of passengers. As with any aspect of security, there are several threads to the issue. An aircraft needs to be kept secure from interference on the ground, from any threat from the bags and cargo that go into the hold, and from threats posed by passengers during the flight. That is why all passenger flights from the United Kingdom operate from restricted zones designated under the Aviation Security Act 1982. Everyone and everything that enters a restricted zone is subject to security control.

Some hon. Members asked what that control amounts to. Every aircraft is subject to a security check when all incoming passengers have left, to ensure that nothing suspicious has been left behind. After that check, access to the aircraft is carefully controlled to ensure that no unauthorised person gets on board. Every passenger who leaves the United Kingdom passes through a security checkpoint where they are screened by metal detection equipment and where many are subject to a hands-on search. They are liable to be searched again at the departure gate. Every other person, from the pilots to the cleaner, passes through a staff checkpoint where they are screened by metal detection equipment, supplemented in many cases by a hands-on search. The United Kingdom is the only country in the world where that is done.

Mr. Don Foster: Will the Minister acknowledge, however, that that system is not in place for general aviation, and that those checks are not necessarily carried out on people flying into this country from abroad?

Mr. Jamieson: I accept that there is more to do in the case of flights that come into this country. That has been the subject of many of our international discussions. I was referring to the comments made by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington about the situation in airports in this country. Every bag entering the restricted zone, whether it is hand baggage accompanied by the passenger, a suitcase bound for the hold of the aircraft or a bag belonging to a staff member, is screened by a trained X-ray operator.

John McDonnell: Can my hon. Friend assure me that Customs and Excise staff are also screened as they go through?

Mr. Jamieson: I do not believe that they are.

Every piece of cargo going into an aircraft hold has been subjected to security controls and every aircraft meal is supplied by a caterer whose security processes have been inspected or approved. Those measures are carried out only in the United Kingdom.

If hon. Members will bear with me—my comments might seem a little disjointed—I should like to address the considerable number of questions and points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington asked about standardising procedures in the event of a hijack. The Civil Aviation Authority is reviewing those procedures with UK airlines, and is trying to establish some appropriate standards. The issue of pre-booking seats will be carefully examined as part of the wide-ranging review of security measures that is under way.

The people who operate the screening machines were also mentioned. The screeners operate for only 20 minutes at a time, with at least a 40-minute break between such periods. It is a difficult and exacting job, requiring a high degree of concentration, which is why those measures are in place. Staff employed as X-ray operators, who are operators of other screen technology, are trained to a very high standard by the DTLR training providers. That training is supplemented by regular refresher training. We are introducing a new screening methodology, which incorporates threat image protection. That not only improves screening but amounts to continuous on-the-job training.

Since January 2001 it has been a legal requirement for security-screened passengers to be separated from arriving passengers. However, while UK airports have agreed time scales to achieve that, it is not done at all airports. In the meantime, compensatory measures, such as extra gate searching, are in place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who has a very long record of concern over airport safety, spoke robustly. He mentioned the article in *The Times*, the thrust of which was that people were coming into the airport without having had their passes cleared. I believe that the newspaper has subsequently published a correction to the effect that the company was working to DTLR guidelines. That meant that people working with the security company could not work airside if they were unaccompanied. If trade unions and others wish to meet

[Mr. Jamieson]

officials to develop aviation security policy, we will of course be pleased to receive views on that matter, which was also raised by the hon. Member for Cotswold.

Mr. Don Foster: I was not aware that *The Times* had published an apology. Is the Minister totally satisfied that existing arrangements for supervising those without full security passes are 100 per cent. adequate?

Mr. Jamieson: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I could never give such an undertaking. However, my Department has done everything humanly possible in that regard, and I can assure him that if any breaches are drawn to our attention they will be investigated thoroughly.

John McDonnell: I, too, have seen no retraction in *The Times*. The issue is supervision. The onus placed on security-cleared staff to supervise those who are not so cleared is almost impossible to fulfil, given working practices in parts of Heathrow airside. That is why I welcome the opportunity provided by the Minister to meet Heathrow staff and the review team.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. They underline why it would be good for unions and staff to meet officials to discuss these issues.

Tom Brake *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: I will give way, but I am mindful of the time and I want to get through some of the other points that were raised.

Tom Brake: I invited the Minister to say whether, given these incidents, it would be appropriate for all staff to be counter-terrorism checked before going airside, rather than having to rely on supervision that might be of variable quality.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington have raised important issues, and we have undertaken to look at them.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) mentioned a number of matters, including NATS' request for a delay to the Scottish centre. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that safety remains—and will remain—absolutely paramount, and will in no way be compromised by such a delay. Nevertheless, I am grateful to him for raising that point.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) mentioned aircraft overflying London. He will know that certain restrictions were imposed immediately after 11 September. In view of the level of traffic, the location of London airports and the prevailing wind directions, it is not possible to avoid overflying London without compromising air safety and seriously impeding air travel to London. However, the points that he raised on his constituents' behalf will certainly be noted.

The hon. Member for Bath asked whether DTLR inspectors are sufficiently well trained to check compliance airside and in airports. I believe that he said that inspectors are capable only of counting paperclips, but I can assure him that they are extremely capable people—

Mr. Foster *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: I will not give way, as I want to have time to answer the points that have been raised.

On data protection, an interdepartmental group is examining the feasibility of checking staff and passenger details against information that could be stored on a master database, so that potential undesirables might be identified. The group will examine any legal implications arising from, for example, data protection legislation. I hope that that is of some comfort.

On aerodromes, under recommendations issued by the European civil aviation conference, the receiving airport should be notified of any aircraft, including general aviation, to which security controls were not applied at the airport of departure. On landing, such aircraft would be made secure. We shall further investigate how that recommendation is being implemented.

The hon. Member for Cotswold raised the issues of finance for security and the general competitiveness of airlines. We are mindful of the funding that has been available in the United States. He will appreciate that those are not issues on which we can make definitive decisions at any particular moment, but he can be assured that they are being kept under review.

The debate has been useful and helpful. I am sorry that there has not been time to respond to all points, but if individual Members want to indicate matters to which I have not responded, I should be happy to reply in writing.

Breast Cancer Strategy

11 am

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I am delighted both by the opportunity to debate this subject in breast cancer awareness month and by the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister is wearing her pink ribbon.

I begin by paying tribute to the work of the breast cancer charities, which are working in partnership this month—they work extremely hard all year round—to raise awareness of the disease. Breakthrough Breast Cancer has established the Breakthrough Toby Robins Breast Cancer Research Centre, which is, of course, the United Kingdom's first centre dedicated solely to breast cancer research. The UK Breast Cancer Coalition is successfully involving hundreds of patients with direct experience of breast cancer in its advocacy work. The Breast Cancer Campaign and Breast Cancer Care work tirelessly to provide people with breast cancer with information and support.

Over the course of her lifetime, a woman's risk of developing breast cancer in this country is one in nine. Approximately 38,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in the UK every year. Between 200 and 250 cases of breast cancer in men are diagnosed each year, which is a tiny number by comparison, but it should not be neglected. Tragically, there are still around 1,000 deaths from breast cancer in the UK every month. Better use of breast cancer treatments in the UK has reduced deaths, but there is still a great deal to do.

This debate provides an opportunity to assess the Government's progress one year on from the publication of the national health service cancer plan. It is a chance to examine the targets in the plan and to review the action that is needed to achieve them. It is also an opportunity to consider the next steps in the Government's strategy to tackle breast cancer. Prevention is the key, so more research and a comprehensive prevention strategy are needed. Sadly, we have known for a long time that many UK breast cancer services lag behind the rest of Europe and that the quality of cancer care available often depends on where one lives. Cancer remains one of this country's biggest killers, which is why the NHS cancer plan is so vital.

There are three main targets specifically for breast cancer. First, the NHS screening programme is to be extended to all women aged 65 to 70 by 2004. That is especially welcome given that the risk of cancer increases with age. Indeed, that point has been the subject of many long campaigns involving several of those present in the Chamber. Can my hon. Friend the Minister tell us what progress has been made towards achieving that target? How many new health professionals will the NHS need to cope with the increasing numbers of women who are invited for screening? Are any of those new staff already in post, or should we expect them all to arrive in 2004?

Secondly, the plan promises a maximum one-month wait from diagnosis to treatment for breast cancer by 2001. As it is 2001, can my hon. Friend confirm that that target has been met? If not, will she explain how the Government plan to evaluate progress?

Thirdly, a maximum two-month wait from urgent GP referral to treatment for breast cancer is to be delivered by 2002. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Government are on course to meet that target, and does she agree that its implementation requires careful monitoring? Concerns have been raised, especially by Breakthrough Breast Cancer, about the length of time that patients must wait between referral or diagnosis and all stages of treatment. The planned target refers only to the wait between referral and the start of treatment. Apparently, some patients receive the first stage of their treatment for breast cancer—perhaps a lumpectomy—relatively quickly, but then face a long wait until the second stage of treatment, often radiotherapy. Given that all the available evidence suggests that the chances of survival depend on timing, can my hon. Friend explain how the Government might address that in the future—especially in the light of the serious shortage of radiographers, which is a problem in my local health authority and nationally?

One of the aims of the breast cancer plan is, of course, to save lives. The ultimate way to achieve that is to learn how to prevent people from getting breast cancer in the first place, so greater priority must be given to research into its causes. Very few of the big killers are as poorly understood, and breast cancer is still the biggest killer of women aged between 35 and 54. The UK is among the worst countries in Europe in terms of the incidence of breast cancer. In a league table of 15 European countries, it is near the bottom—only Belgium, Ireland and Denmark have a higher rate of the disease. The Government's excellent progress on screening and treatment must be matched by a comprehensive primary prevention and evidence-based strategy.

Without identifying the causes of breast cancer, it is difficult for the Government or anyone else to advise on how to prevent it. We already know that many risk factors, including gender, age and family history, are beyond our control, but if there are other factors that we can address, we must do so, and we must first identify them. Scientists believe that breast cancer is influenced by a complex relationship between external factors associated with environment and life style, as well as genetics.

According to a recent Gallup poll commissioned by Avon, the cosmetics company, and Breakthrough Breast Cancer as part of their "Kiss goodbye to breast cancer" campaign, breast cancer is women's number one health concern. Many say that they are willing to make significant changes in their life style and environment if they can reduce their risk of developing the disease, but they need to know exactly what steps they can take. Unfortunately, however, there is little evidence that clearly identifies where such changes can be made, and all the available evidence is either insubstantial or conflicting.

If we are to get to the bottom of the causes of breast cancer and prevent its occurrence, we need more investment in research. International comparisons support the theory that breast cancer can be prevented. African and Asian women are at far lower risk than their western counterparts. The biggest difference is between women in China and Japan and those in western countries. Recent age-related figures show that the rate of breast cancer per 100,000 women is 24.3 in Japan and 26.5 in China, compared with 68.8 in England and Wales, 72.7 in Scotland and 90.7 in North America. The figures have been adjusted to include only white women, so that a proper comparison is made.

[Joan Ruddock]

Studies on Japanese women, however, show that rates of breast cancer in those who emigrate to the United States rise and become similar to United States rates in one to two generations. That indicates that environmental factors relating to everyday activities are more important than inherited factors in the development of breast cancer. Diet could be a significant factor. Various studies have tried to establish a relationship between, for example, the consumption of fruit, vegetables and soy products, or high-fat diets, and the incidence of breast cancer. Variation in diet between east and west appears to support such theories, but we need more evidence.

We are also aware that the environment must play a part in causing the disease. Oestrogen is certainly implicated in the development of some breast cancers, yet the effects of oestrogenic compounds present in the environment are poorly understood. We need to understand not only their effects but if and how we can reduce the risk. There are many questions to be asked, and I do not expect the Minister to answer those that are really directed at the scientific community. However, we need to know whether environmental oestrogen compounds are a risk and, if so, what is their main source. What is the effect of the timing of exposure to such compounds in the womb compared with pre-pubescent exposure? Have studies looked at the correct compounds and what steps have been taken to consider the influence of compound mixtures compared with single agents?

Many commentators have implicated lindane, a chlorinated hydrocarbon poison present in our environment, in the incidence of breast cancer. I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) who has raised the issue in the House. Most registered uses of lindane were banned in 1983, including its use as an insecticidal poison in treating timber, seed grains and livestock, and in pet and human treatments for fleas, ticks, lice and scabies. Last year, the European Union decided that lindane should be banned, and it is due to be phased out across Europe. Can my hon. Friend the Minister tell me what our Government are doing, and how quickly, to ensure that the United Kingdom will comply with the ban?

Several cancer research charities are currently engaged in breast cancer research. They are doing an excellent job but do not have the resources to undertake the large-scale life style and population studies that are desperately needed to answer questions such as those that I have posed. The fantastic work of those charities must be backed up by Government-funded research. Last year, we made a little progress when the Government said that they would match, pound for pound, the money raised by charities for cancer research. Can my hon. Friend tell us when that commitment will come on stream and how the Government will foster their partnerships with the charitable and voluntary sector?

Investment in research must be the cornerstone of any prevention strategy for breast cancer. Better smoking cessation services and the national "Five a day" programme were welcome in tackling many other cancers but will not, I believe, have a very direct impact on the incidence of breast cancer. Although extension of NHS breast screening services to women up to 70 years of age is a step in the right direction, it promotes only early detection, not prevention. What the 38,000 women in this country who are diagnosed with breast cancer every year ultimately want is not to have developed breast cancer in the first place.

There is strong public support for greater investment in research. Today, Breakthrough Breast Cancer and Avon are announcing that they have collected more than 38,000 kiss prints from the public in support of their "Kiss goodbye to breast cancer" campaign, which, as the Minister knows, urges the Government to make breast cancer prevention a priority.

I know that the Minister will join me in expressing regret for the fact that the current UK breast cancer rates equate to one women receiving a diagnosis every 15 minutes. I hope that she can give us a report on the progress of the implementation of breast cancer targets under the breast cancer plan, and that she will give us, in breast cancer awareness month, a cast-iron commitment that the Government will provide greater investment in research to tackle this devastating disease. Breast cancer is the primary health concern of women in this country.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): It is clear that many hon. Members take an interest in this subject, and I suspect that many who are not standing now will want to speak. If speeches are kept brief, it should be possible to accommodate everybody.

11.16 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I am grateful to be called in this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) asked me to tell the Chamber that she was sorry not to be able attend today. She is currently chairing the Select Committee on Administration.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) on securing this vital debate at an important time near the beginning of a new Parliament, when the Government can make an impact on the issue. I will confine my remarks to considering how the Government might enhance their strategy by introducing various therapies that are not currently available throughout the national health service. I suggest that the Minister should be developing a new perspective on cancer care, one that involves a range of therapists who are currently available in the private but not the public sector. I will give some examples of what is happening in the health service in Hammersmith, Bristol and Fulham. The Government will do themselves a favour by embracing such therapies. Not only would it enhance their capabilities, it would reduce their costs. We want to achieve greater remission for existing cases, save more lives and prevent more cases.

Since my election to the House almost 15 years ago, and over the course of four Parliaments, I have been involved in debates about different types of health care. We have about 30,000 doctors and 50,000 complementary practitioners in this country, and I have long held the belief that if a greater proportion of complementary practitioners worked in an integrated health care system, it would take pressure off doctors

with expertise in specific fields, allowing them to treat the patients whom they should be treating, without having to deal with other patients.

Regrettably, evidence shows that since the switch from GP fundholding to the primary care group system that has taken place under this Government, the number of therapists engaged by the health service and the amount of money going to therapists from the health service have reduced because under the primary care group system a greater number of people must make decisions about what services to buy. The Government should consider that. I raised it with the Secretary of State at the most recent health questions, and umpteen times in the previous Parliament.

I have had quite a lot of direct experience of various therapies. It was my luck and privilege to travel to Japan with Rosie Daniels, director of Bristol cancer help centre, on a lecture tour some years ago. I was immensely struck by the work done at Bristol to take on patients whom other services and professionals had found it difficult to treat. I spoke to the director about the wide range of treatments employed to bring a cancer patient back from the edge—perhaps to save their life and certainly to enhance their remission. She talked not only about diet—as did the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford—herbal treatments and acupuncture, but about t'ai chi, exercise and yoga.

I have used yoga with some effect over the years—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) may think that amusing.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Oh no, it's great.

Mr. Tredinnick: The hon. Gentleman is forgiven. Joking apart, I am sure that he knows that yoga has a marked effect on reducing stress. The centre also makes extensive use of therapeutic touch and people who can channel energies. I shall say more about that later.

I suggest that the Minister consider what happens in Hammersmith Hospitals NHS trust. In 1993, the British Medical Association identified a number of complementary and alternative therapies that it believed could work alongside the NHS. In 1995, Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals merged into one large trust, and a set of complementary and alternative therapies were available for the trust. Those services are provided for cancer patients on the health service.

Previously, many patients wanted complementary therapies such as acupuncture or healing but were frightened to tell their consultant. That unsatisfactory state of affairs exists throughout the country where there is a degree of disapproval. In Hammersmith, however, where complementary and alternative therapies are in house, everyone knows what everyone else is doing. Patients have access to massage, art therapy, relaxation, aromatherapy and reflexology. Those treatments are used to support and relax patients, help with symptom control, enhance their quality of life and, in particular, reduce the high level of anxiety, stress and tension that goes with the development of cancer.

At Hammersmith, liaison with radiographers before patients receive treatment diverts some attention from the harsh treatment and enables them to go through their conventional treatment calmly. Aromatherapy is very effective in that respect—massaging oils into a patient's skin can dramatically reduce stress levels.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Tredinnick: As the hon. Member for Watford (Ms Ward) works closely with the Minister, I look forward to hearing her helpful remarks later.

Studies in the United States on the cost benefits of integrated complementary and conventional treatment show pretty conclusively that the Government will save money if they adopt that approach because it achieves a much better throughput of patients in a health service. As the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford pointed out, this country has a chronic problem with breast cancer. It is perhaps the most worrying disease for ladies of many ages. If the Government want to use the treatments to focus on a particular problem, they could hardly do better than focus on breast cancer.

Demand for the services at Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals is so high that they cannot offer the treatment to as many patients as they would like. That is probably why so many go to the Haven clinic in Fulham, which has developed specific breast cancer treatments. All are wonderful organisations, but the Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals are part of the national health service, whereas the Haven is certainly not. Many practices throughout the country offer a form of integrated health care, but much of it has to be paid for. The Minr should consider carefully how to channel more funds to those who support conventional practitioners—the hard-pressed doctors—and also take the pressure off them by bringing in complementary therapists.

There is another problem: many complementary practitioners are not allowed by law to treat specific diseases, one of which is cancer. There is wisdom in that, as it protects patients from being treated by quacks. Doctors regard it as a valuable safeguard, but there are side effects: if a complementary practitioner diagnoses cancer, he may not legally be able to tell the patient in so many words, and that is not necessarily a good thing.

I shall share with hon. Members the experiences of a friend—I will call him John—whom I ran into the other day. I asked him how he was getting on and he told me that he was having a pretty terrible time, as he had been diagnosed as suffering from prostate cancer. He had been to see his wife's reflexologist, who had massaged his feet and said, "You seem to have a very warm prostate. I think you should get it checked." He went back a couple of weeks later for another treatment and the reflexologist said, "This is a hot prostate. You really should get it checked." When he did so, he was told that he was an emergency case and that if he was not admitted to hospital straight away he would die. Reflexology can assess not just prostate cancer—the relevant spot is near the heel—but breast cancer. If greater use were made of reflexologists, who can detect such things by feeling the feet, many problems could be stopped before they developed.

Many integrated health care clinics use Chinese medicine, which includes Chinese herbs and acupuncture—

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): The hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) is well known to be a strong

[Sandra Gidley]

advocate of alternative therapy, and I admit to an interest in the subject myself, but does he agree that there must be evidence-based proof that such therapies work before we devote large sums of money to funding them?

Mr. Tredinnick: The hon. Lady makes a valuable point; however, there is an extensive evidence base for almost all the therapies I have mentioned. There is some contention about the way in which certain statistics have been compiled, but there is pretty much cast-iron evidence for almost all therapies. There is certainly massive anecdotal evidence, such as the cases that I have cited. The Government should carry on with what they have done after the House of Lords Select Committee report to improve regulations, and try gradually to introduce more therapists into the health service.

Integrated practitioners usually take an holistic approach by treating the whole patient, not merely the disease. That is certainly true of Chinese medicine and acupuncture. In acupuncture, Chinese therapists adjust the meridians to get the energy to flow better through affected areas, and use herbs to strengthen the constitution. If someone's digestion is poor they try to enhance his digestive abilities so that more energy—in Chinese, chi—can flow to the places that are a problem. In breast cancer, that could mean arresting the growth of a tumour. The same applies to homeopathy: a homeopath can treat the whole, which may assist in stopping development, or accelerating or extending remission.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford also spoke about diet. She might have mentioned the Gerson diet used at Bristol and elsewhere. An exclusion diet, it is one of many ways of reducing the threat of cancer through dieting which the Government should consider further. Meditation, prayer, yoga, stilling and exercise techniques such as t'ai chi are also valuable and, along with aromatherapy, are often used in the clinics.

I should like to finish by dealing with those who practise therapeutic touch or healing. The Confederation of Healing Organisations covers about 15 disciplines in that sector, including the National Federation of Spiritual Healers. Another body of healers who channel energy from one source or another originates from Japan. Known as reiki, it has become popular in the United Kingdom. Irrespective of whether one believes that people who channel energy through their hands, either by touching or off the body, draw from a divine source or from "universal energy", some people can undoubtedly do it. We should accept that it works. Important studies have been undertaken: for example, Matthew Manning, a well known healer, carried out extensive studies on seeds, attempting to make them germinate faster, and it is scientifically proven that he succeeded.

The healing fraternity and therapeutic touch group is particularly important in hospices. They can help a great deal by treating patients who are not going to make it. They can also help dramatically with mood swings. Someone who is trained in therapeutic touch and channelling energy might well transform, perhaps overnight, the mood of a seriously depressed patient in hospital, and the patient's condition might then significantly improve. A patient who is physically depleted can also benefit from healing—I have seen it happen. The healer can send such a charge through the patient that he becomes tremendously energised. That helps at all levels in the healing process.

I shall not detain the Chamber further because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. However, I ask the Minister to reflect seriously on what I have said. I passionately believe that when different practitioners work together in integrated health care, the resulting treatment will be better in terms of quality and value. The Government should acknowledge that message.

11.32 am

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), who is secretary of the all-party breast cancer group, has secured this debate. With the hon. Members for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) and for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), I jointly chair the all-party group, so I know how hard my hon. Friend works.

I agree that we should pay tribute to the breast cancer charities, which are working in partnership this month to raise awareness of the disease. In particular, we should continue our support for Breakthrough Breast Cancer, the UK's first centre dedicated solely to breast cancer research. The organisation will be somewhat disappointed with me, because I lost my ribbon somewhere on the way to our debate. I also pay tribute to local events on the ground: for example, an Asda store in Halifax works every October to raise awareness of the disease in the community, with considerable success. That is a terrific initiative from a commercial enterprise.

Breast cancer treatment is sometimes seen solely in terms of surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy or drugs such as tamoxifen. Those are, of course, life-saving treatments, but from a patient's point of view treatment is as much about effective communication with health professionals and provision of timely and accurate information as it is about access to the most up-to-date and effective drugs. I am a big fan of the NHS, but it does not always put the needs of patients first. Ministers have been receptive to ideas about new ways in which to involve patients and improve services: one example of a good initiative is inviting patients to sit on the cancer taskforce.

We have a beautiful new hospital in Halifax, the Calderdale Royal. Its physical facilities are excellent and I have seen improvement over the years in, for example, the employment of breast care nurses. There is a local survivors group incorporating Halifax and the Calder valley, whose members have hands-on experience of the disease; it would be great if we could make more use of it. Does the Minister envisage creating more systems to tap into such expertise and develop services at a local level, perhaps by using survivors' ideas?

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence needs more resources. I know that the Minister hears that every day about some part of her Department, but NICE should be given consideration. It could be extremely effective in the future and we must not neglect it. NICE is in the process of developing breast cancer services guidance, although the original timetable for consultation on the guidance appears to have slipped.

As the Minister is aware, NICE is also conducting an appraisal of herceptin, a drug known to extend and improve the quality of life of women with terminal breast cancer—any extension is precious to women who have only a limited time to live. When can we expect the publication of the NICE guidance? Does the Minister agree that patients deserve to see the postcode lottery of treatment addressed more quickly? While we wait for NICE to deliver its verdict on herceptin, women are dying prematurely.

Last week, the all-party breast cancer group held its annual general meeting and planned a programme of work for the next 12 months. We have decided to re-examine lindane, the use of which my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford has questioned. I also pay tribute to Unison and its women's committees, which have campaigned long and hard on the issue. I agree with the hon. Member for Bosworth that we should take diet seriously, and the all-party group has agreed to take evidence and examine diet, in particular the one known as the Japanese diet, to see whether it can be pushed on to the agenda.

I am delighted that the Government have improved and extended breast cancer screening services, but I am concerned about some older women. The Government accept that they should be invited for screening, but some women might miss out because of the time it will take for the intention to extend screening services to become a reality. Some women will miss the boat: for example, a woman who is 68 today will not be invited for screening because by 2004, when the screening target is to be met, she will have passed her 70th birthday. A group of women will miss out, despite having a higher risk of developing breast cancer than the younger women who will gain from the new screening services. Does the Minister share my concern? What could be done to ensure that the health of such women is as well looked after as that of their younger counterparts? The problem is encouraging older women to go once they have got out of the habit. In addition, we still have a lot of work to do in some of the ethnic minority communities.

I should be grateful if the Minister took those points on board. We should never forget the statistics outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford: 38,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in the UK every year, and there are about 1,000 deaths from breast cancer every month. The sufferers from this dreadful disease are the foot soldiers, and it is up to us all to carry on working for them. They are overwhelmingly women, so whole families are touched when they develop the disease. These women are sisters, wives, partners, daughters or precious friends, and we must continue to support them. I echo my hon. Friend's initial plea: we must campaign to make breast cancer prevention the absolute priority.

11.40 am

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I am extremely grateful to be called to speak in this important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) on securing a debate on the Government's approach to one of the UK's most prevalent cancers and one in which benchmarking suggests we are not doing well.

The Government took the early step of appointing a cancer tsar to oversee their strategy. The tsar has presided over the most obvious feature of their approach, which has been the apportionment of sums of money—mainly in lots of penny packets, a bit like the distribution of the Queen's Maundy money. As Professor Karol Sikora pointed out, after each announcement of cash for this or that cancer, there follows a feeding frenzy as rival institutions compete for the available funds.

The overall impression is that despite the tsar there has been precious little joined-up thinking in recent cancer strategy. The Government have consistently been warned to beware of false targets, yet there has been an unhealthy reliance on intermediate outcomes—how quickly patients get to see a specialist—rather than definitive outcomes, or their chances of survival. Moreover, there is an opportunity cost to imposing crude targets: Mr. Jim Johnson, a vascular surgeon and chairman of the British Medical Association central consultants and specialists committee, told the Labour party way back in 1996 that an attack on waiting lists should be a relatively low priority because there were more important issues to be tackled, such as access to acute medical beds.

It seems likely that the Government's two-week standard has been harmful. We understand that that will now be joined by another target—time to treatment. To the extent that it is more realistic, that is to be welcomed. However, we should recognise that target-setting risks distorting clinical priorities, and that the more targets are set, the greater is the potential distortion. All of that has a profoundly demoralising effect on the health professions.

Last week *The Lancet* cast some doubt on the value of breast screening. Of course we must not entertain interventions without a sound evidence base, and we do people a great disservice if we stoke up unnecessary anxiety by promoting inappropriate screening. My mother experienced several distressing days while awaiting the results of such a test—that human cost of screening is rarely factored into the cost-benefit analysis. Yet we sometimes ignore strong evidence. It is likely that women over 70 are being denied operations for breast cancer, despite clear evidence from the colourfully styled "golden oldies" trial that they would benefit from such treatment.

There is evidence that highly prevalent but less appealing cancers, such as prostate and bowel cancer, are relatively poorly resourced even though their treatment may be more productive than the treatment of breast cancer. We must take a balanced view in determining priorities. Although I wear my pink ribbon gladly, I am mindful that the Government appear susceptible to high-profile pressure. I suspect that that has informed the cancer agenda, possibly to the detriment of some forms of the disease, and of health care in general.

Cancer morbidity and mortality rates are still relatively unsatisfactory in the United Kingdom, and we compare badly with similar countries. However, the fashionable expedient of blaming health workers is unhelpful; huge strides have been made since the early 1970s. I well recall the alarm that I felt as a junior doctor

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

about the rough and ready approach to cancer in general, and breast cancer in particular. Happily, today's landscape is very different indeed.

11.45 am

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I wish that I had time to decimate the argument of the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), but I wish to concentrate on something much more positive. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) and for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on the sterling work that they have done to highlight the issue of breast cancer both inside and outside the House.

I entered Parliament not because of my political background but because I was appalled by what the Conservative Government had failed to do for health generally, particularly in the field of cancer—an area in which I was interested. I could not have expected what the Labour Government achieved in one year. It is absolutely amazing that we have a national health plan, a national cancer plan, and money being directed as never before towards research into treatment. We should sing the praises of those initiatives, which might not bear fruit overnight but which are certainly moves in the right direction to provide better health care for our people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford mentioned research. This country is in the forefront of breast cancer research: recently, two of our researchers won a Nobel prize for work in the cancer arena. Oddly, their work was not on cancer cells as such, but on a yeast micro-organism. That triumph for blue-skies scientific research shows that one never knows what will be discovered when one carries out that sort of work. It is essential that we continue to fund such research, which has implications for many health problems.

Understanding of cancer has advanced by leaps and bounds, principally because of work in this country and in the United States. It was discovered in this country that a breast cancer gene runs in families. We now understand that genes might be targeted. Individuals have different genes and instead of treating organs with tumours, we can now treat individuals. Such research is primarily being carried out in this country and is funded by the Government. The prospect is that the science budget will double in the next five years.

Cancer charities are merging: I did not think that I would see the day when the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the Cancer Research Campaign would set aside their rivalries and merge. In a Select Committee sitting, I challenged my friend Sir Paul Nurse—a Nobel prize winner, along with Tim Hunt and Leland Hartwell, who is an old friend from the university of Washington in Seattle. I never thought that I would get the answer from him that Omo and Daz will never mix. In fact, Omo and Daz do mix—they are the same chemical. I knew that they would mix, and I think that they knew that, too.

The rivalries have been sunk, and we have before us the great prospect that those organisations and other groups that work closely with them will combine their research to give it a British flavour, particularly research into breast cancer, where so much has been achieved. I predict that there will be other Nobel prizes for people who discover factors relating to the biological, chemical and other events that occur in breast cancer cells. Genetic differences among individuals allow us to target the problem in a specific way. We do not have to give blanket treatments that result in dreadful side effects, but can instead target particular problems through molecular profiling. Breast cancer research in this country is leading the way.

I support everything that has been said, and I would like to highlight some of the Government's achievements. The National Cancer Institute, for example, is not sufficiently loudly trumpeted: it is a tremendous innovation that brings together many people to co-ordinate work in this country—work that extends all the way from involvement of patient groups to basic research. Another great move, one which was instituted by the national cancer plan, involves the national cancer networks. People who have never before worked together—pharmacists, doctors, GPs and, now, physiotherapists—are discussing the problem of cancer in their regions and devoting their energies to developing plans. I hope that they will receive the money right at the coal face, as it were, to ensure that their priorities—whether lindane, prevention issues or complementary medicine—are addressed, or at least discussed.

The Government have initiated a tremendous spirit, not only in terms of breast cancer but right across the board, and it is a spirit from which we will all benefit. We should congratulate the Government on what they have done and sing their praises to the heights.

11.50 am

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) on securing the debate, which in breast cancer awareness month is timely. I always have to wait weeks and weeks before securing an Adjournment debate. I hope that she will let me into her secret.

As has been said, breast cancer strategies are an important subject. Each year, 38,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer, and almost a third of them will die of the disease. We must do all we can to reduce those numbers. In deciding what to say, I had to cobble together sections pertinent to breast cancer from the NHS cancer plan. The easiest way of approaching the subject is to identify the separate stages of the process.

I endorse all the comments about prevention in terms of diet and alcohol. I will not repeat those points. Many women are first diagnosed with cancer at the point of screening. The NHS cancer plan proudly states that death rates from breast cancer have fallen with the introduction of national screening programmes and new and better treatments, although it does not say which measure has had the greatest effect. The plan goes on to say that among comparable countries, Britain has the most comprehensive nationwide screening programme. However, in the five-year survival rates for breast cancer, Britain lags behind Europe and is way behind survival rates in the United States. That obviously raises the question of why, if breast screening is the key factor and our screening is the most comprehensive, our survival rates are not the best.

The Minister will no doubt be aware of the work of Ole Olsen and Peter Gotzsche, which was recently published in *The Lancet*. The authors reviewed seven randomised trials of screening mammography and concluded that

"screening is unjustified because there was no evidence that it reduces mortality".

That idea was mooted a year or so ago, and the recent paper is the result of a second look at the problem. I cannot stress enough that it reflects a single, controversial opinion and it would be irresponsible to discourage women from attending routine screening appointments solely on that basis. However, as such a large sum of money is devoted to the screening programme, it is vital that further work is undertaken to get to the truth. What is the Government's estimate of the cost-effectiveness of screening? What is the cost per case detected, per life saved and per quality-life-adjusted year?

If screening is ultimately recognised as a good measure, it is money well spent, but if there are no overall benefits, would not the money be better spent on other treatments or on an education programme? It is a sad indictment of our society that there is a gap of approximately 7.5 per cent. in the five-year breast cancer survival rates between the most affluent and the most deprived sections of our society. What are the Government doing to address that problem?

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Is the hon. Lady saying that breast screening is counter-productive and that it is her party's policy to curtail it?

Sandra Gidley: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman was not listening. I said that it would irresponsible to discourage women from attending breast-screening clinics, but that we need more evidence that screening has all the benefits that it is cracked up to have. Despite the screening programme, the cancer plan acknowledges that by the time they are treated, breast cancer patients in Britain are at a more advanced stage of the disease than their European counterparts.

I would like to pursue the arguments made by the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison). The target of a two-week waiting time between referral and out-patient appointment is a cornerstone of the Government's approach. It is obvious that patients with alarming symptoms will want to be seen as quickly as possible, but what is the evidence that bringing appointments forward from two months to two weeks will improve outcomes? It is outcomes in which we are interested, not intermediate targets.

Is the waiting time more important than the time between diagnosis and treatment, which is set at a month? If I were diagnosed with breast cancer, I would not want to wait a month. Approximately 90 per cent. of women referred by GPs have non-malignant lumps, so are the Government's priorities right? Will the Minister guarantee to implement the two-week wait for diagnosis, and will she assure us that the money involved would not have been better spent reducing the waiting time between diagnosis and treatment?

My next point is fairly parochial, but I make no apologies for raising it. It is crucial that GPs receive adequate training in the diagnosis of breast cancer. A problem arose in the treatment of a constituent of mine, who was in her early 20s. The rate of breast cancer in women of that age is low—one in 15,000—but there is still a risk. My young constituent had recently had a child and had breast-fed, but she knew her body and knew that something was not right. She made repeated visits to her GP and was repeatedly fobbed off: she was told that there was nothing to worry about and that the problem was related to her breast-feeding. She was persistent, but not persistent enough. By the time that she was taken seriously, her cancer had spread. So that no other young woman is put in the same position as my constituent, I ask the Minister to ensure that all GPs are adequately trained and so do not dismiss young women on the grounds of probability.

Another aspect of the Government's strategy was highlighted by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). I reluctantly accept that it is appropriate for new treatments to be referred to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, but it is becoming apparent that the process is too long and cumbersome. Women are literally dying while they wait for decisions. If NICE worked well, it would enable the Government to be fleet of foot; as it is, it is more like a rapidly developing bunion that considerably impedes delivery of the latest treatments.

I will use the story of herceptin to highlight some typical problems. The drug has been found to be effective in many cases, and some clinicians in this country prescribe it because they believe that there is enough evidence to support its use. However, we need to go back a step. Herceptin is of use in only certain types of breast cancer: an especially aggressive form of the disease, in which women over-express a protein called HER2, can now be tested for and the appropriate course of treatment identified. In the United States of America, 98 per cent. of women are tested, but in the United Kingdom only 19 per cent. are. We also compare unfavourably with Europe: 32 per cent. of the relevant group are tested in France, and 57 per cent. in Spain. Some doctors have claimed that testing is not worth while because the drug has not yet been given the go-ahead by NICE, but others are happy with the evidence.

NICE's review of herceptin started in December 2000 and a decision was expected in May. I asked in a parliamentary question when the guidance would be issued and was told that it was unlikely to appear before the end of the year. I would be grateful if the Minister could let us know the reasons for the delay. My understanding is that the review of herceptin in combination with paclitaxel is more or less complete and that a provisional decision was reached in April. Is that so? If it is, why has guidance not been issued so that women can benefit from the therapy?

It is rumoured that the delay is due to the institute examining the use of herceptin as a monotherapy, evidence for which is taking a little longer to collect. Will the Minister confirm that that is the case, and explain to those women who could benefit from the treatment the justification for delaying the guidance? Most of the women benefiting from the treatment are those who can afford private medicine; are the Government happy with that situation?

No one has referred to aftercare, which can be problematic. I pay tribute to the many charities that work in this field. Recently, a carping article in a

[Sandra Gidley]

national newspaper complained about the number of breast cancer charities compared to those for lung cancer, for example. In my experience, most breast cancer charities were set up to address a specific need, such as research or providing information and support. Women are good at providing support networks; if what they want is not available, they usually set to and set it up. The fact that those networks have been established suggests that post-operative support within the NHS is lacking, although in some areas of the country it works very well indeed and we need to learn from such examples. I could not find a reference in the cancer plan to the sort of post-operative support that many women would like to receive at that traumatic stage in their lives. Will the Minister tell us how the Government intend to proceed in that sensitive area?

Generally, the position is improving, but we continue to lag behind our European counterparts, and the United States simply leaves us standing. My research has led me to believe that there is no cause for complacency.

12.1 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) on securing this timely debate. I praise her and the other hon. Members who have spoken for their interest and knowledge of the subject. It has been a good debate with some excellent contributions. I also echo her congratulations to the many charities involved in cancer work, especially in respect of breast cancer, and on the great success of the "Kiss goodbye to breast cancer" campaign. I hope that it is not too late to send in my card; when I tired to get the lipstick out, it broke, and as I am not especially au fait with putting lipstick on I have not found another one, but I shall do so. The lack of a ribbon on my breast today means only that I have left mine at home.

It is important, too, to praise the many health service staff involved in cancer treatment. Enormous pressures have been placed on them to reach various targets—some of them may be misplaced, but that is another matter. We should pay tribute to the work done by nurses, doctors, radiologists and other staff.

It is vital that we consider this topic four and a half years on from the election of a Government who raised cancer treatment as a campaigning theme, and a year on from the publication of the national health service cancer plan. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) said that the amount that had been done was breath-taking. He then reeled off a list of plans, targets and schemes that had been published. However, such things will not be the benchmark of the Government's success in tackling the causes and treating cancer in our population. What will be measured is actual output and outcomes, not the amount of paperwork, which the Government are so good at producing.

The hon. Gentleman was right to pay tribute to Dr. Timothy Hunt and Sir Paul Nurse, the Nobel prize winners of a few weeks ago. It is an irony that in this country, which is a leader in cancer research, the standards for survival do not compare with many of our European counterparts and the United States. We have heard the figures relating to women affected by breast cancer and the fact that some 13,000 women die from it each year. We support all genuine moves to reduce cancer deaths and we hope that the Government's target to reduce the death rate in people under 75 by at least 20 per cent. by 2010—thereby saving some 100,000 lives—is reached, so that we can compare with the best in Europe. We must also make progress in deprived inner-city areas and among many ethnic minorities, where the incidence of breast cancer and other forms of cancer is worrying.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford was right to mention the importance of preventive treatments. My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) made, as he always does, many interesting comments. I always learn something from him when he speaks about complementary medicine. It is worrying that the demise of GP fundholders has diminished the availability of complementary medicines. The interesting tale about his friend John's "hot prostate" is perhaps a good case in point, showing that there is much to be gained from liaising with complementary medicine.

The risk of developing cancer appears to be increasing and we still do not know why. There are 200,000 new cases of cancer every year. There has been something like a 30 per cent. improvement in survival rates in the past 30 years, but an alarming divergence in survival rates between different parts of the country, as well as between us and our European counterparts. The breast cancer five-year survival rate in this country is about 67 per cent., compared a figure of 80 per cent. in France. That gap is too great and I am sure that all hon. Members agree that we need to raise our game.

We can look for clues to the cause of the disparity in the availability of drugs—an issued mentioned by various hon. Members. Chemotherapy drugs spending per head of population in this country works out at around 95 pence, compared with £6.24 for Germany and £3.31 for Italy. Breast cancer drugs are available to about 20 per cent. of the population affected in Europe, but only 5.9 per cent. in the United Kingdom. There is evidence that cancer patients in this country have their chemotherapy doses reduced to avoid the onset of neutropenia, which reduces protection against infection, and ensure that they do not need the expensive drugs needed to counteract that. A study by doctors at Addenbrooke's hospital showed that 32 per cent. of breast cancer patients receive sub-optimal treatment as a result of that rationing.

The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon)—to whose vast experience and familiarity with the subject through the all-party breast cancer group I pay tribute—mentioned NICE and postcode lottery prescribing. NICE has recommended paclitaxel and docetaxel for breast cancer at a cost of about £16 million per annum, and has recommended that they should be available to all. However, in practice, many health authorities are financially unable to provide that treatment. A study by the Campaign for Effective and Rational Treatment suggested that about 70,000 patients are being denied vital treatment, mainly because of rationing based on where people live. Wiltshire health authority has refused in the past to fund paclitaxel for ovarian cancer even though an average of 55 cases each year are reported in that county. Women

with breast cancer who live in Avon are denied docetaxel, but if they lived two miles away in Somerset the drug would be available to them.

When health authorities are reorganised, will things become even worse? When even larger areas replace the health authorities that decide, as a matter of financial planning, that they cannot afford various drugs, will even more women miss out? What progress has been made in ironing out the problems of postcode prescribing? I read today that there is to be a large clinical trial of a new chemotherapy cocktail drug based on taxtere. I wonder whether that will be readily available if the trials show it to be effective. I gather that there is great hope of that.

What progress has been made with survival rates in the past few years? Last year's report, "Cancer Research—A Fresh Look" by the Science and Technology Committee, of which the hon. Member for Norwich, North was a member, stated that the Committee was

"unconvinced that guidance from NICE alone will ensure national availability of recommended treatments."

The Committee recommended that

"the Government ensures that its follow-up procedures require all Health Authorities to provide anti-cancer treatments which are approved by NICE where the patient's consultant regards them as clinically appropriate and prescription is within the guidelines set by NICE".

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) mentioned the two-week pledge. It is right to speed up referrals, but it is even more important to speed up the time to treatment. As the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford said, we are talking not only about an initial treatment, but about a series of treatments. The Labour party gave the two-week pledge a great fanfare before being elected in 1997, but the most important issue is surely the time to effective treatment at all stages. The real delay in dealing with cancer has come between diagnosis and treatment: many women have been diagnosed as suffering from breast cancer and then left to sweat for far too long before getting the full and appropriate treatment. I echo the hon. Lady's question to the Minister: what progress has been made on the pledge to reduce delays between diagnosis and treatment to one month by 2001? We are almost at the end of the year.

Simply throwing money at cancer will not suffice; investment must be soundly based. We must offer a coherent system of care from the presentation of symptoms to completion of treatment. There is little point reducing the waiting time to see a consultant if there is a delay in access to diagnostic equipment or the treatment is not available on the NHS. As my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury mentioned, there is evidence that the two-week rule is proving counterproductive in many cases. Specialists must now concentrate their valuable time and resources on consultations for diagnosis, leaving them little time for the more important treatment thereafter. Barry Jackson, the president of the Royal College of Surgeons, said:

"Clinics are being snowed under with inappropriate referrals for breast cancer."

He said that 90 per cent. of women with suspected breast cancer were subsequently found to be clear of the disease. Dr. Joan Austoker of the Cancer Research Campaign said:

"The 2 week rule has completely backfired. It has led to a waste of resources and a waste of specialists' time."

The National Cancer Forum stated:

"Nowhere does a state health department have a 2 week policy or sound out such gratuitous advice to doctors yet many have better outcomes for cancer care."

I ask the Minister to consider the effectiveness of the two-week ruling.

There is also the technical definition of the two-week referrals, which applies only when a GP makes a referral within 24 hours of deciding to refer. A doctor who puts a letter in the post to the consultant would not meet the 24-hour ruling. The figures are slightly artificial, but even they show that for the last quarter of 2000, 95.9 per cent. of women qualified under the two-week rule—down from 96.4 per cent. in the corresponding quarter of the previous year. The benchmark in 1997 was quite high, although I agree that it was not high enough. Some 77 per cent. of women who were diagnosed with cancer had their operations within 14 days. Will the Minister give us an update on the figure and tell us whether it is improving?

There is concern about big variations in the number of women who test positive in oestrogen receptor testing. Figures can range between 5 per cent. and 80 per cent. between different hospitals. That means not that there is a lower incidence among women in certain areas, but that the level of testing leaves a lot to be desired. What progress has been made on the important matter of raising the lowest to the standard of the highest?

The hon. Member for Halifax referred to the important issue of age discrimination, although she did not put it in quite those terms. There is evidence that women are not getting full access to treatment and, worse still, that many older women who get screened do not get treatment. The Cancer Research Campaign revealed that women over 70 are being denied operations for breast cancer, and claims that whereas younger women routinely have surgery to remove tumours, older women usually only get the drug tamoxifen. The CRC says that doctors believe that older women are too frail to be operated on successfully, although, as my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury mentioned, the CRC's "golden oldies" study gave a different view.

I do not want to be quite as alarmist as the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) about the effectiveness of screening. The Danish study was an isolated case, and I go along with the Imperial Cancer Research Fund's claims that women who attend regular breast screenings might reduce their risk of dying from breast cancer by more than 50 per cent. However, we need to ask questions about the cost-effectiveness of breast screening against all the other treatments further down the line that I mentioned earlier.

There is also a question about the capacity of our hospitals to deal with breast screening for older women. Last year, I visited the breast screening unit at Worthing hospital in my constituency. The team there is very hard-working, but there is only one consultant radiologist

[Tim Loughton]

dealing with a population of 100,000 in the town, as well as people from the surrounding area. Her plea to me was, "For goodness sake, don't extend the breast screening programme, because we can't cope with it." It was not that she did not want to extend it or did not think that it might be effective, but because her service could not cope.

There is a big shortage of radiographers. They do not get included enough in the publicity about terms and conditions for nurses and doctors and the technical staff behind them. The standard of radiography equipment in this country is also a problem, with many consultants refusing to accept scans from certain machines because they are out of date and the images not clear enough.

Breast cancer is an important subject, but it is not the only cancer and it should be put into the context of other cancers, including those that affect men. Some 10,000 men die of prostate cancer each year. Government spending last year on research into breast cancer supported through the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health amounted to slightly more than £9 million, whereas the figure for prostate cancer was £1.52 million. Every year, approximately 21,000 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer—a form of cancer that needs early diagnosis and treatment. It is excellent if we are making progress with the treatment of women with breast cancer and survival rates are increasing—although the opening remarks of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford made it clear that we have a long way to go. However, there are many other forms of cancer that affect many of our constituents and I hope that they will all be treated with a degree of seriousness and given a higher profile than many of them currently enjoy, putting them on a par with breast cancer.

12.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) for raising this important issue. We have all been given an opportunity to contribute to an excellent debate. All the contributions have reflected real depth of expertise in and knowledge of the issues and I have learnt a great deal. I should also like to place on the record my thanks to all the breast cancer charities for their hard work and their determination in raising the issue of breast cancer. I have had an opportunity to work with many of my hon. Friends on these issues and I am familiar with the amount of energy and commitment that the charities show in representing the interests of patients. It is also opportune that the debate takes place in breast cancer awareness month. The huge effort by the charities has been a great success this year, as in previous years.

The theme of breast cancer awareness month is myths and facts about breast cancer. Despite the fact that more women are being successfully treated than ever before and women are no longer afraid to talk about the disease, there remain several myths about the disease and it would be helpful to know the facts. One of the myths is that not many women survive breast cancer; in fact, although one in nine women will develop the disease at some point in their lives, the latest figures show that around 75 per cent. of women are alive five years after being treated for breast cancer. It is important that we give hope and confidence to people who are diagnosed by telling them that survival rates are extremely good.

It is also important to know that breast cancer is not primarily an hereditary disease. Only between 5 and 10 per cent. of breast cancers are linked to hereditary genes. It is very important that people know that. Another myth is that breast cancer screening by mammography is 100 per cent. effective. We are the first to say that that is not the case. It is the most reliable method of detecting breast cancer, but like other screening tests, it is not perfect. Women who are invited to come for breast cancer screening need to understand its potential benefits and limitations, so that they are able to make an informed choice about whether they wish to proceed.

That is relevant to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) about patients having information to enable them to become partners in their health care and make decisions with the professionals who are treating them. Information and communication are key. That is why we said in the cancer plan that all women would receive a national information leaflet on breast screening. The new leaflets will be launched at the end of the month. They are based on research and include text of the discussion with community groups and a wide range of women from diverse backgrounds. They are being overseen by the Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer Screening and the national cancer director. Information in the leaflets is evidence-based, and the advisory committee has included patients in formulating the information in those leaflets, in recognition of the importance that the Government attach to involving patients, their families and carers in developing policy.

The leaflets are a brave step in openness because they clearly outline the benefits and allow people to make a real choice. As several hon. Members said, only last week, the question of whether breast screening works came under scrutiny in a medical journal and was picked up widely by the national media. It is important to state that the majority of experts still believe that breast screening by mammography saves lives. That view is backed by all the cancer charities, and the Government share that view.

Sandra Gidley: I think that the article will probably be dismissed, but in light of the now acknowledged scientific method of rating research papers it is incumbent on us all to investigate further the allegations that it contained, especially as it repeated work done a year previously. The article picked up on the fact that some of the research highlighting the benefits of screening did not meet the criteria that would class it as high quality research—indeed, it was regarded as poor quality research by the authors.

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. Interventions must be brief.

Ms Blears: The hon. Lady asked about research. I understand that Professor Valerie Beral, chair of the Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer Screening, said:

"Taken as a whole, the seven studies reviewed show that breast screening by mammography reduces mortality from breast cancer."

The *British Medical Journal* reported on further research from last September by Blanks et al, which indicated that 30 per cent. of the decrease in breast

cancer mortality could be attributed to screening. That represents 320 lives saved in 1998. It is clear that lives are being saved. Experts will always dispute some research, but the vast majority of people are still of the view that mammography screening saves lives.

Although not perfect, we believe that the facts about breast screening speak for themselves. Last year, 1.3 million women were screened in England through the national programme, and more than 8,000 cancers were detected. Almost half of them were small cancers that could not have been detected by hand, and more than 90 per cent. of women who have had breast cancer detected through screening are alive five years later. That is the real benefit of screening. Research has shown that breast cancer mortality fell by more than 21 per cent. between 1990 and 1998; a third of that fall was attributed to breast screening. However, the true effect of screening may be much greater, and experts believe that it is likely to be 2005 to 2010 before the full effect is seen in national mortality trends, as the benefits begin to work through.

We have confidence in our breast screening programme, which is why we are extending it. The NHS cancer plan was that by 2004 we should have extended routine invitations for breast screening to women aged up to 70. That will benefit 400,000 extra women. I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford that we are not waiting until 2004 to start that extension of screening; we are implementing the change now. Twelve per cent. of breast cancer screening units will expand their services this year, which is well ahead of the target of 10 per cent. An additional 50,000 women will be screened this year, and we shall build on that increase in the years leading to the target date. We have already made a start, and we shall be increasing that during the next few years.

Mr. Tredinnick: Previously, the Minister said that patients and carers would help in evolving policy. She has just referred to screening. Does she recall my remarks about how reflexology can detect cancer, and does she intend to look further at complementary treatments?

Ms Blears: I was coming to the points raised by the hon. Gentleman, I shall have some good news for him shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford and others have mentioned the shortage of radiographers, whose role in the extension of the screening programme is vital. Although theirs is not a high-profile service, it is crucial. There are now nine pilot sites looking at new ways for radiographers to work, extending the skills of health care assistants and introducing new radiographer practitioners, to determine whether the skills mix can be broadened. There is a new programme of near patient screening that uses technology to screen patients as fast as possible, although we realise that it remains necessary to recruit extra radiologists.

As is the case throughout the NHS, there are some demarcations and boundaries in working practice that are not appropriate. The more that practitioners can extend their skills through training and education so that they are able to take on some of the work previously done by other members of their team, the more effective and efficient screening can be. We expect to have the results of the pilot programmes by 2003; that will provide evidence on how those new ways of working can be extended.

The NHS cancer plan set out the Government's commitment to improve cancer services across the board. It is important to recognise that time limits and targets are not plucked out of thin air without considering the outcomes. Outcomes are crucial to patients. The programme links prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and research, and puts an extra £570 million into the process. I take issue with the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), who spoke of tiny little bits of funding: £570 million to improve cancer care represents significant progress.

The hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) asked about complementary therapies, which are important in palliative care and in supporting patients by dealing with their symptoms. I hope that he will be encouraged to know that his drive to integrate such services with the NHS is being taken seriously by NICE, which is to publish evidence-based guidance on supportive and palliative care. One of the issues that it will consider is the potential benefit to cancer patients of complementary services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax mentioned extending screening to women aged 65 to 70, and the possibility that those aged over 70 could fall through the net. I have good news for her. Women aged over 70 will be offered free three-yearly screening on request, as women over 65 are now. Those who have been in the programme will automatically be notified of their right to that. The Government have been working with Age Concern to produce a leaflet and a video to publicise the entitlement of those aged 65 or over to breast screening.

I know that hon. Members are anxious that guidance on herceptin be published. So far as I am aware, the latest information is that, as the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) said, it will be published at the end of this year or early next year. I do not know of any specific reason for the delay, but I shall look into it and respond to any issues it raises.

I am delighted to say a word about men, because it is certainly not the Government's intention to ignore them. We take prostate cancer extremely seriously, and the decision has been taken to invest £6 million—not the £1.2 million mentioned by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton)—to set up two centres of excellence for research into screening for prostate cancer and its treatment. We have to find out what works and obtain an evidence base. Currently, there is not a good evidence base for screening for and treatment of prostate cancer, but we want to invest in it because we recognise that it is a huge problem for men.

GP training is crucial to detection, early diagnosis and early referral, but no single step will reduce breast cancer. There has to be an integrated approach involving diagnosis, prevention, diet, cessation of smoking, proper treatment, proper drugs, the extension of cancer collaboratives and the introduction of hundreds more cancer care consultants into the system. The issue of cancer has been pushed up the agenda by the Government in a way that has never happened before. As many hon. Members have said, cancer in general and breast cancer in particular devastate lives and families. That is why they must be at the top of our agenda, not just this year or next year, but in the years to come.

Night Flights

12.30 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I am grateful for this second opportunity in my brief parliamentary career to talk about aircraft noise, which, as I am sure the Minister will remember from the last time that we discussed it, makes a great impact on the quality of life of the people whom I represent. Judging by the considerable interest that hon. Members and outside organisations have shown in this debate, it is not only the constituents of Tatton who suffer the tyranny of sleepless nights caused by unnecessary commercial night flights.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) has contacted me about the matter. He has been a strong voice arguing for a more balanced approach to be taken towards airport policy. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) is present for the debate. He is a tireless campaigner on such issues and I look forward to hearing what he has to say. I have even been contacted by the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), who is concerned about helicopter night flights in south Armagh, but that may be beyond the scope of today's debate.

Since the Minister and I last met, the landmark ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on 2 October 2001 has been a major development in the whole vexed question of night flights. The ruling, which relates specifically to Heathrow, will have a major impact on Manchester airport near my constituency because it adopts the same night flight policy as Heathrow. I shall not go into whether the European Court of Human Rights should be ruling on such issues. Some of us believe that it has gone far beyond its original remit, but we are signatories to the convention and usually accept its judgments. Indeed, the Government are so enamoured of the convention that they have gone so far as to incorporate it into our domestic law.

On 2 October, the court found that the Government

"failed to strike a fair balance between the United Kingdom's economic well-being and the applicants' effective enjoyment of their right to respect for their homes and their private and family lives. There had accordingly been a violation of Article 8."

It also found that

"mere reference to the economic well-being of the country"—

the Government's standard defence of night flights—

"was not sufficient to outweigh the rights of others."

The court said that the Government

"had a positive duty to take reasonable and appropriate measures...to strike a fair balance between the competing interests of the individual and of the community as a whole".

A fair balance should mean that people who live under flight paths and near airports should at least have the right to a good night's sleep. Reasonable and appropriate measures should therefore include the banning of night flights.

I suspect from the Minister's recent written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor that he will say that the Government are studying the judgment, that they have three months until it becomes final and that they are commissioning yet another study into attitudes to sleep disturbance. In other words, he will not say anything interesting about how the Government will respond to the problem. We do not need the Government to undertake further consideration of the matter. We do not need any more studies into sleep disturbance. We already know that night flights disturb the sleep of hundreds of thousands of people in Cheshire, Manchester, London and elsewhere. My constituent, Mrs. Taylor of Knutsford, said:

"I was awakened by noisy aircraft no fewer than four times during the night."

Mr. and Mrs. Suckling of Northwich said:

"once we are awake the damage is done. We are irritable and tired. This is not the way we had hoped to spend our retirement."

Mr. Thomas said:

"We can't even get a decent night's sleep. I would have thought it a basic human right."

We do not have to rely only on the powerful anecdotal evidence of our constituents. The Minister will know that the World Health Organisation's recent charter on transport, environment and health stated that excessive noise can

"cause difficulty in falling asleep, reduction in deep resting sleep, increased awakenings during sleep and adverse after effects such as fatigue and decreased performance".

He will further know that the WHO charter sets out what it calls "community noise guidelines", which state that night-time noise levels should not exceed 60 decibels for an individual noise event such as the flying over of an aeroplane.

I am sure that the Minister will also know that the charter has been signed by two of his fellow Ministers, including the right hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Tessa Jowell), who is now in the Cabinet, as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. He will also know that in a letter to campaigners at Gatwick, a copy of which I have here, Elizabeth Duthie of his Department's aviation environmental division confirms that Britain is a signatory to the charter, which, although not legally binding, represents a "political commitment" on which the Government need to act in three years. In other words, the Government, through their political commitment to the WHO charter, are committed to a 60-decibel limit for an individual noise event at night such as the flying over of an aeroplane.

According to Manchester airport's fixed noise monitor between Knutsford and Mobberley in my constituency, in July and August this year the average noise level at night from aircraft was 78 decibels—18 decibels higher than the WHO charter allows for. Given how the sound scale works, that means that the average aeroplane at night is four times higher in perceived loudness than the WHO guidelines allow. I emphasise the word "average", because some aeroplanes are much louder even than that. The latest noise fines from Manchester airport show that its night noise limit of 87 decibels, a full 27 points higher than the WHO guidelines, was breached several times during the summer by, for example, Pakistan International Airlines three times, Scandinavian Airlines twice and a couple of freight company aeroplanes.

Each of those aircraft would have woken up thousands of people in my constituency, but the fine received would have been no more than a few hundred pounds. That is why I argued in our first debate on the issue that as a first step and a bare minimum we need much stiffer fines for airlines that break noise limits,

including the sanction of banning or withdrawing slot allocations for persistent noise offenders such as Pakistan International Airlines.

As I said in our previous debate, I am not anti-airport, and I accept that we will not stop people wanting to fly. In dealing with airport policy we need, as the European Court of Human Rights says, to strike a

"fair balance between the competing interests of the individual and of the community as a whole".

The ECHR is obviously right in its judgment that it is

"at the very least likely that night flights contribute to a certain extent to the national economy as a whole",

although it also states that the

"importance of that contribution has never been assessed critically".

The contribution to our economy is insufficient to outweigh the detrimental impact on people's quality of life. Airports and airlines do not need to fly at night to make a profit. The theoretical limit on night flights at Manchester is just 7 per cent. of total daily flights from the airport, and the actual number of night flights is far less. Last winter, the last period for which I have seen figures, the number of night flights was just half the theoretical limit. I understand that at Heathrow there are just a couple of dozen flights at night, although, as at Manchester, the definition of "night" does not include 6 o'clock in the morning, when most people are asleep.

However the figures are examined, night flights are a relatively small proportion of airport business. "Ah," the airlines and airports cry, "There may be only a few flights, but they are very lucrative, and if we banned them all, our customers would all go to Charles de Gaulle or Schiphol or another European airport." They certainly cannot switch to Tokyo or Sydney airport, not only because they are on the other side of the world, but because those airports already ban night flights. Being such good Europeans, the Government will recognise that one of the advantages of the ECHR ruling is that it will apply to night flights out of other, continental European airports too, and with such a level playing field there is no danger of customers landing at 4 am in Paris instead of Manchester. The Government should regard the ECHR judgment not as a setback but as a blessing.

When I asked for a debate, I knew that the Minister would not be able to detail the Government's response to the ECHR judgment in full, but I know from my experience of working in Whitehall that the time to try to influence Government policy is before it is announced, rather than after. The message from my constituents that I should like the Minister to take back to his Department today as he considers his response to the judgment is simple. We do not need any more studies into attitudes to sleep disturbance. We do not need any more Government flannel about unspecified economic benefits to the country. The only practical way in which the Government can satisfy the European Court of Human Rights judgment, meet their commitments under the World Health Organisation charter that they have signed, and give my constituents a decent quality of life, is by banning night flights.

12.40 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I thank my hon. Friend very much for allowing me to intervene briefly in the debate and I also thank the Minister. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his good sense in bringing this debate and on his good fortune in securing it. I pay tribute to the clear way in which he has outlined the continuous distress caused to our constituents by night flights. I also want to congratulate the brave people from Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise—HACAN—who took the case. I was among those present, at a photo opportunity at Waterloo station, who waved them goodbye on their way to Strasbourg, many months ago.

This has never been a partisan issue, as the presence of the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) shows. I have banged my head against the brick wall of this Government, and of the Conservative Government whom I supported. It has been difficult to explain to Governments that our constituents have a serious problem, and we have a duty faithfully and accurately to represent the widely held views of our constituents to the Government. My hon. Friend referred to the irony of Conservatives supporting a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. That is an irony with which I can easily live. It may not be the means that I would prefer—I would prefer to make such progress in this House—but it is the means, we hope, to an end. I hope that the Government will take the ruling seriously.

I want to touch on one or two points that have already been raised. Most importantly, we are not anti-airport. We have kept an open mind on many of the issues relating to the airport. I congratulate it frequently on being a good neighbour in lots of ways—its public relations staff do a lot of good work throughout my constituency, many of my constituents work for the airport, and many of my constituents use it for holidays and business trips. However, night noise is unacceptable. Whatever efforts we have made in the past, which have not been successful, have now had a result through the European Court. My hon. Friend mentioned that the Court thought that a fair balance had not been struck between two competing interests—that of the state and of the individual. That is what we have argued in the past. We believe that there should be a balance, and we do not want to deliberately set out to destroy a greater economic interest.

The judgment shows three things in particular, and vindicates some of what we have been saying over the years. First, the 1993 scheme has not achieved the stated aim of keeping overall noise levels below those in 1988. We made that point frequently, and the Court judges that to be the case. Secondly, the bogus distinction used when the sleep research was originally done—between sleep disturbance and sleep prevention—was a thorn in our side for many years. We tried to make Governments of all parties understand that they were missing the point in terms of disturbance and prevention, and that the research was fundamentally flawed as a result. The court has agreed with us on that. Thirdly, on the economic interest of the country, the court finds that in terms of the national economy as a whole, the importance of that contribution has never been assessed critically. That is terribly important, because we have tried on many occasions to make the Government say what the cost would be if the night flights were no longer allowed to carry on. Neither the Government nor the agencies that they have asked to look into the matter in the past have made that assessment. If that had been

[Mr. Michael Trend]

done, we could have had a sensible debate in this House. However, the European Court of Human Rights is right to say that that has not been done.

We shall keep up the pressure. The hon. Member for Putney and I have asked for responses, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) is doing today. We know that the Government have a certain amount of time to respond to the case, but we urge them to take the matter seriously. We are here to try to articulate the views of our constituents. If the brick wall that we in Westminster have been banging our heads against has finally collapsed in Strasbourg, so much the better. However, the heart of the matter is the distress of those—the elderly, young people with exams the next day, those who are anxious about their lives in many different ways—who are unable to wake up feeling refreshed and ready to face the day. That is indeed a matter of human rights.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) on securing this debate and on the way in which he has conducted it. As usual, he has proved sensible and well informed, and as the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) said, he has put his constituents first. I also thank him for making my speech for me. That was very kind of him, and he anticipated its content absolutely correctly. His own speech was wide-ranging, but it would be sensible for me to restrict my comments to the title of the debate. Although I may not be able to consider all his points in the detail that he would like, I can assure him that we have listened carefully to them, and to those made by the hon. Member for Windsor.

The hon. Member for Tatton has been most diligent in securing a second debate on aircraft noise so soon after 17 July, when we last met in this Chamber. However, he will appreciate that unfortunately, my comments today must be somewhat constrained, given that the court judgment in the Hatton case was published as recently as 2 October. I am sure that he does not expect me to say today what the Government are going to do. Indeed, if I did so hon. Members who represent the many different and conflicting interests involved would be quick to criticise the Government for not giving this important judgment the careful consideration that it deserves.

In the weeks ahead, we shall indeed be giving the judgment the careful consideration that it warrants, before deciding what action—if any—to take. Furthermore, there is time for such consideration. According to the procedures of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, the judgment cannot become final until at least three months after the date of its publication on 2 October. There will therefore be no immediate changes to the present situation—neither at Heathrow, which is the focus of that particular case, nor elsewhere.

In considering the judgment, it will of course be necessary to keep at the forefront of our minds the fundamental principles that underpin article 8 of the European convention on human rights. Such rights are central to this case. Article 8 of the convention makes the following guarantee:

"Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence."

The essence of those rights has been covered by both today's speeches. However, like many rights that the convention guarantees, they are necessarily qualified by the second part of the article, which states:

"There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

Such qualified rights give rise to the "fair balance" or "proportionality" test, as there is often a need to strike a balance between the rights of the individual and the competing rights and interests of others—including, as in cases such as this, the economic well-being of the country.

The Government also have a positive duty to safeguard the rights of individuals as guaranteed by the convention. I should mention steps that the Government have taken, through the Human Rights Act 1998, to make such rights more accessible in our domestic courts. I was delighted to discover that the hon. Member for Windsor now agrees with that approach. I wonder what he might have said about the matter and how he might have voted on it when it came before us a few years ago. However, I shall move on rapidly from that.

Incidentally, that step has remedied the second violation found by the judgment, that of article 13, which concerns

"the right to an effective remedy before a national authority".

Where, in pursuit of a legitimate aim, it is necessary to interfere with the rights of individuals, and that aim can be attained in more than one way, the way least harmful to the convention rights should be chosen. Within the limits of reasonableness, Governments should consider all relevant facts in striking a fair balance between conflicting rights and interests. In the case law that has been developed over the years, the court has allowed states a certain margin of appreciation. However, I do not wish to dwell too long on those important principles, although they are central to the case and will inform our consideration of the judgment.

An important issue in the Hatton case is whether the Government got that balance right when they introduced a modified scheme of restrictions on night flights at Heathrow in 1993 and 1995. The court clearly has its doubts on that score. It is concerned by the way in which, in the 1993 and 1995 decisions, the balance was struck between the conflicting rights and interests. It is particularly concerned by the amount of information that the Government had available to them at that time, and whether that information was adequate. We must consider those issues carefully. We also need to reflect on the fact that the 1993 night restrictions regime was replaced by more stringent arrangements at Heathrow in 1999. We must therefore consider what further measures may be necessary in light of the judgment. We also need to consider whether the judgment has wider implications beyond Heathrow night flights.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Because of the media interest in the case, some of which has been less than objective, it is important to make it clear that we do not currently consider that the court judgment says that the disturbance that a limited number of night flights can cause necessarily amounts to a violation of human rights, and therefore they should not be allowed. In our view, the court continues to recognise the principle that a fair balance needs to be struck.

The court also recognises that part of the problem in striking the right balance is the difficulty of measuring the economic importance of night flights and the harm that they can cause. The latter is a little easier to assess than the former. A great deal of the best research has been conducted in this country, looking into the effects of night flights in causing interference with sleep, including premature awakening and sleep prevention. Much of that research has been carried out around Manchester and Heathrow.

As with the more difficult area of researching the contribution of air transport to the economy, sleep research is too often casually dismissed when it does not conform to preconceived ideas or is held to be counter-intuitive.

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I will not give way because we have little time left in this debate. I am sure that my hon. Friend understands that I must try to respond to the points that have been made.

Although it may be possible, after careful study, to estimate the value of night flights to the economy, it would certainly not be a simple matter. It would have to involve key assumptions for the purpose of estimating the important secondary economic benefits. Sadly, the result would inevitably be open to criticism as either an overestimate or an underestimate, depending, of course, on one's point of view, and not necessarily on the facts of the case. Indeed, that was the case with the Oxford Economic Forecasting report on the "Contribution of the Aviation Industry to the UK Economy" in 1999.

Not all things can be measured precisely. Night flights form part of an integrated network of services, and their economic value cannot readily be teased out from the other services that they complement and with which they interconnect. There are important economic regions of the world that are best served by night services, simply because of the geography of the world, the time-zone differences and the duration of flights. This is not a uniquely British problem, as the same services operate at night to all other major European cities, although our one-hour local time difference from continental Europe does exacerbate the problem in the UK for airlines wishing to compete on broadly equal terms with those based in Paris, Frankfurt and Amsterdam.

The charter airline industry is also particularly dependent on night flights to achieve the efficient use of its aircraft that is necessary to compete effectively with continental competitors and to provide affordable holidays. Time-sensitive mail and express cargo, including perishables, rely heavily on night flights. As a society, we expect and demand these things, but are often reluctant to accept the consequences that go with them.

Despite the difficulties of conducting scientifically robust research in such controversial areas, the Government are not throwing in the towel. Indeed, we are in the process of commissioning a major new study to reassess attitudes to aircraft noise, which will include further research into subjective responses to annoyance by night and day. That was announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) on 8 May 2001. The aviation industry should meet the external costs that it imposes, and the new study will give us more information on the value that people give to relief from noise. However, it would be premature to initiate further studies of any other aspects of night flights while we are considering the implications of the judgment.

We have a few more moments, so I thought that it might be helpful to respond to some of the points that the hon. Gentleman raised in the debate on 17 July, when there was insufficient time to do so. I shall try to make amends for that deficiency. He said that people at Manchester airport had told him that pilots could do little to reduce noise when coming in to land, which is why there are fines for aircraft that exceed the maximum permitted noise limits on take-off only. There is a kernel of truth in that, but the matter is a little more complicated. On take-off, pilots have considerable scope to operate their aircraft in ways that will reduce the noise that they make, especially when they are encouraged to climb as quickly as possible. Therefore the departure noise limits, and the fines that Manchester and other airports levy on aircraft that exceed them, serve an important role in influencing pilots to operate their aircraft in the most noise-efficient way.

However, on the final approach to landing pilots have to follow the precisely defined 3 deg descending glideslope of the instrument landing system and adhere strictly to the specified approach speeds. That leaves them with little scope to influence the amount of noise that their aircraft make, especially when flaps are deployed to provide essential lift at lower speeds and when the landing gear has been lowered. Consequently, fines would not influence pilot behaviour or techniques, and there is concern in some quarters that they could have safety implications. Further from the airport, however, before aircraft are established on the final approach track, pilots can do much more to reduce noise. In particular, whenever practicable they can follow the best practice "continuous descent approach" procedure and maintain their aircraft in a "low power and low drag" configuration.

My Department has been working closely with the Civil Aviation Authority, air traffic controllers and airline pilots to develop best practice guidance for pilots to improve their approach procedures. Although there is some scope to reduce noise during the approach phase, it is very limited closer to the airport, as would be the case over Knutsford in the constituency of the hon. Member for Tatton.

[Mr. Jamieson]

This has been a narrowly focused debate. I have even managed to insert one or two comments on matters raised in a previous debate, which may help the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that he and other hon. Members appreciate that at this stage the Government are somewhat limited in framing our full response, but I hope that my comments have been helpful in the context of this important matter.

Putney Post Office

12.58 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this Adjournment debate, which has important lessons for all Members of Parliament with Crown post offices in their constituencies, and will require Ministers to change—or rather, I hope, halt—the sale of such post offices, including Putney post office, and subsequent franchise arrangements. I thank the Minister for his presence, and I hope that I manage to touch on all three aspects of his ministerial responsibilities.

Before I start, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all postal workers who are dealing with the threat of bio-terrorism at this time, especially those working here in the House of Commons. They deserve our support and gratitude. Although the actual threat has been in the United States, we need to continue vigilance here.

That is one reason why I oppose the privatisation of the Post Office. What is happening at Putney post office is the thin end of the wedge of privatisation. On 2 August, I was telephoned out of the blue by the local Post Office Counters official to be told of the sale of the Putney post office site and franchise to a third party. All existing post office staff would go. There would be a consultation period until 12 October, and the decision could be rescinded.

Putney post office is on a prime retail site, has a training school above it and a large yard at the rear. It is held on a very long lease, is profitable and has 10 retail windows and a minimal stationery offering. During the two-hour telephone conversation, I discovered that the franchisee was to be London Post Ltd., which had contacted Post Office Counters to say that it was interested in any Crown post offices going in London. It thus became the preferred franchisee, to pay a franchise fee set by the Post Office to enable it to make a profit, and with a tender list consisting of itself alone, to agree the price of a substantial freehold or long leasehold for the whole site.

In an area where modest flats sell for up to £500,000 each, considering that a substantial block of flats could be built above the post office, the value of the whole site should be very high. I wished to meet the franchisee, but was told that he would not agree to a meeting because the last time he took up a post office franchise, the local MP had caused him "considerable hassle". A deal has been done behind closed doors involving only one bidder, who refuses to meet the MP or any other democratically elected representative.

What is proposed? I have seen no plans. Incidentally, in the franchising of Morden and Wimbledon post offices, carried out in the 1990s when I was the leader of Merton council, Safeway and Elys, the respective franchisees, had negotiated in great detail about their proposals with me, as a local democratically elected representative. In each case, the original post office buildings did not come with the deal.

There have been public meetings in Putney. Post Office Counters did not help itself by changing its management structures half way through so that we ended up with people who had little idea of the background except that someone else higher up had

agreed the deals. I had no choice other than to ask the National Audit Office to investigate, and I also asked to meet board members of Consignia plc, who have not yet agreed to the meeting.

On 13 October, however, the letter came stating that the consultation was at an end, that there were to be no changes to the deal and that the franchisee was taking over both site and franchise in November. A new code of practice has apparently come in, negotiated with Postwatch, the post office consumers council, but that does not affect this consultation, or bring about the fundamental changes to procedures that I believe are necessary.

I do not believe that Crown town centre post offices should be franchised. They provide a key service to the public and, given their prime sites, could make considerable profits for the Post Office. As a former retailer, I am astonished that there has been no attempt to recruit to Post Office Counters retailers of quality who know how to make prime retail space work as Crown post offices. If the Post Office is going to walk away from retailing and the Government are, to their shame, going to allow it to do so, there must be safeguards: first, for the public purse—because we all own the Post Office—to stop a scandalous rip-off of assets; secondly, for us all as users of the Post Office; and thirdly, for the postal workers who will lose their jobs.

First, any proposals to franchise a Crown post office should be made public six months before the tenders open. That would give time for the public to understand why the franchising was proposed, and alert local business men and women to the opportunity that might become available. It would also allow for a proper consultation period before the making of any decisions. That is a specific measure being sought by Postwatch, which has outlined to me that although the Post Office will say that no decision has been made until the consultation is over, decisions are almost always a fait accompli. If no deal is ever altered or rescinded, it not only makes a mockery of the consultation period, but means that sensible suggestions that arise from consultation, from the public or Postwatch, cannot be taken on board. That, surely, is not good business practice, especially since Postwatch and its predecessor have many years of experience of examining the good management of post offices.

Secondly, a tender should be based on profit and loss statements given to the tenderers on a commercially confidential basis. That would allow the highest tender on the basis of the maximum performance standards to be identified. In Putney, the proposal to franchise was not made public until after the deal was done with one bidder. No local businesses could therefore compete, and there was no tender for an extremely profitable franchise; the Post Office set the fee.

Thirdly, any staff working for the Post Office on site should be given the option of transferring to the franchisee. They have the expertise and should not have to move to other potentially distant remaining Crown post offices. In Putney, the franchisee has not been required to retain existing staff, who have been told that they can have jobs elsewhere in the Post Office if they want them. Apparently, the franchisee has to guarantee that new staff are of the quality of the old staff. Why will he not accept the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981—TUPE—and the continuity of staffing?

Fourthly, before a contract is signed for the franchise, the final tenderer should be required to show Postwatch and locally elected representatives, such as MPs, their proposal for the retail operation, and demonstrate that there will be no diminution of standards; the tenderer should reveal details of layout and other retail offerings. Safeways and Elys did that in Morden and Wimbledon. Why was London Post Ltd. able to get away with not telling people in Putney? What is it afraid of telling the public before it is too late?

Fifthly, the franchise contract should be for a maximum of seven years, and the Post Office should be able to retender at that point, or withdraw the franchise at any time if performance standards fall. In Putney, the franchisee is required to keep the Post Office where it is for seven years. It may be moved elsewhere for seven years, and the contract may then be terminated if the franchisee wishes. In the case of Putney, the franchise deal is actually a property deal.

Sixthly, I propose that where franchising takes place in an existing Post Office-owned site, the franchisee should pay, in addition to the franchise fee and all other property outgoings, the market rent to the Post Office. If the Post Office has a long lease or a freehold, as it does in Putney, before franchising, it should sell and lease back the property, pocket the proceeds of the sale and leaseback, and pass the market rent to the franchisee. That is normal franchising practice.

Seventhly, any property rights relating to upper floors, air rights for development and any developable area, such as yards or outbuildings, not needed for the operation of the franchise should be separately developed by the Post Office, either on its own or with a private sector partner to maximise the profit from the Post Office estate for reinvestment. The Post Office should be doing that for every building it owns where no operational use is being made of such spare space.

In the case of Putney, such common sense has gone out of the window. The franchisee, who was chosen by the Post Office, has been charged a franchise fee and offered a very long lease on the entire Putney post office estate, the price of which has been set, I am told, by internal post office valuers on the basis of needing to make the franchise attractive. To date, the Post Office has refused to tell me the price that London Post Ltd. paid for that valuable site. Although commercial confidentiality is understandable when a deal is being negotiated, once the deal is done, the rules of confidentiality should no longer apply, particularly in the case of the disposal of publicly owned assets. The Post Office management have been challenged again and again on why they have not approached the transaction on normal sane commercial lines. I do not believe that they are corrupt, but I do believe that there is whiff of a fire sale of assets within Consignia; it is not privatisation, but close to it. I believe in public-private partnerships when they are to the public's advantage, but I do not believe that Crown post offices have to be franchised, or that the estates should be sold off for all time.

The Government should intervene to point out that the commercial independence of Consignia plc should not mean financial illiteracy, and failing to value staff

[Mr. Tony Colman]

and listen to customers and elected representatives. No private sector retailer would do that. The shareholders would object, and ultimately throw the management out. We are all shareholders in the Post Office. It speaks volumes that the management of the Post Office spent £2 million on changing the name to Consignia. Our representative on the board is the Minister. Will he stop the shenanigans at Putney? Will he halt the sale of the site and the franchise, and order a rethink and a proper consultation? Will he use the ideas in this speech to ensure that the licence to operate does not have to be taken away from the Post Office for future generations in Britain because of the failure of this generation's management?

The Government, via the performance and innovation unit, have laid out plans to keep the Post Office as a vital centre for our towns and villages. The universal bank will not only provide access to banking services for many who were previously left out, it will give the Post Office a profitable key role in providing services at the heart of communities. Plans for internet access, for one-stop shops for Government information and transactions, and for e-commerce opportunities in post offices are on the agenda. If people could order goods or services and collect goods ordered on the internet at a post office it would increase thousands of people's access to a wide range of products and would certainly be welcomed by my constituents. Might we even see coffee being served for those on the internet or those waiting their turn? What better hub of the community could we ask for?

Can the Minister explain how the Post Office is driving forward that modernisation agenda, which provides the opportunity to retain profitable Crown post offices in the major high streets of this country? The Post Office seems too keen on getting rid of assets, rather than modernising them into workable, socially inclusive, profitable businesses. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister, with his portfolio for e-commerce, has ensured that post offices such as Putney do not miss out on the potential for services that can be provided on the internet. As in Putney, post offices are often in prime locations. Location is everything in retail, so they are in an excellent position to compete with other retailers and increase competitiveness. Why can they not sell computers, stationery or other services? One further suggestion would be to give my hon. Friend an extra power, akin to the power of his ministerial colleague with responsibility for planning. He could then call in proposed sales or franchises and demand to be shown the facts and figures, with the power to stop the proposal if it seemed that it was not the best available course of action.

I have digressed slightly, but only to try to draw some attention to the options available to the Post Office, other than the disposal of publicly owned assets as fast and as secretly as possible, as in the case of Putney post office.

At the beginning of this speech I mentioned the current threats to postal workers, particularly US postal workers. I was in Massachusetts and New York this recess before the terrible events of 11 September. One of the things that my family noticed was that whether in the smallest villages of northern Massachusetts or in downtown New York, the US postal service premises were at the centre of the community. They are substantial civic buildings, often new and always well maintained. They are a matter of pride. As we pride ourselves on sharing a common heritage with America, may I try to persuade my hon. Friend that Crown post offices should remain owned and run successfully by the Post Office on behalf of the Government? That includes Putney post office.

1.13 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): First, may I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on securing the debate on the future of Putney post office, and start by echoing his praise of post office workers not just here in the House of Commons, but right across the UK. They deserve our support and gratitude during these difficult days.

I listened carefully to his speech, and welcome the opportunity to respond to the issues and the points that he has raised. I know of his strong commitment to the Post Office as an institution and to the community that he represents with such diligence. His concerns centre on whether the change of status from Crown post office to franchise outlet will have an adverse impact on post office customers in the locality. I can reassure hon. Members that the Post Office Ltd. proposals that I have seen are intended to secure the long-term viability of post office facilities and services for the local Putney community, bringing a number of improvements including the extension of opening hours and improved facilities.

My hon. Friend will be aware that under the Government's reforms we have given the Post Office greater commercial freedom, and established an arm's-length relationship so that the board can structure the business as it decides how best to meet the challenges of market developments and changing needs.

From 26 March this year, under the Postal Services Act 2000, the Government's role became not director but shareholder in a public limited company. Decisions relating to the day-to-day running of the business are the responsibility of the Consignia board and management.

With regard to operational matters, I should emphasise that this is not a new development. It has been the policy of successive Governments since 1969, when the Post Office was established as a public corporation, that decisions relating to day-to-day operational matters, such as the status and location of individual post offices, were the responsibility of the Post Office board and management.

Given the size of the post office network, it was, and remains, inappropriate and impractical for Ministers to become involved in decisions relating to individual offices. With almost 600 Crown offices operating, the suggestion that franchising and conversion plans be called in for ministerial consideration and assessment is, I fear, not practical. The method of sale that the management of Post Office Ltd. choose to employ when offering franchises to the market and deciding how best value for money is achieved is a matter for their own commercial judment.

The conversion of Crown post offices to agency or franchise status is by no means a new issue. The process began in the late 1980s as a means of strengthening the

economic viability of the post office network. Because of concerns that resulted from some earlier conversions, on taking office in May 1997 the new Government imposed a moratorium on further conversions pending a review. That moratorium was lifted in December 1998, following agreement on proposals put by the Post Office to the trade unions on a future strategy for the Crown office network. The arrangements were included in the White Paper, "Post Office Reform: A World Class Service for the 21st Century", published in July 1999.

This strategy provided for more Crown offices to be converted to privately run operations, while ensuring that the total proportion of business transactions carried out at Crown offices was maintained at no less than 15 per cent. of the total business transacted by the post office network as a whole. This percentage figure, which established that Post Office Ltd. should maintain a substantial core of Crown offices within the network, forms the basis on which the May 1997 moratorium was lifted.

The Cabinet Office's performance and innovation unit report on "Modernising the Post Office Network", published in June 2000, concluded that, as a matter of priority, the Post Office should carry out work to maximise the commercial potential of the network, the efficiency of its operations and the quality of individual post offices. The PIU report contained 24 specific recommendations, all of which the Government accepted.

My hon. Friend suggested that Putney post office was profitable. However, a particular conclusion of the PIU report was that more Crown offices should be converted to privately run operations as a means of addressing the poor profitability of the Crown office part of the network, which is currently losing about £50 million annually.

Clearly such a situation needs to be addressed in the wider interests of the network as a whole, in view of the major changes and challenges that it faces. Decisive and urgent action to reduce costs, including measures such as the planned changes at Putney post office as well as other Crown offices, is increasingly necessary. It is the clear aim of Post Office Ltd. to address the losses generated by the Crown offices and contribute towards establishing a sustainable future for the urban network as a whole by establishing bigger, brighter, better post offices with robust business potential to deliver sufficient returns to sub-postmasters.

Mr. Colman: Given that Putney post office is profitable, will the Minister confirm whether there is a pattern of first franchising the most profitable post offices rather than addressing the problems of the unprofitable ones?

Mr. Alexander: I would like to make it clear that proposals regarding the Crown office part of the network are judged on the merits of both the profitability that can be achieved in the network as a totality and the individual circumstances of individual offices.

In proceeding with conversion of Crown offices, Post Office Ltd. will continue to fulfil its publicly stated commitment to maintain a network of main post offices that offer the full range of products and services, while enabling it to invest in improving the whole network.

However, the process is subject to public consultation with interested parties. That provides customers and local representative bodies with specific details about the facilities being offered under the proposed new arrangements, and allows for objective evaluation and feedback. The overall process has been updated recently following discussions with the Consumer Council for Postal Services, which is more commonly known as Postwatch. The revisions are included in a code of practice on the network agreed between the Post Office and Postwatch to cover post office branch relocation, closure and conversion.

Although the consultation process under the code does not extend to the principle of conversion of a particular Crown office to franchise or agency status, it gives customers and other interested parties the chance to express their views about the operational and customer service implications of planned changes. If significant issues emerge from the consultation, Post Office Ltd. will review its plans and, wherever possible, incorporate appropriate modifications. In addition to customers, the code of practice requires Post Office Ltd. to notify other interested parties, which include the relevant parish council, local authority, local chamber of commerce, Member of Parliament, Postwatch at headquarters and regional level, and the local branch of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters.

In Putney, Post Office Ltd. adhered fully to the code of practice on public consultation. The code states:

"The act of conversion as such is not a matter for consultation, the service implications, which are normally enhancements, are of interest to local customer groups".

As well as standard provisions relating to post office relocations, the section on conversions provides for Post Office Ltd. to allow an eight-week period for consultation, to provide information on the proposed franchisee, to display prominently information about the proposed change in the post office concerned and to invite customers to write in with their views on the proposal. Post Office Ltd. stated that, in considering a range of options for the Putney premises, it is satisfied that the contractual arrangement reached with Mr. Patel represents the best commercial option. Against the background of commercial freedom and non-intervention by Government, that is a judgment for Post Office Ltd. to make.

My hon. Friend the Member for Putney criticised the consultation as being meaningless because a deal with the franchisee had already been struck before the views of customers and other interested parties were sought. In the past, Post Office Ltd. put out broad proposals for change before any specific agent, franchisee or location had been identified. However, it found such an approach was unsatisfactory both from its perspective and from that of customers, who criticised the absence of any specific plan or proposals on which they could comment. Clear plans for the proposed changes allow informed and constructive debate.

Postwatch, as one body consulted about the conversion of Putney post office, has closely monitored the plans of Post Office Ltd. Postwatch's Greater London committee has sought assurances, on behalf of Putney customers, on future service provision under the new franchise arrangements. Post Office Ltd. has given Postwatch Greater London the assurance it sought: that customers in Putney will continue to receive the same range and quality of service as is currently available.

[Mr. Alexander]

Other key assurances received by Postwatch Greater London include commitments that the services currently provided will continue to be available throughout the extended opening hours; that, after refurbishment, there will be nine counter positions, compared with the current 10, of which a maximum of eight are in service at any one time; and that the space for post office operations will conform to the requirements of Post Office Ltd.

Postwatch was also told that the franchisee would make a substantial investment in refurbishing the post office, including installing new counters in full compliance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and that for measuring quality of service—including queuing times—and for staff training, the same procedures as those applied at Crown offices will continue. Postwatch was also reassured that the franchisee had experience and an excellent track record in operating franchise post offices. However, it will monitor the situation carefully to ensure that facilities and staffing standards are maintained and that customers receive improved service levels.

My hon. Friend asked about the existing staff at Putney post office. That is an important issue. They are Post Office Ltd. employees, and none expressed a wish to continue to work under the franchise arrangements. All have been easily and successfully reassigned to posts in nearby offices under their existing terms and conditions of employment, so there will be no compulsory redundancies.

Post Office Ltd. has been criticised for failing to advertise the franchise opportunity at Putney more directly in the locality. However, it is the long-standing policy of Post Office Ltd. to market franchise opportunities in the business community at franchise fairs and trade shows and in trade and retail press advertising, including local press such as the *Evening Standard*, without specifying particular offices, because to do so would create considerable uncertainty and concern for the future among the staff and customers of the named office. That might be prolonged if there were no early expressions of interest from prospective franchisees in that office.

Concern has also been expressed at the refusal by Post Office Ltd. to disclose the detailed terms and proceeds of the sale of the lease on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. However, it is operating in a commercial market and is subject to the prevailing customs and practices. I understand that it has confirmed to my hon. Friend that an extensive range of options relating to the sale of the premises of Putney post office were reviewed and considered before concluding that the terms agreed represented the best commercial option both in the wider interests of the network and in the specific continuing provision of main post office services in Putney.

Anxiety has been expressed that the move to franchise Putney post office provides no long-term guarantee of continued service provision. However, I understand that although the standard term of a franchise is seven years, in Putney's case there is a requirement for the post office to remain at the existing site for 14 years. There is also provision for an 18-month notice period, so ample time is available to find alternative premises for a post office should that be necessary.

My hon. Friend, who has considerable retail experience, expressed surprise that there had been no attempt to recruit those with retail experience to the post office network. However, I can confirm that such steps are being taken. The appointment of the highly experienced Allan Leighton to the main Consignia board with a role as "network champion" will be followed shortly by the recruitment of a new chief executive for the network to address the issues raised by my hon. Friend.

I acknowledge my hon. Friend's genuine desire to protect and maintain the provision of first-class postal services for his constituents. I hope that during this short debate I have been able to clarify some matters for him and provide reassurance on others. I hope that he and his constituents will draw reassurance from the detailed inquiries made, and the reassurances received, by Postwatch, which will monitor developments in Putney closely in the coming months. If my hon. Friend wishes to raise further issues with me, I shall be happy to respond to him in writing.

Mr. Colman: I made a series of proposals for a new code of practice to ensure that future Crown post offices are dealt with in a different way. Is the Minister considering those proposals as a way of ensuring that we do not have similar debates about every Crown post office in the UK?

Mr. Alexander: I assure my hon. Friend that I shall consider the matters that he raised in the debate and discuss them with him either in person or in correspondence. It is clear from the PIU report that there is a genuine commitment to the Crown offices as part of the network's future; there is an equal determination to tackle the matter of retailing raised by my hon. Friend. In considering the sustainability of the Post Office network in the years to come, it is essential that we advance the retailing agenda in what are often prime locations in communities in urban and rural Britain. The Government are committed to implementing the recommendations of the PIU report; as I said, we are already driving forward the agenda with a network champion specifically allocated those responsibilities on the board of Consignia. I am also confident that the chief executive who will be appointed to look after issues related to the Post Office network will regard those issues as being high in the in-tray when he or she takes up the post. It is important that the Government continue to support the Post Office network; there is a great deal of work to be done to ensure that we realise the considerable retailing potential for Crown offices and for the sub-post offices throughout the country.

I applaud my hon. Friend's concern about the post office in Putney; I have received representations from several hon. Members on the issue. I am fully cognisant of the strength of feeling in the House about the Post Office. I assure my hon. Friend that the issues that he has raised receive considerable attention in my Department. Even in the present difficult international circumstances, in which the focus tends to be on the delivery of mail, there is much work being done to ensure that we sustain the network's viability throughout the country.

Asperger Syndrome

1.29 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I declare a non-remunerated interest: I am a special councillor on the national council of the National Autistic Society.

I believe that this is the first time that the House has considered a debate specifically dedicated to Asperger syndrome. I am aware, of course, that many Members of Parliament have raised individual cases from their constituencies—all too often when a crisis has occurred and an MP's help has been sought.

Asperger syndrome was first described in the 1940s by Hans Asperger, but received little attention in this country until the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is part of the autistic spectrum, affecting some 71 people in 10,000. It is characterised by qualitative impairment in social interaction and restrictive, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests and activities. There is a serious risk of mental health problems, particularly in the late teens and adulthood. The syndrome is also characterised by autistic behaviour, which can present a challenge and often be misinterpreted as a mental disorder.

What characterises people with Asperger syndrome compared to others with autism is that they usually have good language skills and often have an average or above average IQ. Contrary to the stereotype of a person with autism being withdrawn, a person with Asperger syndrome may talk on and on, regardless of the listener's interest. A two-way conversation may be restricted simply to the giving and receiving of specific pieces of information. Because of their IQ, people with the syndrome can obtain educational qualifications, in some cases at degree level.

Initially, all that may sound rather quirky, but not like a major disability. I initiated the debate to tell Ministers that we now know enough about Asperger syndrome to identify good practice where it exists and to provide services and support. Throughout the country, unfortunately, there is still very much a lottery. People with the syndrome may just happen to live in a part of the country where expertise and support services are available.

The key requirements are recognition of the condition, appropriate support before a crisis occurs, and an understanding by professionals and statutory bodies that they cannot provide services in the short term and then walk away. The situation deteriorates quickly. Perhaps I can put that in context and explain why, as with an iceberg, what you see on the surface belies the depth of the problem underneath.

I shall focus on the over-18s. Education and support at school are important. However, many adults with Asperger syndrome may be well educated but unable to manage cooking or even to seek appropriate help if they have a physical medical condition. It is rare for people with the syndrome to marry. Indeed, I know of none who has. The inability to form social relationships denies them friends and permanent relationships. They are only too aware that they miss out in their teens and adulthood on what they clearly see is normal interaction among their siblings and peer group.

Equally, the communication impairment affects people's position in the workplace, if they are fortunate enough to have a job. Many suffer bullying at school, which affects their self-esteem and often stays with them for the rest of their lives. Inappropriate behaviour, which is often a normal autistic response, is frequently seen by other adults as intimidating. At worst, mental health professionals misdiagnose it.

It is not uncommon for adults with Asperger syndrome to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act or prescribed drugs, because their autistic behaviour is not recognised as such but is misdiagnosed as a mental health problem. That is not to disregard the fact that mental health problems occur, and one does not have to be a psychiatrist to understand why. Factors include growing into adulthood with no friends, having no social life while peer groups go through the usual growing up periods such as going out at weekends, never forming personal relationships that lead to marriage, poor job opportunities and, for some, being denied the opportunity to drive a car because they have difficulty in anticipating dangerous situations, which means that they are obviously not allowed to hold a driving licence. All those issues come together in young people who have average or above average IQs and who are desperate to be part of life. Their daily battle denies them what we take for granted. It is no wonder that depression is common, that mental health problems develop on top of autism and that the suicide rate is high.

A report published earlier this year by the National Autistic Society found an 8 per cent. suicide or attempted suicide rate among a group that it surveyed. The Government are interested in reducing suicide rates across the board. It would be helpful if we could identify how many suicides, especially those involving young men, are autism based. It is tragic when somebody contemplates, attempts or commits suicide, but we know that there are circumstances in which people do so as a cry for help because they have reached rock bottom. People with autism do not think like that. Cause and effect is not part of their thinking. When a person with autism decides to take their life it is not because they hope that somebody will come and rescue them; it is because they have had enough of life. I hope that the Department of Health will consider the shocking figures for suicide attempts and suicides with the help of a group of people who are aware of the difference between those with Asperger syndrome and those around them.

The situation does not have to be this bad. If appropriate services are provided and support is sustained, many people with Asperger syndrome can have a vastly improved quality of life and can be supported to live with a degree of independence. Unfortunately, tapping into such services is crisis-driven. It is a postcode lottery whether services are available locally or a great distance away. All too often, elderly carers look after an adult child, and getting to the point where a crisis becomes serious enough to warrant consideration of a package of care places a huge burden not only on the person with Asperger syndrome, but on carers and those who take immediate responsibility.

I have not called this debate because I want to raise awareness of Asperger syndrome. There is greater awareness of Asperger syndrome than there was 10 years ago, which is good, but we have reached a stage

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

where I am looking for action, which is why I have asked hon. Members to consider the matter today. I welcome bringing together health and social services because communication between the various agencies is important in identifying appropriate support packages. All too often social services departments have to find packages of support in a crisis, which means that such packages are necessarily expensive. That puts health and social services off Asperger syndrome. They are terrified whenever they see that there is another case of Asperger syndrome or autism to consider, because they know it will cost them a great deal of money. It costs tens of thousands of pounds a year to support somebody who presents in crisis.

If social services departments were to take advice from those who specialise in the condition to set up a strategy to support adults with Asperger syndrome, they would find that lurching from crisis to crisis is not the only option. There are ways of supporting people and improving their quality of life. However, input is needed before the crisis occurs. I am sure that the economics of that, notwithstanding the humanitarian benefits, would prove to be more beneficial to the statutory bodies.

The Government recently published a strategy for learning disabilities entitled "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century", and I flag up some concerns about the document. Over a year ago—before the report was published—I corresponded with the Minister of State, Department of Health. He assured me that the Government had started to develop a national strategy for learning disabilities, and that matters relating to autism and learning disabilities among those with an IQ of more than 70 would be considered. However, I am worried by what I read in the document.

Section 8.42 of the document states:

"Adults with autism need a range of living and working environments."

The section specifically addresses autism and recognises that person-centred planning should make it possible for individuals to exercise choice about the provision of their housing and support. However, section 1.6 of the document states that the definition of a learning disability

"encompasses people with a broad range of disabilities. The presence of a low intelligence quotient, for example an IQ below 70, is not, of itself, a sufficient reason for deciding whether an individual should be provided with additional health and social care support."

I do not disagree with that. However, the report continues:

"An assessment of social functioning and communication skills should also be taken into account when determining need. Many people with learning disabilities also have physical and/or sensory impairments. The definition covers adults with autism who also have learning disabilities, but not those with a higher level autistic spectrum disorder who may be of average or above average intelligence, such as people with Asperger's syndrome."

That is discrimination, and I say that as somebody who willingly sat on the Committee on the Bill that set up the Disability Rights Commission.

I ask the Minister to examine the document seriously because it singles out people with Asperger syndrome who are, apparently, not to share in the document's aims of dealing with the problems and challenges of learning disabilities. I ask the Government to issue clear guidelines to social services and those involved in health, mental health and education as a matter of urgency to ensure that the statutory services do not deny people with Asperger syndrome their rights purely because they have an IQ of over 70.

I shall put life for a person with Asperger syndrome in context by referring to a report by the National Autistic Society, which was published earlier this year for autism awareness week. In a survey, the NAS identified that only 12 per cent. of such people are in full-time paid employment. Many do nothing but help around the house. Late diagnosis is an on-going problem: 46 per cent. of people did not receive a diagnosis until after the age of 16. There is on-going confusion between the statutory agencies about which has responsibility for funding because, all too often, the responsibility falls between the various agencies. When mental health agencies take responsibility, people are ineligible for help because of their IQ, until they suffer a breakdown in their mental health.

It is difficult to know which statutory agency to approach for help for an individual with Asperger syndrome. I receive a huge amount of post from all over the country about the subject, and can comment about a young man who suffered a severe mental breakdown. The mental health service responded, "Sorry, we can't do anything for him; he has GCSEs." If a person with Asperger syndrome has GCSEs, it does not mean, that they are necessarily a person whom the statutory services should ignore or deny appropriate services to.

I want the Government to recognise what the NAS has concluded: that people with Asperger syndrome are marginalised and excluded. Sufferers carry no white stick, and on a good day, one would wonder whether they had a problem at all. Those who suffer from Asperger syndrome are discriminated against because they have a life-long disability, but are also intelligent. Since when has IQ prevented the recognition of a disability? Do we not recognise those who have no sight but are intelligent? Do we discount wheelchair users who have an IQ of more than 70? Of course not, but that is what happens to those who suffer from Asperger syndrome. It is time to rectify a gross injustice against some of the most vulnerable and socially excluded people in society.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) on securing a debate on such an important subject, and for presenting it so passionately. She has a tremendous personal commitment to the issue. Today's debate ought to raise the profile of Asperger syndrome across the piece, and I congratulate her on that.

Asperger syndrome is a complex and distressing condition, and the Government are conscious that services must be responsive to sufferers' needs. I sympathise with those who care for family members affected by Asperger syndrome. Caring for someone with any disorder from the spectrum of autisms is a life-long commitment that continues even when the person lives away from the family home. Carers make a vital

contribution to the lives of those with autism, often providing most of the support that the sufferer needs. The Government's determination to improve support for carers—particularly in such fields—is made clear in the report, "Caring about Carers: A national strategy for carers", which sets out our approach.

Asperger syndrome is a form of autism characterised by abnormalities of reciprocal interaction. The hon. Lady explained it graphically, and in more human language, when she described the difficulty that sufferers have in gaining social skills and learning to respond to others in ways that we might take for granted. It is also characterised by a restricted, stereotyped and repetitive repertoire of activities, although language and cognitive development are not delayed. Many sufferers, as the hon. Lady said, are highly intelligent. That is why it was difficult to identify the syndrome for many years; there was little evidence of how prevalent it was.

A report commissioned by the Department of Health from Dr. Tony Holland of Cambridge university suggests that one in 350 people have Asperger syndrome. In that case, there would be approximately 140,000 sufferers in England. It is not clear why there has been such an increase in the number of sufferers in recent years, but I think that that is partly due to improvements in diagnosis in the past 30 or 40 years.

Asperger syndrome has received much media attention recently, and rightly so. I must compliment the NAS for raising the syndrome's profile. I also thank the all-party autism group, which has raised the issue with the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions. The all-party group has been active across the piece to make sure that the Government are aware of the issue.

We recognise that some, like the hon. Lady, are disappointed that "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century", the White Paper on learning disabilities published in March, only deals with adults with autism who also have a learning disability. The White Paper focuses primarily on those with learning disabilities, many of whom also have autism. That is not to say that we are not doing anything for those with Asperger syndrome, which is a higher functioning autism. "Valuing People" brings together health, social care and educational agencies, and helps us to improve opportunities and services for people from across the autistic spectrum.

I want to make it clear that "Valuing People" does not preclude those with Asperger syndrome from benefiting from learning disabilities services if that is the best way of meeting their needs in their local community. We made that point prominently in the guidance that was issued on 31 August. Representations from the National Autistic Society caused us to issue that guidance, in which we stated explicitly that people with Asperger syndrome may require an assessment of their social functioning and social skills in order to establish their level of need. It is the most explicit statement on the importance of caring for people with Asperger syndrome that has ever been included in departmental guidance. I recognise that the hon. Lady is impatient for action and wants to see much more done. It is to her credit, and to the credit of others acting on this issue, that, for the first time, there is such explicit recognition in the departmental guidance, on which I am sure she will want to build in the coming months.

Diagnosis is an important first step for those with autism. The hon. Lady has made some important points about the effectiveness of early intervention when early diagnosis is made. It is clear from the report of the National Autistic Society that early interventions—whether in education, social skills or opportunities for employment—were much more effective than waiting until the syndrome had been diagnosed at a later age.

One of our top priorities must be to raise the awareness of the syndrome among professionals in primary care and in all services. Raising awareness was the reason for the commissioning of Tony Holland's report. It has now been shared with a wide range of interested bodies including nursing, paediatrics and child health bodies, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the British Psychological Society and the National Autistic Society. Dr. Holland has taken account of their comments, and copies of the final report are now available from the university of Cambridge. Dr. Holland's recommendations relate to a wide range of issues: the need for professional groups to develop their awareness of Asperger syndrome; the roles of health, social and other services to work together; and the need for population-based studies in both children and adults to try to establish the prevalence and range of disabilities in people who meet the criteria for this condition.

I acknowledge the hon. Lady's remark that we already have the research on prevalence and that what we need now is action. It is right, however, that we continue to gather and refine as much information as we can to support the action that we want to take. That is why we have tried to improve the information on prevalence, and on 5 March 2001 we commissioned the Medical Research Council to undertake a detailed review of the current state of knowledge about autism and to suggest possible areas for further research. The review panel is being chaired by Professor Eve Johnstone, who is an eminent psychiatrist at the university of Edinburgh and chair of the Medical Research Council's neurosciences and mental health board.

The aim of that research is to get a clear and comprehensive picture of what is currently known about the incidence, prevalence and causes of autism and the strength of the evidence that underpins that knowledge. That research will be crucial in helping us to develop further projects that will enable us to tackle the problems faced by people with the syndrome.

The Medical Research Council's review group will consider current knowledge about those with Asperger syndrome to identify gaps and to examine possible areas for developing that knowledge. It is actively involving lay persons' understanding and experience of autism, as well as that of recognised experts, which is a real move forward. It is not merely looking to the scientific community, but is talking to carers and families about their experience of the syndrome. The report's time scale is challenging: it is supposed to report by the end of November. I understand that it is still on track to do so, and I am sure that the hon. Lady will take a close interest in its recommendations.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

There is also an independent national initiative on autism, chaired by Professor Le Couteur. The Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills are both represented on that body and are taking a keen interest in its recommendations. In addition to the research, it is important that we take action throughout health and social services, and that we try to give people access to employment opportunities. As part of our welfare-to-work strategy, local authorities have just produced the first of three annual joint investment plans on welfare-to-work for disabled people. The hon. Lady explained clearly the difficulties that people with the syndrome have in accessing employment. We hope that the welfare-to-work plans for disabled people can provide specific help and assistance for people with the syndrome who want to work, stay in work or move closer to the world of work through a transition process. There is also quality protects, a huge new five-year programme that is underpinned by £450 million of funding, as well as £60 million for spending on services for disabled children and their families that has been specifically ring-fenced from the children's grant.

An extra £85 million is going into child and adolescent mental health services. As the hon. Lady said, many people with the syndrome also suffer from mental health problems as a result of exclusion and isolation due to the lack of relationships that they experience in their lives. Therefore improving mental health services has to be a top priority. It is also important to help people to improve their social skills so that they can begin to make relationships.

Mrs. Browning: Something as basic as a befriending scheme, which does not cost very much, is simple yet very effective. It is true that people with Asperger syndrome can improve their social skills. However, I think it would be rather over-optimistic to think that their social skills would improve to the extent that they were able to form relationships with other people. I am not aware of any sort of support that would go that far, but there are simple low-cost types of support like befriending schemes. Just to be able to go out for a drink once a week with someone of one's own age can make a world of difference between total isolation and taking a course that teaches systematic social skills.

Ms Blears: The hon. Lady is right. I have some experience of incredibly successful befriending schemes, from which the person being befriended and the befriender can gain equally. They find such schemes a really worthwhile and enjoyable experience; simple things like going out for a drink, going bowling and the other activities that everybody else takes for granted are vital. Social services at a local level already provide those schemes in many areas, but trying to provide extra funding for support for young people through the quality protects programme can go a long way to putting in place simple, effective services.

A balance is needed between getting the science right—doing the research on incidence, prevalence and filling in the gaps in our knowledge—and the practical things that we can do to help people in the community, as well as their families and carers, who bear much of the responsibility for looking after people. I assure the hon. Lady that the Government are keen to take action on both fronts. We want to establish the science and get a base of proper evidence. We do not mean to use that to delay action but to take action now, where we can, so that in the future, properly informed by research, our projects can be even more effective in supporting this group of people who are desperately in need.

The hon. Lady raised an important point about the number of suicides among young men. There is a higher incidence of suicide among young men in the population generally, often connected with depression, lack of self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and a feeling that they do not have a role in the world. We should consider some of the real issues behind those statistics to see whether there is a link. We must not simply take the bald statistics but look at the issues that give rise to people becoming so desperate and so much in despair that they would take a decision of such tragic proportions.

The Government are determined that services for everyone with autism, including those with the Asperger syndrome, should continue to improve. We are sure that they will be among the many groups that will benefit from the positive action that is already taking place. In conclusion, the hon. Lady and others like her have done a great service to people with autism, and Asperger syndrome in particular, in moving the issue up the Government's agenda. It is not an issue that is going to go away. We hope to work with partners, including the National Autistic Society, to develop first class services and make sure that this group of people are treated with equity, respect and dignity.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 24 October 2001

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Manufacturing Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Angela Smith.*]

9.30 am

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker, how nice to see you in the Chair today.

I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to talk about the manufacturing industry for various obvious reasons, so I had better declare my interests now. I am a senator on the board of the Engineering Council, which regulates the engineering profession in the United Kingdom and has about 250,000 members. I sit on the board of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, which has a membership of about 150,000. I am an adviser for the Institution of Electrical Engineers, which is the largest engineering institution in the UK, and I also advise and support my colleagues in the other 37 engineering institutions that manage the engineering industry in its broadest context in the UK.

You must forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, for my indulgence and for the terms that I use to refer to my industry, which I love with a great passion. These are difficult times for us. On Friday last week, most people probably would not have heard that Rolls-Royce announced approximately 5,000 job losses. For those of us who are interested in the business, it was 5,000 more job losses in what has been an exceptionally difficult year.

In addition, last week, the World Economic Forum announced in its annual survey that Finland is now top of the league as the world's most competitive economy, a fact that was validated even after the awful events of 11 September. It was intriguing that such a small country could do so well. The fall of the United States from the top spot, which it shared with Singapore for the past few years, is blamed partly on the collapse of high-tech shares and the resulting slow-down. Much to my dismay, guess where we appeared—it was not fifth and it was not eighth. Both Ireland and the UK have now slumped out of the top 10. The World Economic Forum says that that is a result of slow economic growth.

Those of us who have a passionate interest in manufacturing want to know why that has happened. More importantly, we want to know what is going on in Finland, as it has achieved a great prize. Over the past 10 years, Finland has become not only the world's most effective technology-driven economy, but has invested effort and money into social policy. I wonder, as do most of my colleagues, whether Finland has developed a new paradigm that produces outstanding competitive advantage and whether it is, therefore, a country to which we should turn for some valuable lessons.

A significant indicator in Finland is the long-term plan—the "Finland 2015 plan"—which aims "to improve the knowledge, skills, resources and networks of top-level Finnish decision-makers in matters concerning the future of Finland".

Many of the institutions that I have the privilege to work with and represent have set about producing similar plans that need Government assistance if they are to realise their objectives on our behalf. I do not believe in propping up industries that are badly managed and that do not hunger to be the best in their field. My colleagues however, are grappling with multiple—not single—complexities.

After my short foray into the European continent, I turn to the United Kingdom. I want, specifically, to examine how our manufacturing industry—and our mutual passion—is faring. We have been given the impression, particularly by the media, of a manufacturing industry that is in terminal decline and on the road to becoming an ever-decreasing proportion of the UK's economy.

I shall list some of the job losses that we have experienced since last October. For instance, at Vauxhall—there are colleagues present who are interested in the car industry—2,000 jobs were lost. The reason for that was over-capacity in Europe—nothing to do with monetary policy. At Cammel Laird, 189 jobs were lost in a contractual dispute. At British Aerospace Systems 3,500 jobs—perhaps 4,000—were lost. It has experienced losses and orders are down; we can expect more bad news from that sector.

However, do these figures really matter in the greater economy, which is a mixed and diverse economy? How serious are they for the current and future successes of our world as a whole? Is it time for us to forget manufacturing and rely on the service economy? The answer must be an emphatic no. No one present will forget the MacGregor days—I certainly will not because I come from south Wales—when, under the direction of Margaret Thatcher, he stepped into south Wales and devastated entire industries without any thought of the impact that such action would have. Those of us who work in that wonderfully creative world were constantly derided. Although others insisted on consigning us to the bin, we understood the value of manufacturing to the gross domestic product. We also understood that we needed and could nourish the culture and intellectual activity of the UK.

Let us consider a few facts. First, manufacturing is still very important in international trade. In 2000, manufacturing industry contributed £156 billion to UK exports, which is a remarkable 59 per cent. of the total of all exported goods and services. The truth is, although it may be unpalatable to some, that output has risen in the long term. In 1961, the index of manufacturing output was nearly 63. By 1995, that figure had increased to 100—a rise of nearly 60 per cent. The effects of recessions were felt in the early 1980s and 1990s and there was a further decline in 1998 in the wake of the south-east Asian crisis. By 2000, the index recovered to 105, which is very encouraging. However, I fear that there will be another decline this year after the events at ground zero.

The second fact is that productivity has risen in recent years. It rose by 3.5 per cent. in 1999 and by a further 5.5 per cent. in 2000. Those of us who are critical and realistic about our colleagues who work in

[Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas]

manufacturing know that we desperately needed to improve our productivity if we were to remain competitive in the market for low-value technologies.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Would the hon. Lady acknowledge that that increase in productivity over the two years that she has cited has been achieved by a reduction in the numbers employed in manufacturing industry, rather than by the preferable route of greater investment?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Yes. That is an extremely valid point. I would not deny the mix of downsizing and the acquisition of new technology. Those factors were essential. Some industries were over-staffed, and I think that a number of industries have failed to develop their asset base.

I shall turn to that very point. Slightly more than 5.8 million people were employed in manufacturing industry in 1982, and the figure fell to 4.8 million in 1987 and to 3.9 million in 1994. By May 2001, the figure was about 3.8 million. The number of people working in manufacturing has reduced dramatically. However, that does not demonstrate the current diversity of the business compared with its nature in the past. It used to rely on heavy utilisation of individuals rather than technology.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My hon. Friend makes a cogent and interesting case. Does she accept that one of the problems is that employment in manufacturing is often hidden? In the rural economy, that is more important than people would have us believe. I would not belittle in any way the impact of foot and mouth disease on agriculture and farming, but the loss of manufacturing jobs in my constituency in recent years has been much more devastating.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Yes. Later, I shall come to the pithy issue of the limited definition of manufacturing. The manufacturing that my hon. Friend referred to could be collated under the title of agricultural activities, which need not include manufacturing. As long as agricultural activities are outside of manufacturing, they do not receive the support or recognition that they deserve.

The proportion of GDP accounted for by manufacturing has declined in the past century. In 1990, manufacturing represented 23 per cent. of GDP, but by 1999 it had fallen to 19 per cent.—if we use the Government's definition of manufacturing. Manufacturing has not been so unprofitable since 1992, and the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply's index on manufacturing business activity is below 50 per cent. for its seventh consecutive month. August's reading was the lowest since 1999.

The Engineering Employers Federation, which is a difficult organisation to deal with, although its strength is in its valid statistics, declared when it released its quarterly survey that the manufacturing sectors were almost certainly in recession. I lament that, because it is a source of great concern to those of my colleagues who work in these sectors. The EEF has called for monetary easing, as have many other organisations, including the Confederation of British Industry.

Manufacturing and engineering are in recession. They have suffered two consecutive quarters of negative growth. The contraction in manufacturing output—about 4 per cent. in manufacturing and 9 per cent. in engineering between December 2000 and July 2001—suggests that negative growth will soon stretch to double figures, and beat the decline seen throughout the 1992 recession.

These are grim times for our engineering industry, but we should not be perturbed by facts alone. After all, the picture is the same across most of the developed world. In a successful modern economy, our challenges and priorities will vary. We must ask where those lost to manufacturing have gone. One of them is standing in front of us today.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The hon. Lady is right to say that we face the common challenge of loss of employment in the manufacturing sector. Is she not concerned that Britain adds disproportionate costs to our manufacturing sector? I speak particularly of the climate change levy, which is a higher cost than that faced by competitors in, for example, Germany.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I wish it were that easy; I wish that it were just one tax structure, such as the climate change levy, that prevented us from having a level playing field. I know many engineers who work in Germany who talk about the myriad initiatives of ours that they do not have. They envy us the research and development investment that we have introduced in the past few years. They realise that although it does not bring us short-term gains, we will reap long-term benefits.

Some of my fellow engineering colleagues are in the House; we appear everywhere, much to the betterment of other Members. By and large, we are straight, factual people, not given to the fantasies that sometimes infiltrate such a political environment. That does not necessarily make us good politicians, but it makes us a safe pair of hands.

Some of us engineers, and some businesses, have transferred to growth areas in manufacturing which, until recently, included electronics, aerospace, machine tools and motor vehicles. In these areas, inward investment and growing global markets have played a major role. Engineering and technical skills are in great demand, but unfortunately there are too few of us to satisfy the diversity of that demand. There has been an increase in employment in the construction industry in recent years; for that, we must thank God for the Labour Government and their commitment to rebuilding our dilapidated transport and health infrastructures, which employ many of my erstwhile colleagues and fuel their innovative and practical skills.

The losses have been felt mainly in the country's old industrial heartland, and it is here that we start to unravel the story.

Mr. Hammond: To pick up on the hon. Lady's last comment, which related more to the construction than the manufacturing industry, what impact does she believe sustainability in public spending will have on the viability and competitiveness of the manufacturing

sector? The rebuilding that she mentioned implies a level of public spending that many in the manufacturing industry fear will impact negatively on the environment that it faces.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: The hon. Gentleman will recall that in the 1980s and early 1990s his party introduced several environmental-led pieces of legislation—for example, the Environment and Safety Information Act 1988 and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health, or COSHH, Regulations 1988. For someone working in the chemical industry, the COSHH regulations were extremely onerous. As someone responsible for undertaking audits and compliance with the environmental legislation passed by that Government, my experience was that it was not only an arduous task to comply, but hellishly expensive. For example, when I worked for Shell Chemicals, we did not discuss whether it was morally right to comply with good environmental policy, but whether we could afford it. The answer was no, so we had to shut down previously profitable activities.

If I were asked whether that was the correct thing to do in the long term, I would say yes. It forced my colleagues in the R and D department to work out how to create a clean and sustainable production environment while still making a profit. If we step outside the UK, we see that we have engendered respect for our environmental competence. I will speak later about the money that engineering companies are making from consultancy, which is partly because of the legislation passed by the previous Government. They said that certain changes had to be made for good reason. That was done at a short-term cost, but the long-term gain was the development of world-leading technologies and intellectual capacity. Under the Kyoto agreement, which I hope will resurface, there is a worldwide requirement to produce in a sustainable way, which looks damn good for my colleagues in environmental and sustainable consultancies.

Until recently, the high sector growth, to which I referred, has been growing dramatically. Between 1990 and 1998, output in the electronics sector grew by 60 per cent., and the sector is worth about £30 billion. During the same period, manufacturing output fell by 4 per cent. After its peak in December 2000, the high-tech sector has fallen—tell me about it, for those with shares in the businesses have suffered the consequences—by almost 14 per cent. in five months, but the structural impact is unlikely to have a long-term effect in that consumer-driven market.

It must surely be time to rethink radically our definition of the manufacturing industry, using the interventions that have been made today and the comments that I have already made. We should have a more inclusive definition, which would assist policy makers in understanding the kaleidoscopic nature of a sector that requires essentially a common skill base and managerial and operational structures. We have all witnessed the shift in the UK and industrialised world to a service-based economy, so let us understand what that means for UK manufacturing.

Earlier this year, Warwick university's Institute for Employment Research forecast a net fall of 315,000 jobs in engineering manufacturing between 1998 and 2009, a drop of 17 per cent. with the bulk of it taking place between 1998 and 2004. However, it says that that drop contrasts with growth of 8 per cent. in employment in the economy as a whole, so overall the picture is robust. Once again, the sectors bearing the brunt are likely to be the traditional areas of mechanical engineering and base metals. Geographically, most regions of the UK are forecasting a decline until 2004, although the decline will be only marginal in the south-west, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The paradox in the success story that manufacturing is today is that employment reductions will be due mainly to technology change, which brings about improvements in productivity through the more flexible use of labour and changes in working practices and organisation. Changes in markets and the effects of price competition will encourage such trends.

When I worked for Shell, I visited a factory that employed about 150 people. By the time I had traversed the length of the factory, I had estimated that 140 staff could be laid off without any loss in productivity. That was tremendously sad, because those people were using skills and doing work that they clearly enjoyed. However, we cannot ignore developments in technology and the opportunity to improve profits, because we all benefit from that.

Mr. Hammond: Is not the challenge to ensure that manufacturing industry grows, as well as productivity, so that employment remains stable while becoming more productive?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Yes, it is. However, I said earlier that people leaving a particular business—the factory to which I referred manufactured lost-wax metal components; a great process, fantastically fiddly and marvellous—leave with a certain skill mix. All the employees at that factory were men, I am sad to say. I told the managing director that he could lose 140 of his employees, get money at preferential interest rates and make a good return on his capital investment. However, what do we do with the people who have gone, bearing in mind that they support families? What was missing in the past was an opportunity to retrain; I am pleased to say that it now exists.

The parlance and curricula in further education suit old and not new industries. That is largely because we underpay staff in that sector and do not provide them with the investment in their asset base to allow them to produce the type of services that their clients need. Many of them know what the demands are, but they are simply not equipped to meet those demands.

Future economic success will be based increasingly on quality of labour, and we in the engineering community are acutely aware of that. We have rested on our laurels for years. We were shocked to learn from a study that we undertook that UK engineers were not rated the best in the world; unfortunately, our colleagues in Germany were. I do not wish to involve the House in the tribal warfare that exists between engineering communities of both a professional and a craft nature. However, it does not sit terribly well with British engineers to find that, in world opinion, we lag somewhat behind our German colleagues. Therefore, the race is on to try to improve the ability base, not of our academic engineers only but of our skilled technicians as well.

[Mrs. Curtis-Thomas]

There is a plethora of academic engineers in the UK, but they cannot translate dreams into reality; only a good technician can do that. I ask those who are interested in house renovation to try to find a good electrician. It is very difficult to find a good, reputable electrician, in whom one can have confidence. Such people are not easily to be found because we as a society do not sufficiently reward them, not in a material or financial sense but in acknowledging that they are important to our infrastructure.

I have lost count of the number of undergraduates that I have heard of who were keen to study law or work in the media. The number of graduates in the media in the north-east last year was 30,000 whereas the number of individuals doing engineering had declined to approximately 1,000. There is a complete mismatch between graduates and the demands of the local economy, which leads to industries moving away. In the north-west we have low-level technology activities, and the strength of the pound is forcing some of those businesses out of business. In other parts of the world, salaries are £1 an hour or, worse still, £1 a week. We cannot continue to engage in low-value technology activities, but we do not have a sufficient skill base in the north-west to underpin the development of alternative high-value technologies. Such assets are the product of years of sustained investment by a Government who are committed to diversity within the economy but who understand that diversity requires money at the front end, with very little return in the short term.

I took great pleasure in being a member of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which considered the UK R and D budget. It was appalling when we took power in 1997, I suppose because the previous Government did not understand the relationship between R and D investment today, bottom line return tomorrow. We have put £1.4 billion into the R and D infrastructure in the UK's academic provision. We will not get a return on it immediately, but we are sitting on an enormous asset base that will be realised in 10 years' time. I say to the Minister that in these difficult times we should not forget the long-term impact of R and D investment. We must continue to invest at that level if we are to resume our dominant world position in productivity and innovation.

I shall now bring my remarks to a close, sparing hon. Members another 10 pages of statistics and interesting facts. I make no excuse for being well prepared, as I represent a wonderful business that is keen to do its best but which needs our assistance.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has announced several new initiatives and is committed to taking full advantage of the fact that the UK has some of the best scientific and academic brains, and the best practical skills, in the world. My right hon. Friend said that she is committed to ensuring that "invented in Britain" becomes "made in Britain", which is fantastic. At a manufacturing summit in November, she will unveil plans to help to build a manufacturing industry of the future and I am glad that I will be part of those discussions.

I want to take this opportunity to tell my manufacturing colleagues that it is time for them to put up or shut up. They must be prepared to sit down and articulate their vision for the future and to seek out those who are charged with managing the environment in which they work. I say to my engineering colleagues that no comment means no future. I have lost count of the number of institutional meetings I have attended where there was a great deal of pontification about what was going wrong but an absolute failure to articulate those concerns and to make them known to the people who matter.

I am wedded to a Government who want us to do well and to support industries in our environment to help them to achieve their best. They cannot do so in a vacuum of silence. We are a capable group of individuals, but we are not yet telepathic. We need to make our views known in writing at the very least but even more by our physical presence.

Investment in R and D and capital is essential. I shall leave my hon. Friends to talk about R and D investment and the tax incentives that are needed to make investment in capital more realistic for those who are struggling and having to reduce margins to remain viable. When the Chancellor announced R and D tax breaks for small companies in the 1999 Budget, I was the only Member in the House to jump up and shout. I thought it was absolutely fantastic. I have run a small, struggling business and the notion that one has money to do anything other than the job one is doing is farcical. One wants to do more, but needs an incentive to do so.

The tax incentive for development is extremely important, but let us not limit it to small companies. Large companies now need tax breaks for development. I want to see products developed in this country, not in other countries. It is essential to keep innovation here. Let us export the operational sectors if we must, but let us keep the R and D function here. High value means high returns means better profit margins.

I look forward to hearing the Minister, who has a difficult job. Manufacturing in its broadest context falls under many Departments and Ministers, not him alone. I mentioned that I have worked with the Engineering Council and other organisations, and they are keen to hear what he has to say. We want to hear him acknowledge the benefits that engineering and manufacturing bring to our economy and the value that they constantly bring to our gross domestic product. We also want him to acknowledge their contribution to the cultural development and intellectual capacity of this country. We want him to support us in these difficult times. We are the innovators and the doers. We remain a prized and coveted commodity; worthy of this Government's great protection and support.

10.1 am

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I am pleased to contribute to this debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on her excellent introduction. I have a great interest in manufacturing and believe that it is a vital component of our economy, which has been sorely abused over the past several decades.

In my first year as a Member of Parliament my constituency was hit by the closure of Electrolux with the loss of 700 jobs. More recently, Vauxhall has announced a plant closure with several thousand jobs lost. Our problems go back much further. My first

temporary job as a student was working for a company making high-quality microscopes. That company has now gone. Recently, I attended a conference on the health service. The conference centre was built on what used to be an aerodrome—previously owned by a manufacturing company for which I had worked. It is now a conference centre, not a manufacturing plant.

We have serious problems in Luton. The small firms in the supply chain for the motor manufacturing industry, especially those dedicated entirely to providing for Vauxhall Motors, are in serious trouble. These are desperately hard times for such firms.

I want to focus on the main problem faced by manufacturing in Britain at present: the high pound. I have some trade statistics relating to trade deficits in finished manufactures, at current prices. Between 1991 and 1993 the trade deficit rose from £2.5 billion to £9 billion. Between 1993 and 1995 it fell from £9 billion to £6.2 billion. Between 1995 and 2000 the deficit rose from £6.3 billion to £23 billion and it is continuing to worsen. The first two quarters of 2001 has seen an annualised extrapolation of a deficit of £27 billion or £28 billion in finished manufactures. Our trade problem is serious.

To explain the significance of those dates, from 1991 to 1993 we were suffering from the delayed inertia J-curve effects of the exchange rate mechanism disaster, the overvaluation of the pound, which caused desperate problems for our manufacturing. Unemployment rose and large sections of our manufacturing industry closed down. From 1993 to 1995 we had the benefits of the substantial depreciation of nearly 30 per cent, which gave a tremendous boost to our manufacturing and improved our trade deficit. That meant that we reduced the problem of our deficit in respect of manufactures. After 1995, however, the pound started to appreciate rapidly and strongly against other currencies, particularly those of the euro zone. During that period, the desperate trade balance and much more serious difficulties for our manufacturing sector emerged.

There is no sign yet that the pound will reduce, although we have yet to see what happens when the euro really gets started next year. I suspect that there might be a change then. The parity of the pound is critical for the UK's competitiveness. We constantly talk about the need for education and training, investment and consideration of our skills base and supply side components, but we always seem to ignore the desperate problems faced by manufacturing when the pound appreciates, especially by more than 40 per cent.—a stunning figure.

If a company is trying to export motor cars, as Vauxhall was from Luton, and over a few years there is a 40 per cent. appreciation in the currency relative to those of our major competitors, that company has desperate problems. Indeed, Vauxhall had a wobble three years ago, when there was a possibility of its closing. Many Labour Members and one or two Opposition Members lobbied the Government, manufacturers and General Motors, and we managed to save Vauxhall.

During those discussions, I told Nick Reilly, Vauxhall's then managing director, that there was a problem with the strong pound, and he agreed. I said that it could not stay like that for ever because it was obvious that it was massively overvalued and that it would soon fall. Mr. Reilly thought that a reasonable point. Indeed, it may have been a factor in Vauxhall's deciding to stay in business at least for the time being. It reached an agreement with the work force that was beneficial for the company, and it stayed for another two years until announcing its closure suddenly and unacceptably. Nevertheless, the strong pound was a major factor if not the major factor.

It is much cheaper to manufacture General Motors cars, which are called Opel on the continent and Vauxhall here, on the continent and export them here. The cars are identical. We are talking not about second or third world countries, but about Belgium and Germany—plants in other prosperous, developed countries.

With the all-party rail freight group, I recently visited the SNCF in France, where we looked at rail freight facilities and investment. With a straight face, the French told us that they had a little problem with their rail freight going to Britain, because all the trucks were full of goods going into Britain but empty coming out, which was not good for their business. The reason is obvious: we do not export enough and we import too much.

When we talk about trade, we should not focus only on exports. They can increase over a period, perhaps slowly or too slowly, but imports are the problem. We have an enormous propensity for importing too much, because our currency's value is too high. Foreign goods are cheap and domestically produced goods are expensive, whatever we do in other respects. Adjusting the pound downwards to a sensible level would overcome that problem and at least give manufacturing a fair chance.

Mr. Hammond: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Given his clear view of what is needed, what are his recommendations for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister on future public spending plans if the objective is to bring down the value of the pound?

Mr. Hopkins: As the hon. Gentleman will know, managing the macro-economic economy depends on monetary and fiscal factors. If we need a fiscal stimulus in a recession, I am happy with that. However, if there is a fiscal stimulus when the value of the currency is too high, it will draw in imports but not promote development of the domestic economy. Therefore the two go together.

I would focus on getting the pound down to a sensible level first. Indeed, I have said this publicly and written to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor several times, saying what I think we should do. The Government must intervene in the currency markets and the long-term bond market. Others have proposed a technique for bringing down the value of the pound relative to the euro zone currencies in particular, where we have a false parity.

My hon. Friend the Minister cannot answer for the Treasury, but I ask that he speak to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor about the problem of the pound and press him to do something about it. The value of the pound is far too high and is causing desperate damage to our manufacturing industry. We must address that before we can start to win.

[Mr. Hopkins]

I live in a town that was built on manufacturing and where relative living standards have fallen over recent decades. We are a great manufacturing nation with a great tradition of manufacturing, which is a vital component of our history. If we do not do something about the macro-economic environment in which manufacturing now struggles, we will do serious damage to our economy and future generations.

10.10 am

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) for initiating the debate at a time that is critical for manufacturing industry, right across the United Kingdom. As is apparent from my accent, I, like her, am from south Wales. I echo many of the points that she made.

We heard last night a slightly complacent passing comment from the Government on the resilience of the UK economy. I look forward to their considered approach. The Government seem unable to grasp or even admit the gravity of the current crisis. We have heard examples of some of the problems that we are facing across the UK. The British Chambers of Commerce this month warned that manufacturing was in a critical condition, with domestic orders and export sales down, further job cuts in the pipeline and confidence ebbing away. Last month there was a 0.2 per cent. decline in factory prices, which is the largest since records began in 1958. This is a serious crisis.

Professor Steven Nickell, a member of the Monetary Policy Committee, has talked about the dangers of a two-speed economy. Of the 300,000-plus manufacturing jobs lost since the Government came to office, almost two thirds have been the wrong side of the north-south divide, in the most disadvantaged regions of the United Kingdom. Scotland has reported the largest fall in business confidence since 1980 and in Wales more than 25,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing since the Government came to office—an average of just under 23 jobs per day. Another estimated 20,000 jobs are at risk because of deteriorating economic conditions. I shall listen intently to the Minister's response.

The global economic slowdown is certainly a factor in the deepening problems of the sector, but it is important to recognise that, as has been said by the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins), manufacturing has been in crisis for many years. Indeed, in the second half of the 1990s, manufacturing output hardly grew at all. At the heart of that failure has been the Government's inaction on the key question of the exchange rate. For the third time in 20 years, the high pound is decimating our manufacturing base.

One of the fallacies that cloud the debate is that it is about not the strength of the pound but the weakness of the euro. I remind hon. Members that the biggest rise, in the exchange rate, pre-dated the launch of the euro, so the issue is clearly more structural.

Mr. Hopkins: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that appreciation was at least partly to do with an anticipation of the euro? Those who knew it was coming started to get out of euro zone currencies and into other currencies, particularly the dollar and sterling.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. I should have informed hon. Members earlier that by convention we commence winding-up speeches, of which there are usually three, 30 minutes before termination of the debate. That means that, in order to get everyone in, right hon. and hon. Members must take account of the need to be concise and clear and for any interventions to be brief.

Adam Price: I am grateful, Mr. Cook.

Anticipation plays an important part in the action of currency markets. Rationality unfortunately plays a far lesser role. The hon. Member for Luton, North pointed out that a remedy to the problem of the high pound is available to the Government. It has been pointed out by a fairly distinguished list of economists, including Roger Bootle and Gerry Holtham, former director of the Institute for Public Policy Research, who is now the head of Britain's largest investment fund, Morley Fund Management.

The Government could lower the pound by buying euro-denominated Government bonds, which would offset the pressure on sterling to appreciate. They could do that in a way that was at least neutral in terms of its costs to the Exchequer, and they could even make a small profit. The notion that the Government should never intervene, regardless of the market rate, is bizarre. The tools are there. It could be done overnight. It would have a marked impact the viability of manufacturing business across the length and breadth of the UK. The Government's stubborn refusal to do that has led to the loss of more than 100,000 saveable manufacturing jobs this year alone.

The Treasury and the Bank of England have shied away from currency market intervention, in part because of the debacle of 1992, when the Government intervened to prop up sterling by using, or indeed losing, all our foreign exchange reserves. As a general rule, it is easier to temper a rising currency than to prop up a falling one. There is a precedent, of which I am sure the Minister will be aware, of the United States in September 1985, when the G7 Finance Ministers approved the Plaza agreement to puncture the dollar bubble. A fortnight later the dollar had fallen by 10 per cent. against the yen.

We have heard two propositions against those arguments from the Bank of England and the Government. Sir Edward George has consistently said that interest rates would be significantly higher were it not for the high level of the pound. A strong pound keeps import prices down and depresses borrowing costs. A weak pound necessarily imports inflation and, other things being equal, forces interest rates to rise. The key phrase is "other things being equal". The Government could change their fiscal stance and use fiscal rather than monetary measures to stave off inflationary pressures. That would allow the Bank to set lower rates than it otherwise could.

Another argument is that the problems of manufacturing are principally due not to the high exchange rate but to the persistent problem of low productivity.

Over the summer, the Chancellor claimed that higher productivity in competitive firms would help offset the impact of an adverse exchange rate. There is almost a Thatcherite feel to this: the medicine might not taste nice but it is doing good. The problem here of course is that higher productivity is essentially a long-term policy. Welsh manufacturing firms are being hit in the here and now, and simply may not be around to enjoy the benefits of higher productivity, higher research spending and better skills in the future. Even for those that survive, the high pound will wipe out productivity gains and prevent the investment needed to improve their competitiveness.

There is a deep-rooted historical problem of lower productivity in British industry linked to lower skills and under-investment, but productivity growth for most of the past 20 years in the UK has been quite impressive; it has been similar to that of the US and other advanced economies. It is output growth that has been negligible. That is the key point. Since 1970, manufacturing output per head of population in the US has risen by 108 per cent., whereas the UK figure is 15 per cent.

The greatest weakness of the UK economy has been the failure to translate productivity growth in manufacturing into output growth. One of the main reasons for that has been the poor macro-economic environment. During the crises of the early 1980s and 1990s, and now in the millennium, we have seen wave after wave of gradual de-industrialisation of Britain. As the hon. Member for Luton, North said, our manufacturing trade balance has deteriorated massively, which has been hidden to some extent by the high exchange rate. We have ceased to be a manufacturing economy. There is an inherent danger in that because many of the higher value-added services in the so-called knowledge economy are embodied within manufactured goods. For example, I draw the attention of hon. Members to design and its relationship with manufacturing.

The long American boom of the 1990s was as much a manufacturing-based phenomenon as a service-based phenomenon. We can ill afford to lose our manufacturing industry. Such matters are particularly worrying for us in Wales because manufacturing industry represents 27 per cent. of our economy compared with 20 per cent. for the United Kingdom as a whole. In the past five years, the strong pound has caused much damage to our economy. It may become a handicap in the difficult times that could lie ahead. The Government need to accept their responsibilities and to take action. The tools are there to enable them to intervene in the currency market. There are undoubtedly risks involved in taking such action, but doing nothing will incur incomparable greater danger.

10.21 am

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): For the best part of a decade I have attended debates on the decline of the manufacturing industry. The arguments about the lack of investment, loss of market share and employment have been well rehearsed yet again today. I shall not dwell on them because time is short. However, Governments come and they go, and whenever they are forced to deal with the decline in the manufacturing industry, they come up with a five or 10-year plan that they can kick into touch so that what is happening is not their problem. I do not expect the Government to come up with an instant panacea to resolve the ills of manufacturing. The problems are far too well-embedded for there to be an instant solution. However, I expect them to apply their policies in a manner that will support manufacturing, not add to its burden.

I shall cite two examples to show how the Government's actions are threatening yet more manufacturing jobs in aerospace and railway engineering in my constituency of Eastleigh. This month, about 100 skilled craftsmen have lost their jobs at Hamble Aerostructures—a firm that I have known well for many years and which is a major supplier to Boeing for its 737s. As a direct result of the atrocities of 11 September, the firm's order book has been slashed from 17 aircraft a month to eight, and 25 per cent. of its export sales are now going at a stroke. The Government are not to blame, but they are failing to ensure that Hamble can compete successfully under their programme to secure future work.

I turn now to the A380 airbus. Hon. Members will know that the Government have provided £530 million of assistance to Airbus Industries UK on a preferential loans basis. Airbus Industries UK is now placing invitations to tender on that programme throughout Europe, the far east and elsewhere. However, the rub is that Airbus Industries UK is expecting its suppliers to finance the upfront, non-recurring development costs. That will increase the tender costs and prices of Hamble and other United Kingdom firms and make them less competitive. Their competitors in Italy, Belgium and Holland do not have the same problem. In Italy, the Government's assistance to the A380 programme has been split; 50 per cent. goes to the prime contractor and 50 per cent. to the subcontractor and the supply chain. Hamble Aerostructures is competing against suppliers in Italy that have the benefit of direct Government assistance. That cannot be sensible and it is a direct result of the Government's policy.

If the UK's aerospace firms such as Hamble are to receive their fair share of the programme, the Government must change their policy and either restructure the assistance to Airbus Industries so that 50 per cent. of it goes to the supply chain and 50 per cent. to the main contractor, or insist that Airbus Industries absorbs the upfront, non-recurring costs itself. After all, it is taxpayers' money.

My final point, in the short time that I have, is about the rail industry. The Government have appointed the Strategic Rail Authority, which is charged with increasing rail-rider numbers and improving and expanding our rail industry. However, at the same time, the Government have decided not to proceed with renewing 20-year franchises but, instead, to extend them for two years. That has an enormous impact on the rail industry. Nobody has the confidence to invest or to confirm orders for new rolling stock or for renovation. That has a direct effect on my constituency and Alstom's railway works, on which Eastleigh was built, which is waiting more than six months for confirmed orders while jobs are shed week after week. There is an answer. The SRA has the power—under section 54 of the Railways Act 1993—to underwrite investment that is required to give clients the protection to make orders firm and, simultaneously, to stop jobs leaching from my constituency month after month.

10.26 am

Andy Burnham (Leigh): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on securing the debate and on her thoughtful and convincing speech. This is a time of great change in the United Kingdom's manufacturing base, and the human cost of that is sharply felt in the communities that we represent. I wish to put on record the experiences of my constituents who work at the Ingersoll-Rand portable compressor plant at Hindley Green. I shall draw out two lessons from them, which I ask the Minister to address.

Four weeks ago, Ingersoll-Rand announced that it was to move the manufacture of compressors from Hindley Green to the Czech Republic, thereby breaking a long-standing association with my constituency. Two hundred and fifty jobs are expected to be lost over next year and in the early part of 2003. The factory is based at the heart of a former coalfield area, and it is a tragedy that many of the people who will lose their jobs were previously employed at local pits. It must be extremely difficult for such people to face the situation and to try to find new employment.

The work force mounted a magnificent campaign to try to save the jobs, and I pay particular tribute to the union convenors, Ian Bryant and Mike Hughes, for their leadership, energy and resourcefulness in trying circumstances. I also thank the Minister for Employment and the Regions for his work to try to keep the jobs. Negotiations continue to keep an after-sales centre on the site.

I raise two points after having gone through all the stages of the campaign and reflecting on it. Do we need greater protection of existing employment in this country? I realise that there are two sides to the coin, and the last thing that we would want is an environment that does not encourage companies to invest here. However, I ask Ministers to examine the matter again and to ascertain whether more can be done to tie companies more firmly to the UK after they have located here. That occurs in other European countries.

I turn to the impact that the enlargement of the European Union may have on some of the oldest industrial areas in Europe. During the period of job losses at Ingersoll-Rand, it was suggested that the removal of trade tariffs for the developing economies of Europe, as part of the Nice treaty, makes it more attractive for companies to locate in countries in eastern Europe and to move away from countries such as ours. I know that labour costs are the main economic driver for the decisions, but I would be interested to hear from the Minister the extent to which the removal of the tariffs contributes to the problems suffered by British manufacturing.

Few people—if any—in Hindley Green would oppose the development of a strong and united European Union, and they would not question the need to help developing economies in Europe. However, they would reasonably ask why they have to pay the price for that.

I would like to see more debate at the European level about how the EU can help some of the oldest economies in Europe to make the transition into a new era.

10.29 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on animating the debate with her clear personal commitment and experience. I think that we crossed paths in industry without having been aware of it.

The remarks of the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) were a useful point of departure, which brought us up to date with the painful reality that manufacturing is in a severe and critical state. Reports are coming in more or less daily illustrating the seriousness of the situation. The most recent CBI study suggested that there is more spare capacity in the manufacturing industry than at any time since the early 1990s. A report published a few days ago by the Machinery and Metal Trades Federation argued on the basis of a survey of its members that investment is likely to fall by 40 per cent. over the next 12 months. In addition, a recent survey by the Item Club, which is one of the more reputable mainstream forecasting outfits, suggested, on the basis of an optimistic picture of the British economy—about 2 per cent. growth—that manufacturing industry would decline by about 1.5 per cent. this year and next year, with much greater falls in employment.

The outlook in the short run is therefore difficult. There are two basic reasons for that, which have been touched on at various points in the debate. As the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) expressed clearly, manufacturing industry has been struggling with a seriously overvalued exchange rate. The figures are all too clear. The key measure is called the real effective exchange rate, which is the overall measure of competitiveness of the UK economy as against other economies, given relative inflation. That suggests that the competitiveness of the UK economy, because of the exchange rate problem, has declined by about 30 per cent. since 1996. It has remained at roughly that level ever since.

Over the past two or three years, manufacturing industry has got by, essentially by accepting low profit margins but keeping the volumes going. That has been stopped because of the incipient global economic recession, which predated the events of 11 September. There are plenty of signs that east Asia, the United States and parts of western Europe are in serious economic trouble. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) described in relation to the aerospace industry, that is compounded by all the special problems arising from events in September. British manufacturing industry is being hit by the double whammy of an overvalued exchange rate, which has existed for three or four years, combined with serious problems on the international front. All that is superimposed on the long-term problem of relative decline in British manufacturing. Those of us who are a bit long in the tooth will remember the 1950s and 1960s, when endless tracts and books about the problems of British manufacturing industry were written. Similar tracts were written in the 19th century. We have therefore been living with the problem for a very long time.

How much does the relative decline in manufacturing industry matter? One can be philosophical about it—in all industrial or developed countries, manufacturing is in relative decline. In developed countries as a whole, the

share of GDP represented by manufacturing has fallen from about 30 per cent. in the 1960s to about 20 per cent. today. The problem with Britain is that the decline has happened much faster and gone much further than elsewhere. That is why it is worrying.

Manufacturing industry is important, although probably for more subtle reasons than is often acknowledged. One of the most important reasons is that manufacturing industry is the best source of productivity growth. In an ideal world, one would have lots of productivity growth combined with stable employment. I listened with interest to the interventions of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), who was trying to make that point. There may have been a way of achieving that, but the Conservative Government whom he supported did not discover it. I concede that their productivity performance in manufacturing was exceptionally good—between 1980 and 1995, productivity growth in manufacturing was about 4 per cent., as opposed to 2 per cent. in the rest of the economy. On the other hand, manufacturing employment collapsed from 6.8 million to 4.1 million. Therefore, there was growth in productivity without employment stability—it is very difficult to get both.

Looking to the future, what could the Government usefully do? I shall make three points in that regard. First, it is important that the Government do not rush into all sorts of clumsy and unhelpful forms of intervention. We went round that circuit in the 1960s and 1970s. The Minister of State recently made the unfortunate remark—I hope that I quote him correctly—that any half-decent bird watcher can tell the difference between a lame duck and a bird that can fly, heralding a much more active process of subsidising and bailing out failing enterprises.

I suspect that all Governments experience that state of hubris in which they imagine themselves to be entrepreneurs. If that is the Government's new policy, I fear that their public expenditure priorities will be badly distorted in the next year or so, with no obvious benefit. Perhaps the Minister will make it clear what his Department intends to achieve at the proposed manufacturing summit. It could be an exercise simply in hot air and public relations, or a serious process of examining what the Government should and should not be doing in this context. It would be helpful to hear a little more about what they have in mind.

The second aspect in which the Government's role is relevant is tax policy. Everyone to whom I have spoken in the various manufacturing federations always starts with the climate change levy. They, and I, object not to the principle of environmental taxation or of it being used to curb carbon emissions, but to the extraordinarily complicated, cumbersome and abrupt way in which it has been introduced. Manufacturing industry has been hit up front with a large levy with numerous and rather arbitrary exemptions. It could have lived with a form of climate change levy bearing on carbon emissions throughout the economy, phased in gradually, but being hit with the tax in the way that it has, and at the time that it has, has been extraordinarily onerous.

To some extent, the climate change levy is water under the bridge, but I fear that the Government may repeat exactly the same mistake with the proposed research and development tax incentives. The principle behind them is admirable. R and D is clearly important, and if the Government can envisage a way of encouraging them, I am sure that we would be all in favour of it. I understand that the proposal is for all companies to have to distinguish between new R and D and the R and D that they were already doing. I am not sure how that is done, but they will be required to do so, and will be given a generous tax break for the new R and D, and nothing for the R and D that they were doing anyway. That is a complicated and distorting way of intervening in manufacturing industry. A much simpler way of dealing with the matter, which the various industry federations are trying to press on the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury, would be to spread R and D tax credit evenly across all R and D activity, with the same revenue implications. That would be a much more efficient approach.

Mr. Hopkins: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the tax environment in which companies operate, but is that not relatively small beer compared with the massive overvaluation of the pound? Given a correct valuation for the pound in competitive terms, could we not live with the tax changes and might we not need support such as we had in the past when we had similar problems with an overvalued pound?

Dr. Cable: I do not disagree. The complaints that industry has had about tax measures such as the climate change levy and the framing of R and D tax incentives are that they are irritants. The hon. Gentleman is right that, compared with a 30 per cent. change in the real value of the exchange rate, the matter is indeed rather small beer.

The central role of the Government in the matter is to get the basic macroeconomics right and achieve stability. In terms of monetary policy, interest rates and basic fiscal policy, they have done that to a remarkable extent. However, the big lacuna at the heart of the matter is the exchange rate, as the hon. Member for Luton, North suggests. Having said that, I recognise that these are not easy matters. In the current world of floating exchange rates it is not possible to decide arbitrarily to have an exchange rate that is 10 per cent. or 15 per cent. lower. It does not work like that. Intervention is not easy to secure, which is why my colleagues and I have always argued that it must be done in the context of a big long-term decision about euro entry. It is significant that a few weeks ago the Prime Minister chose, even in the midst of the present crisis, to make it clear that that big choice must be faced, and probably soon. That can be done in a way that secures a stable, sustainable, long-term exchange rate.

Adam Price: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cable: I would have been happy to take an intervention, but that was my last point. I will draw my conclusions to a close.

10.39 am

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on securing this debate. As we have learned this morning, she is eminently well qualified to speak on these matters.

[Mr. Philip Hammond]

All hon. Members will agree that changes in the shape of a dynamic economy are inevitable and, indeed, welcome. Equally, however, a healthy economy is a balanced one. The sometimes dramatic growth and spectacular successes of parts of the service sector have appeared to be at the expense of our manufacturing base. Despite some of the Labour party's rhetoric in opposition, the Government appear not to have reversed the cultural bias against manufacturing, but often to be obsessed with the so-called new economy.

Most people agree that our manufacturing competitiveness in 1979 was at a pretty low ebb. A high price was paid in the early 1980s for achieving a leaner and more competitive industrial base. That was essential, but I agree with the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) that we did not go far enough. We failed to achieve the holy grail of improving productivity not only absolutely, but enough to ensure that the employment growth that resulted from the expansion of the manufacturing base outweighed inevitable employment losses. The US manufacturing economy has managed that, but we have not.

Put bluntly, the debate must, when taken in the context of anything but the shortest term, be about productivity. All other things being equal, our manufacturing industry will grow in the long term if our productivity increases faster than that of our competitors; however, our manufacturing base will shrink if productivity increases more slowly. We are talking about a relative gain, not an absolute one; the issue is how we perform in relation to our competitors. This might not have been apparent in the past, but it is now recognised across the political spectrum that the long-term issue is how we ensure that British productivity gains are in line with, or better than, those of our competitors.

Our manufacturing industry finds itself in condition red. I will not repeat the data that the hon. Member for Crosby outlined in some detail, but historic data tell only part of the story. Anyone who is in touch with manufacturing industry and the associations that represent it understands that many businesses are clinging on by their finger nails. If the situation does not improve in the relatively near future, we shall see a step change in the rate of decline in our manufacturing base. Confidence is at an all-time low, projections for inward investment are dramatically down, uncertainty pervades industry, our international competitiveness is falling, we have a huge and rising trade deficit and crucially, profitability in manufacturing industry is at a record low. The CBI quarterly trends report will come out later this morning. I do not know what it will say, but I confidently expect it to show that demand is weakening further.

The Chancellor has recognised that the issue is one of competitiveness. Government support for improved competitiveness in the manufacturing industry can be effective, but I caution the Minister that it is likely to be only an expensive short-term palliative measure if it is not targeted at improving competitiveness over the longer term. Budget after Budget, we have heard the Chancellor pay lip service to improving Britain's productivity and closing the productivity gap. However, Budget after Budget, we have seen measures that have damaged productivity further and led to the widening US-UK productivity gap.

Manufacturing is on the rack. High exchange rates, weak world demand, a faltering domestic economy and loss of confidence by the manufacturing sector, as well as heavy burdens of taxation and regulation, have hammered the competitiveness of our manufacturing businesses, and have led to a squeeze on margins that will inevitably lead to abandonment of investment plans.

The situation that we face demands a short-term response from the Government, but also action to prevent long-term damage to our future productivity growth caused by the reaction that business inevitably makes to short-term problems. To put it bluntly, we must not allow the margin squeeze faced by business to become the seeds of a downturn in the next economic cycle due to cancellation of investment, as that will translate into failure to maintain productivity in the next cycle. The Minister must stand up to the Treasury and insist that no more tax burdens are piled on business. He must stand up to Brussels, which has a not-so-secret agenda of costly burdens on British business that will erode our competitiveness further.

In the long-term, competitiveness is the key issue, and it can be achieved in several ways. Low wages are not desirable and not possible in an economy in which manufacturing makes up less than 20 per cent. of the total. Low profits are not desirable either, as they inevitably lead to low investment and the lack of a future for our manufacturing industry. Artificially set exchange rates are also not a long-term sustainable solution, although I agreed with hon. Members who emphasised the need for macroeconomic management to ensure a realistic exchange rate, so that manufacturing industry was not unfairly and inappropriately disadvantaged.

Growth of productivity is essentially an enterprise-level issue, a business management issue, but one in which the Government have a large role to play. Investment—bringing the capital-labour ratio of British industry up to the levels of its international competitors—is crucial. It is self-evident, to me at least, that the Government's piling of burdens, expenses and taxes on business takes money away from investment that would improve the competitiveness and productivity of British industry.

The Government have a large role to play in flexibility and rapid responses to changes in demand through alterations to the labour-output mix. They must ensure that regulation is not over-prescriptive and that regulations intended to protect employment and employees do not have the perverse effect of preventing employment growth. The Government must also foster innovative research and development; other hon. Members have spoken about the relevant tax credit proposals and I share the concerns about the mechanics of the project, but its objectives are clearly positive.

One of the Government's most important roles—industry alone cannot take responsibility for it—may be in skills and education. We hear much about the knowledge-based economy, but manufacturing is a knowledge-based economy as well. The Government

have so far failed to translate their rhetoric into a real move away from the bias against engineering and manufacturing skills in our education system.

Before 11 September, manufacturing was already in recession. The tax burden was rising on the economy as a whole, and certainly on the manufacturing sector. The climate change levy was introduced at the worst possible time, with a hugely disproportionate burden on the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing needs a breathing space, a chance to regroup to recover from the burdens that it faces as a result of what the Government have imposed on it and what is happening in the world. We need not more summits and tsars, but solid policies that will allow manufacturing businesses to ride out the storm and ensure that they continue to grow and improve their productivity in the future. The real danger for our manufacturing economy is that the squeeze on margins today will jeopardise investment in capital equipment, training and innovation and will undermine future productivity growth in the next economic cycle. It is only by maintaining that investment that manufacturing industry will maintain its competitiveness and stabilise its share of overall output in the next cycle.

I hope to hear the Minister's proposals for tackling the immediate needs of manufacturing industry, including lightening the burden of regulation, and in due course I hope to hear from the Chancellor what he intends to do in his next Budget to underpin the future growth in productivity and competitiveness of the manufacturing sector.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on securing this debate on manufacturing, which is the bedrock of our economy. Manufacturing and engineering matter. They matter to the Government, to our economy and our people, to those who work in them and to all of us who enjoy their products.

I do have a cultural bias in favour of manufacturing, which accounts for more than a fifth of our national income and almost £150 billion of output every year. The sector employs about 4 million people directly, and millions more depend on manufacturing for their livelihood, including 2.5 million people in the service sector. A strong manufacturing sector is the backbone of our economy, and the manufacturing summit will reinforce that message.

As the Minister with responsibility for small and medium-sized enterprises, I have visited manufacturers whose forebears were pioneers 200 years ago. These manufacturers are innovators, at the cutting edge of competition. Manufacturing is led by some of our most innovative businesses, which invest heavily in research and development. It drives innovation in the rest of the economy and creates jobs and prosperity. It is the crucible for production improvements across the economy through advances in technology and new goods and processes, but most of all through a highly skilled, highly flexible and dedicated work force.

In the past four years we have helped 3,000 businesses and supported £6 billion of investment and 135,000 jobs, most of them in manufacturing. These challenging circumstances make it all the more important that we adopt strategies that allow us to be successful in the global economy. We can no longer compete on labour costs and raw materials alone. Globalisation means that low value added goods can be produced more cheaply elsewhere.

In the past month I have visited factories in Norfolk and the east midlands, where new technologies are transforming every product and service in every part of the production process and in every sector of the economy. The companies that I visit and the directors and the workers who I meet tell me that the challenge for the UK is to shift the focus from competing on the basis of cost alone towards high skill, high value added products and processes based on quality, innovation and know-how.

Many of our manufacturing companies in the textiles sector, for example, are responding to that challenge. Leading textiles firms have transformed themselves from companies making traditional textiles into leading-edge manufacturers of technical textiles and engineering materials. Brintons began in 1820 and is now the largest yarn manufacturer in the northern hemisphere. Based in Telford, the company is the world's largest manufacturer of woven axminster. Hamilton's paintbrushes and Hudson's whistles span three centuries of manufacturing in Britain. Both are leaders in their sectors in the new century.

That is the direction of manufacturing in this country, but it does not mean that we will lose our traditional industries. Investments in the UK by Jaguar, BMW and Nissan demonstrate our continuing strength in global industries such as vehicle manufacture. Component suppliers are equally important. By investing in technology and most of all by creating the most highly skilled work force, HR Adcock of Loughborough, employing 50 people, has beat off the world and supplies the suspension components for all Ford Focuses.

The Government have a clear role to play in helping companies face the challenges of globalisation, technology and varying states in the business cycle. That can be achieved by helping businesses to become more productive, to innovate and to cope with change successfully, by helping people when changes of jobs are required.

Change is inevitable, driven by technological innovation and globalisation, and the Government can help UK industry to manage that change. We are investing £15 million in a new manufacturing advisory service to spread best practice, which will include a centre for manufacturing excellence in every region. The new manufacturing advisory service and centres of excellence will provide the main point of contact for manufacturers who want to raise their game.

Our Faraday partnerships initiative is helping innovative companies to turn research into new products and services for British industry. We are enabling firms to access high-quality research and the expertise of industrial research organisations. We are helping established industries to modernise and compete in new markets. Faraday is helping the United Kingdom textiles industry to exploit the growing market of technical textile products in the medical, automotive, construction and defence industries.

[Nigel Griffiths]

We can support manufacture by encouraging sustained investment in research and development. Industries need to keep ahead of the game. Even during a slowdown, companies must maintain research and development investment. When the world economy picks up, those who have invested in R and D will be ready to succeed.

I assure the hon. Members who have raised the matter today that the Government know the importance of R and D, which is why we are introducing a new R and D tax credit for industry. We are supporting the manufacturing jobs of the future by strengthening our science base and ensuring that the knowledge and technology coming out of our universities goes into our industries. That is why we are putting more than £1 billion into sciences in addition to the £1.4 billion that we have already invested in partnership with the Wellcome Trust. We are providing new incentives for commercial application of research, with a fund of £140 million to get more of that science and technology out of the labs and into the factories.

We can support the manufacturing jobs of the future by creating strong regional economies. That is why we pledged £1.2 billion, rising to £1.7 billion, to our regional development agencies to support innovation and enterprise. In raising the game of every region, RDAs are working in partnership with the public and private sectors, with businesses, universities and local authorities. We support manufacturing jobs of the future by investing in a skilled work force, and are investing in the skills people need—in schools, the university for industry, the learning and skills councils and the technology institutes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) spoke with knowledge and feeling about the recent job losses in his constituency. I acknowledge that our manufacturing industry is feeling real pain and that workers with 10, 20 or 30 years of skills and experience face redundancy. When jobs are threatened and businesses need support, we do everything in our power to save jobs and find new ones. In the past four years, we have helped more than 3,000 businesses, supported £6 billion of investment and ensured that 135,000 jobs—most of them in manufacturing—were safeguarded or created. We are investing £40 million in Jaguar, saving 2,900 jobs and creating another 500. When redundancies are inevitable, we will not walk away, but do everything we can to help people to find new jobs and, if necessary—and it is necessary—learn new skills. We are doing that for the workers at Corus.

The job transition service and the rapid response units will provide an intensive and personalised response to large-scale redundancies. At Fujitsu in County Durham, a rapid response unit helped to ensure that about 94 per cent. of the work force found new jobs in 12 months. At Siemens in north Tyneside, the Employment Service played a major role in helping about 90 per cent. of the work force to find new employment. In future, instead of providing retraining when people lose their jobs, we shall retrain them while they are still in work, so that they can move straight into new, higher quality work.

Our aims can be achieved only by the Government and manufacturing sectors working in partnership. We must continue to improve the UK's skills base, promoting closer links between education and industry and providing a supportive framework for technological advance. We must look to the long term, delivering a framework of stability and steady growth and delivering our strategy for supporting manufacturing and British industry in a global and competitive economy. In that way, we are optimistic that British manufacturing and business can rise to the challenge and match the best in the world.

Asylum Applications

11 am

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this subject today. Not only has there been a great deal of debate concerning the position of the Oakington immigration reception centre, which is in my constituency, but last Friday, the Court of Appeal gave its judgment on the legality of the detention of asylum applicants at the centre. In addition, we learned at Home Office questions on Monday that the Home Secretary anticipates that his review of asylum will be published by the beginning of next month. My purpose is to set out for the benefit of the Minister and, I hope, for the Home Secretary's review, some thoughts prompted by my experience of the circumstances at Oakington, and a little about how it fits into the system of management of asylum applications.

First, I should like to thank the staff at Oakington immigration reception centre. Whatever our views about the desirability of the centre, we should express our appreciation for the way in which the staff have buckled down to the task of trying to manage it in an effective and decent way that is sympathetic to the circumstances of the asylum claimants who reside there. Many of them are my constituents, and I applaud their work. I know from visits to Group 4 on the security side, to the Immigration Advisory Service and the Refugee Legal Centre, that the people who maintain the centre and those who advise asylum applicants do a good job to the best of their ability.

Although it is not relevant to the debate, I understand that in the past few days the Oakington reception centre helped to accommodate those affected by flooding in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice). I am grateful for that neighbourliness on the part of the Home Office.

I shall attempt not to be tedious in terms of the statistical background to this subject; the Home Office is already painfully aware of it, particularly in relation to the review. What is important is to try to manage the process better. That is best done by analysis and by discussing principles, not by trading statistics, especially if the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle) agrees that we should not now ascribe guilt or otherwise about the past, but should consider where to go to from here.

The management of asylum applications is a serious issue for the United Kingdom. Last year there were some 80,000 applications—two and a half times more than there were four years ago. Some countries in Europe have experienced similar increases and others have seen reductions, so there are clearly a number of factors at work. If we examine them, they might point to the reasons why the UK attracts a larger number of asylum applications than other European countries do, and that could assist us in respect of the decisions that we have to make in the review.

The failure to take asylum decisions was a chronic problem until last year. I do not ascribe blame only to the present Government; prior to that, too, there were insufficient case workers. Those who have held ministerial office in Governments of both political persuasions, including the Minister, will know that the shortage of case workers and their resultant inability to make decisions quickly is at the heart of the problems that have emerged in recent years.

The Minister will no doubt tell us that the increase in the number of case workers has made a substantial difference and that the number of initial decisions made last year exceeded the number of applications. However, the Government's expectation that that factor, along with the implementation of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, would lead to a reduction in the number of asylum applications has proved wrong. The backlog of decisions has turned into a substantial backlog of appeals; the dispersal system and support arrangements are, at best, overstretched and in some places chaotic and only a small fraction of those whose applications are refused have been removed from the country. The overall result is that our immigration and asylum systems have been undermined, and opportunities for abuse have increased, as have opportunities for the malicious stirring up of xenophobia. The effectiveness with which we can offer a haven for genuine refugees is severely constrained.

I do not propose to discuss border controls and to concentrate on the subsequent management of asylum applications. I submit that the best way to restore the integrity of our border controls would be to relieve the pressure that is placed on them by people who claim to be asylum seekers, but are actually economic migrants who attempt to enter the United Kingdom and avoid subsequent removal. I shall begin with the Oakington reception centre.

The High Court, and subsequently the Court of Appeal, accepted that under the Immigration Act 1971 the Government had the power to detain asylum applicants pending an initial decision. The issue upon which those cases turned was whether detention was compatible with article 5 of the convention on human rights, which covers the circumstances in which deprivation of liberty may occur. The Court of Appeal held that the Secretary of State was acting within the terms of article 5 because the action was intended to prevent unauthorised entry into the United Kingdom. It was held that the restriction of liberty entailed by detention for up to a week, and the circumstances in which the applicants were held at Oakington made the use of detention in such circumstances proportional to the objective and thus not an unacceptable infringement of liberty.

As I said at the time, I agree with the Home Office view and therefore with the Court of Appeal. I know that the Home Office was not using detention to assuage local concerns about asylum seekers wandering about the area. In truth, it was used because of the concern that applicants would not be present when they were needed for interview.

As of last month, there were 11,618 detainees at Oakington, of whom 2,310 were women and 1,817 were children. I shall not dwell on those figures, but it is important to recognise that the cases heard by the Court of Appeal were in relation to four Iraqi applicants. Those applications were brought in respect of four Kurdish men, not in respect of women and children held at Oakington. We should be aware of the risk that similar cases might be brought in respect of families with children and that the use of detention as a proportional

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

measure might be open to further challenge if it were applied in relation not only to adult men but families. It may be more arguable as a proportional measure.

We know that 0.28 per cent. of asylum seekers at Oakington have absconded. It is a small number—about 30 of the 11,000. Whatever the original fears of the Home Office about the absconding rate in the absence of security measures and the power of detention, applicants are held for such a short time that absconding would lead to the effective abandonment of a claim. It would also lead to the loss of access to benefits and support, and, if discovered, it would lead to detention. All that suggests that applications could continue to be processed at Oakington while it is re-designated as a reception centre for the purposes of temporary admission. Therefore, the fact that the Court of Appeal has allowed the Government to continue their regime at Oakington does not mean that there is no case for change.

Change is possible. A much greater proportion of applicants—perhaps all of them, except in-country applicants and those who do not need to be detained—should, in the first instance, be housed in reception centres while an initial decision is made. Applicants who are refused asylum on initial decision should also be housed in such reception centres until they are removed from the country, have had their appeals heard, or are detained for other reasons.

It is important to give support to claimants. In my visits to Oakington and my discussions with people who work for the immigration support services, I have been struck by the fact that, while thousands of applicants are sent to the Oakington reception centre, many others, who do not fit the criteria for residence at Oakington—which often means that their applications are less obviously manifestly unfounded—are dispersed around the country. Those applicants are asked to produce evidence to support their claims under different circumstances than those enjoyed by the residents of Oakington and, frequently, in the space of a mere couple of weeks. The perverse result of that is that, sometimes, those with a manifestly unfounded claim for asylum are resident at Oakington, where they have access to support and legal services, and to help with translation and interpretation, and that enables them, if their application has any validity, to pursue it successfully. That rarely happens, as many of them are selected for Oakington on the grounds that their applications are manifestly unfounded. However, applicants who are dispersed, and whose claims might be better founded, do not have the same access to services. Therefore, it might benefit such applicants to be accommodated in reception centres that offer legal, translation and other services.

The latest figures with regard to the number of decisions where asylum has been refused on non-compliance grounds indicate that applicants who have been dispersed around the country might face serious problems in substantiating their claims—not because they have no evidence to support their claims, but because they are unable to assemble the evidence and understand the questions that they must answer and the forms that they are required to fill in.

In 1999, 1,085 cases were refused on non-compliance grounds under the normal procedures. In 2000 there were 26,630 such refusals. The figures must be considered in the context of the considerable increase in such cases: however, the problems that I have outlined arise out of the process of trying to clear those cases at a faster rate. All hon. Members must be concerned that, although refusal on the grounds of non-compliance might often be justified, it might also lead to the refusal of a significant number of applicants who have a genuine claim to refugee status but are unable to validate it, and are not given the support to enable them to do so.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to that subject. Does he understand that there is a strong legal argument that refusal on the grounds of non-compliance is incompatible with the convention on human rights, and that there is authority for saying that, in the end, that is not a justification for refusal? The technical grounds cannot undermine the basic case, so in addition to the practical arguments that he has proposed, there is a legal argument.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comment. However, I suspect that I am better at practical arguments than I am at legal arguments. The hon. Lady will perhaps take note of that and comment on it later.

My understanding is that the refugee convention requires those who seek to make a claim for asylum to be able to support it and to demonstrate that it is well founded. The inability to produce evidence to support such a claim can mean that it is refused on non-compliance grounds because there is no evidence to support it and in legal terms that is entirely justified. Whether I am right or wrong about that, my argument relates to the practicality and the desirability of giving asylum applicants a better service. I hope that I can demonstrate that that is in the interests of both the management of the system and genuine refugees.

Essentially, it is a perverse situation. Those who manifestly or apparently have unfounded applications seem to be given a better service by way of support for their applications. We could go further down that path. Reception centres for temporary admission are successful and help genuine refugees to support their claims more effectively. I have a proposal to put to the hon. Lady and to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and, via him, to my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) who, I am happy to say, as he is experienced and knowledgeable, has responsibility for these matters in my party. I recognise that my suggestion would represent a shift in both Government and Opposition policy.

The policy of the Conservative party at the last election was one of universal detention. Last Friday's Court of Appeal judgment suggests that prolonged detention while applications were being dealt with would have been in conflict with article 5(1)(f) of the convention. That is one of the reasons, if not the only reason, why it is in the interests of my party, as well as the Government, to look for a wholly different legal solution that is none the less compatible with the regime at Oakington.

An alternative is available. Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 empowers the Secretary of State to provide accommodation for those granted temporary admission. Schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971 gave powers to impose residence conditions during temporary admission. Schedule 14 to the 1999 Act would enable the extension by regulation of the purposes for which such residence conditions can be imposed. The legal structure seems to exist. My suggestion to the Minister and to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield is that those powers should now be used to speed up the handling of applications in respect of initial decisions and appeals.

One sure way of improving the management of asylum and enhancing the situation for genuine refugees would be for applications to be processed more swiftly. I am sure that a greater use of reception centres would assist, but the number of appeals heard each month must also be increased. The appeals backlog doubled between mid-1997 and the middle of last year. The number of adjudicators is now increasing and I hope that the Minister can confirm that there will be a substantial increase in the number of appeals that are determined each month. The present rate of appeals, together with the backlog, which is something of the order of 50,000, suggests that a capacity of some 6,000 a month is required.

We are well below that capacity at present and the introduction of one-stop appeals last year should have been accompanied by greater capacity. It would be desirable for that capacity to come on stream, but it can be helped by the continuing availability of applicants who have appealed for the provision of information and interviews. In view of the increase in budgets and the £835 million annual costs of the asylum system, I suspect that it would reduce costs to proceed down this route, rather than dispersal, given the difficulties associated with managing appeals for those who are dispersed around the country.

Indeed, the whole process of dispersing people around the country has many consequences, one of which is the establishment of stop-off points. As the Minister may know, Wackenhut, or the Premier Group which manages these matters on behalf of the Home Office, is proposing to establish one at Great Gransden, just outside my constituency, presumably to deal with those being dispersed from Oakington. Great Gransden is only a few miles from Oakington, so it is surprising that they need to stop off so quickly. Will the Minister explain why that is necessary and why such an inappropriate location has been chosen? Many of my constituents who live in the area would appreciate an explanation. At the moment they do not understand the proposal and they disagree with it.

Although it is important to deal with applications speedily, that will not suffice as an explanation. The presence of many nationalities and communities in our country, our relatively buoyant labour market in compared with that of some of our European neighbours and our comparative lack of internal enforcement often makes the UK a destination of choice for economic migrants. I do not criticise people for making that choice, but we have a responsibility to uphold the right of a sovereign state to determine whether aliens should be able to enter our territory. If the Home Secretary proposes to offer significant opportunities for migrants to work here, he should also introduce further measures to prevent the abuse of our asylum procedures by those who want to enter this country for purposes of economic migration.

I therefore call on the Minister to enforce the employment checks and sanctions provided in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1996. Unless further measures are taken, the pressure to introduce other forms of identity checks inside the UK—up to and including ID cards—will increase. I view the introduction of ID cards for the purposes of managing the asylum system as the tail wagging the dog. It would be an undesirable infringement of our liberties. If we choose to go down that path, it should be for wider and more important reasons. It is much better to deal with asylum in its own terms than to impose further constraints on the liberties of the whole population.

The further strengthening of our asylum system will also depend on the effective removal of persons whose claim for asylum is refused. Additional detention places are being provided, hopefully so that detainees need no longer be put in prisons. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) may have more to say about that. I understand that the Home Secretary has committed himself to ending the use of prisons for detention purposes within four months. Will the Minister confirm that? I recognise, however, that we need more detention centres in order to be more effective at achieving removal.

The limitations of our expertise as well as time constraints mean that it is difficult to go further in the comprehensive analysis of the asylum system urged by the Home Office. Other issues are relevant. However, I have referred to the need for some substantial and necessary changes. We must establish the principle that those with a viable claim to asylum should be given leave to enter and remain in this country, while those who cannot substantiate their claims should be housed in decent circumstances, given the opportunity to be heard, but not dispersed around the country. Subject to the refugee convention, they should be returned to the country from which they entered, their country of origin or a safe third country.

Those dispersed should be those with a prima facie case for refugee status and the choice of accommodation should be the subject of informed discussion with the refugees themselves or their representatives. They should be sent to areas with good community support, good community relations and the necessary facilities to look after refugees in an appropriate manner. Those given leave to remain could be given greater opportunities for work; we could try to dispense with the voucher scheme and escape from the risk of stigmatisation and abuse associated with vouchers; and we could give people with a genuine case for refugee status the facilities and support that they need.

In that context, the Minister may be aware that this morning the British Medical Association and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture have put out a document called "Asylum Seekers and Health", which describes the experiences of medical practitioners working with asylum seekers. The two organisations want the dispersal system to be reformed and the well-being of asylum seekers improved in the community, not least by scrapping vouchers in favour of cash benefits.

[Mr. Lansley]

The health screening facilities at ports of entry are not effective enough, and the health facilities and support available to asylum seekers dispersed around the country are often not appropriate. At Oakington, people have to deal with asylum seekers' health matters despite the fact that those who come to them have not always been screened. The medical practitioners also recognise that the time that they are there—seven days—is often insufficient to deal with that properly. Unless asylum seekers are housed in reception centres for sufficient time for health facilities to be concentrated to support them, some of the unhappy experiences to which the BMA and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture refer in their dossier will continue.

I do not underestimate the difficulties of managing the asylum system effectively, and I am aware of how the Government's expectations of the beneficial impact of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 have been dashed. The present review must be wide ranging, and changes may need to be substantial. The Government and Opposition may have to accept new solutions, but that does not necessarily mean toughening our asylum laws in a knee-jerk reaction. What is in the interest of refugees may also be what is needed to reform the system: faster decisions; clear separation of refugees from economic migrants; a generous welcome and work opportunities for those who appear to have a good claim; and decisive action to detain and remove those wishing to abuse our system. Making the system less open to abuse will not harm the interests of genuine refugees. On the contrary, it should cut the ground from under those who would abuse our welcome and frustrate those who would want to treat all asylum seekers as bogus.

11.27 am

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I thank the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) for the opportunity to have this timely debate. He made his points in a measured and helpful way, which, given the points of view that were attributed to him before the election, is encouraging and will correct some perception of his position. He has clearly benefited from having Oakington in his constituency.

The debate is timely because the Home Secretary made clear again on Monday that the Government are reaching the end of their initial review and will make proposals soon. I have an initial procedure question for the Minister, which she may want to answer. Apart from debates such as this one, and given the general courtesy of the Home Secretary to seek as much agreement as possible on such matters, are further representations best made urgently—between now and the date that the Home Secretary is minded to make his initial response—or should we wait for that initial response on the understanding that it will have Green Paper status rather than White Paper status, and provide an opportunity for reconsideration? It would be unreasonable if the proposals, when made, were firmly stuck to without any flexibility around the edges. The best approach is the Green Paper approach, so that the proposals can be considered before any firm decisions are taken.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. If I were him, I would make my representations urgently.

Simon Hughes: In that case, there will probably be a call to the Home Secretary, asking for an urgent meeting with him or the appropriate Minister of State. However, I urge the Government to present their proposals in a way that allows debate and response based on the broad experience that hon. Members have gathered on the issue from around the country.

How we deal with asylum seekers is one of the tests of our civilisation. Obviously, it is comparatively easy for a country to take responsibility for looking after its own citizens. It is always more difficult and more controversial to take responsibility for looking after people who come from elsewhere, and the issue often engenders irrational, primaeval instincts about differences and alienation and causes politicians, the media and the public to overreact and become overly defensive.

As the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire said, there has been a rise in the number of people who are making applications to the United Kingdom; however, that is part of a worldwide trend. Nothing that has happened, is happening or is about to happen changes the obligation that we entered into immediately after the war when we signed up to the universal declaration of human rights and, later, the United Nations convention on refugees. We must take responsibility for and accept those who are refugees within the definition of the convention.

As the fourth most successful economy in the world, we must accept that the situation is one that we can manage. If we have been bad at handling asylum applications, it is because we have been incompetent and not because the issue was unpredictable or the obligation unclear. The record of Governments, the Home Office and those dealing with the matter over the years has been one of slow response and periodic incompetence. That has worsened the situation and made it far more problematic. People have been allowed to say that there is a great problem that we cannot handle, whereas it is not a problem and we should be able to deal with the issue without considerable difficulty.

In that context, it is unfortunate that the Home Office continues to get its figures wrong. I hope that it will not happen again; I cannot understand why it happens so regularly. We had an admission just a few weeks ago that the figures for asylum cases waiting to be dealt with had been 100 per cent. wrong. We cannot go on like that; we must be able to rely on the Home Office figures so that we can make accurate projections and formulate appropriate public policy.

The basis of the debate is that individuals have not only the right to asylum under the United Nations convention, but the right to seek asylum. That may sound trite, but one cannot obtain asylum unless one can seek it. Therefore, one of the first questions in

respect of how we manage asylum applications is the "What?" question: what rights do people have? We have all recited and read often enough the provisions of article 1 of the convention, which was updated by the protocol that makes it relevant to people who are fleeing now. It contains an exception that deals with one of the concerns of the past six weeks; namely, those with a criminal or terrorist background who are seeking asylum. Article (1)(f) is clear:

"The provisions of this Convention shall not apply to any person with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that:

(a) he has committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity, as defined in the international instruments drawn up to make provision in respect of such crimes;

(b) he has committed a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to his admission to that country as a refugee;

(c) he has been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations."

It is important that the public understand that Governments have a right to tell people in those categories that they cannot claim asylum in another country. That does not apply to people who may have been active in attempting to overthrow an undemocratic regime in their country. We must be careful about generalising that people who have been associated with violence are therefore presumed to be ineligible for asylum. The most obvious example, which is always given, is in respect of people who fought against apartheid in South Africa when it did not have a democratic Government. With the benefit of hindsight, no one would now argue that they should be prevented from leaving that country just because they had an association with the anti-apartheid movement. We must be mindful of the difference between people who have been associated with seeking to overturn Governments on the one hand and those who clearly, and tightly, come within the definition of article 5(1)(f) of the convention on the other.

The next question is, "Where should people make their application?" I repeat this in every debate on the subject: of course some people make their application here having coming to the United Kingdom lawfully. They come on the basis of the free right to travel, if they come from another country where there are no travel restrictions, or they may have a student or tourist visa. However, as we well know, many people have to risk life and limb to avoid the authorities in order to come here to put their case, because at present the only place where people can apply for asylum to the United Kingdom Government is within the territorial jurisdiction of the United Kingdom. Ministers owe the House a better answer than we have had in the past to the question, "How can you put your case if you can't get here lawfully?". It will be helpful if the Minister can now say that the Government are considering that question in the general review.

It is absolutely proper that people should be able to make their asylum applications at United Kingdom missions abroad. I have never understood why it is not possible for someone who leaves a country where there is conflict and goes to a nearby country which is a safe place where there is a United Kingdom foreign mission, or one representing the United Kingdom, to put their case there. I have visited foreign missions and I am aware of the pressure of their immigration and visa work, but that is a practical matter; it is about having staff on the ground at least to receive the applications. It must be better for people to avoid the risk of travelling across the world to put their case, often being exploited in the process. Are the Government willing to consider allowing people to make asylum applications at British missions overseas?

Another obvious matter to consider is what arises from the experience of Sangatte and similar places. People there are in territorial France, but subject to that understanding we could have British officials in Calais and Paris to deal with matters in that part of the territory that was negotiated under the Canterbury treaty, which is technically under UK jurisdiction. There are also people in the Red Cross holding centre, the Eurotunnel building appropriated for the purpose. I have had discussions with Eurotunnel and with the French Ambassador to the United Kingdom, who was extremely courteous and helpful. A sensible proposal would be to allow applications to be made to the United Kingdom from a place outside the United Kingdom. It would be far better for people who say they want to come to the UK, who are waiting on the other side of the English channel, to be able to put their case there, rather than—

Angela Eagle: Does the hon. Gentleman admit that under the terms of the Geneva convention, people are supposed to claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach? That convention does not give them a choice of country in which to claim asylum. If people are in France—I assume France is a safe country—why on earth should they not claim asylum in that country? Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that people should be allowed to choose the European country in which they claim asylum? That would be the end of the Dublin convention.

Simon Hughes: I was coming to that and I will answer the Minister's question. This is about not the Geneva convention but the Dublin convention. I understand that it requires people to claim asylum in the first safe third country. The convention is nonsense, because people often arrive in the first safe country completely by accident.

The example that I give most often relates to the civil war in Sierra Leone. When people fled from there, they often arrived immediately in a French-speaking west African country. They did not claim asylum there but got on an aeroplane to Europe to seek asylum in the UK. However, flights from the Ivory Coast, for example, always went to Paris, because that was the traditional link, so people ended up in France. By the logic of the Dublin convention, they should claim asylum in France. The fact that they did not speak French and had no tradition or links with the French was disregarded, which was complete nonsense.

We should recognise that when people leave a country where they cannot stay or do not feel that they can stay and they seek haven in a safe country, a number will come to Europe. We must therefore have a broader vision than just saying, "Let's send them back to the first safe third country."

The convention is also nonsense in practical terms, which I discussed with the French ambassador. People who end up at Sangatte without paperwork will not own

[Simon Hughes]

up to the name of the first safe country at which they arrived; they simply do not answer that question. It is no good saying that they must—they do not. Most people will have come by land across western Europe. It depends whether we consider non-EU countries relevant, but people will have been through non-EU countries and many other EU countries. According to the logic of the convention, a lot of time is spent deciding whether to send them back to Germany, Romania or wherever, which is a completely pointless exercise.

A better solution lies at European level. We could reasonably consider processing in the EU but not necessarily in the UK asylum applications in respect of the UK.

Mr. Lansley: Did not the Dublin convention have more to it than simply the specification that applicants should claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach? The convention was drafted, among other things, in contemplation of relatively large numbers of asylum seekers from eastern Europe, who at the time arrived in Germany, Austria or Italy in the first instance.

The extension of that principle is one of burden sharing. If a relatively large number of asylum applicants from Sierra Leone arrive in Paris, there should be a burden-sharing system involving the French and others. Whether or not an asylum seeker has papers, the simple incontrovertible fact is that someone at Sangatte is in France, a safe country, so their application should be managed in France. If a burden-sharing system is needed, we can manage it between us and France, rather than allowing people to make applications from across the world and importing them all to the UK to deal with them.

Simon Hughes: Let me explain the consequences of that. The French Government told me—I have no reason to disbelieve them—that they interviewed all or many of the people in Sangatte and asked them whether they wanted to seek asylum in France and that they said no. The reason was that they did not speak French, had no links with France and so on. An opportunity was offered but not taken up. It is no good having legal systems that will never work in practical terms. We need the combination of a legal structure that works practically. Logically, we should work out a common EU policy, and that is on the drawing board.

Can the Minister tell us where we have got to in progressing the common EU policy in terms of burden sharing? I have always taken the view, as have my colleagues in the European Parliament and elsewhere, that burden sharing is the right way to proceed. However, one should not implement that in an arbitrary way because those who have links with the United Kingdom, because of Commonwealth traditions and so on, would be more likely to come to the UK. It should not matter where people first make their application.

The Dublin convention is also protective of the United Kingdom. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, almost everybody coming to Europe from outside—or who came from the Balkans during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia—comes first to eastern and south-eastern Europe. That fact has loaded the responsibility on to Germany. Britain was about the last place that people would reach and it was very much in our interest and that of the Irish Government to minimise the number of people who came here. That does not seem fair. We should have burden sharing.

Angela Eagle: Is the hon. Gentleman musing? The whole policy area is difficult. Is he expanding the Liberal Democrat policy by advocating the abolition of the Dublin convention, giving people a free choice to decide in which country they wish to seek asylum and for those processes to be automatically accepted by the country concerned? Is that Liberal Democrat policy?

Simon Hughes: Of course I am not musing. It is our view that the Dublin convention is not appropriate and that it ought to be replaced by a Europe-wide policy—that is why I asked how much progress we are making on that—as soon as possible. That means that people who came within the European Union territorial boundary would make an application—in law, because of subsidiarity it has to be made to the country in which they arrive—and that we would accept a responsibility to accept claimants proportionate to our population, so that we all took an appropriate share of people coming to Europe. The accident of whether one arrives in Britain or in Germany should not be relevant.

Angela Eagle: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that explanation. I am intrigued. He is expanding a choice mechanism whereby asylum seekers can choose in which country they will end up. What if the number of people making claims to that country is larger than its allocation under the system of burden sharing? Is the hon. Gentleman saying that asylum seekers should have such a choice, regardless of their numbers? Asylum seekers wanting to come to Britain may end up in Sweden, Germany or Spain.

Simon Hughes: I did not say that there should be a choice-based system. I said that people coming within the boundaries of the EU should make their case and that it would then be sensible to interview them to establish the most logical and appropriate place for them to go. Asylum seekers can reasonably express a preference. In as far as it can be accommodated, that is appropriate, but if three quarters of applicants—to take a ridiculous number—said that they wanted to come to the UK, it would be entirely disproportionate.

The purpose of burden sharing is that the burdens are shared appropriately across the European Union. We should therefore take people's preferences into account. The reality is that many people coming to the UK from Sangatte and elsewhere have done so as a means of going on to the United States, Canada and other countries. We need to be more intelligent about working out how we process cases in ways that share the burdens across the EU and take account of people's community, family and linguistic ties. I therefore repeat my question to the Minister: how far are we going and how urgently are we making progress in the EU-context, which seems the essential way forward?

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. I have been becoming a little concerned for some time now. The subject of the debate is the management of applications

for asylum in the UK. The hon. Gentleman, conscientiously I am sure, is expanding the debate and almost hijacking it. I ask him to confine his comments more closely to the subject that was introduced by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). If the hon. Gentleman wants to explore the matters that he seeks to, he might be better to have his own Adjournment debate.

Simon Hughes: I was trying to respond to questions and I shall move on.

For me, the next matter is the "When?" question. I share the view of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire that the processing of asylum applications in the UK should be done as quickly as possible. That has logical consequences. We need more case workers; we have always needed more. Apparently, they are neither relatively expensive nor difficult to recruit, so there is not a supply problem.

I share the hon. Gentleman's view—it would be an interesting development of his party's policy but I welcome it—that the best way of processing cases is at reception centres. I have always taken that view. That is how Finland and other European countries manage the matter. The benefit of that is that one accepts that detention centres are illegal, which seemed to be the Court of Appeal judgment, although the matter has yet to reach the House of Lords. We may then do what other countries do, and give people an incentive to stay by telling them that their case will only be processed if they do. The Finns have done that. If a person walks away and disappears, he or she loses any benefits. In that case we would not need detention centres or prison and I welcome that, should it be the Government's clear view that neither should be continued. We would allow what is effectively, but not technically, bail; people would be free to go outside and be able to go elsewhere. Also, there would not be the totally unsatisfactory dispersal policy that has been imposed, through which people are dispersed to places that are inappropriate for them and for the host community.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Gentleman said that we did not need detention centres. Does he mean that there should be no detention centres for the purpose of detaining people while making a decision? Surely by the time a decision has been made and a person is pending deportation, there must be substantial detention facilities.

Simon Hughes: I can give the hon. Gentleman two quick answers. It is clearly lawful to detain people who have committed offences or who are reasonably suspected of being about to commit offences. That is always an exception to the general policy of permitting people to come and go. Secondly, there is the matter that he rightly raised about what happens at the end of the process. I agree that we have had inadequate policy relating to people whose applications have been rejected and who are thus not entitled to stay here. There must be a combination of factors, such as better tracking conditions while people's applications are processed—signing on and so on. That is not difficult. People who have exhausted their right to put forward their case may be detained prior to their removal, and I do not argue about that.

I have two questions for the Minister. Are we examining increasing the numbers of people accepted for resettlement? Our numbers for that have been extremely low. Will the Government address the system of managing people whose applications are turned down? That system has clearly failed and discredited much of the rest of the system by containing no adequate provisions for managing such people. Do the Government accept that that should be done on a European Union-wide basis?

The best way forward is to ensure that the way in which we manage our applications is consistent with the way in which our neighbours in the EU manage their applications. Thus, if the burden were shared, it would be reduced and the controversy and difficulty of the policy would be minimised for this and other Governments.

11.54 am

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): In light of the lengthy peroration of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), I shall be brief because I am keen to hear the Minister's response to my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). In fairness to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, the way in which the debate has developed may have been inevitable. The problem with asylum seeking and how we process asylum applications is bound up intimately with the profoundly changed circumstances that now prevail compared with those when the original conventions were drawn up in the 1950s. No one at that time had the slightest notion of the novel way in which asylum applications and asylum seeking would develop.

I am sure that, when the conventions were drawn up, the idea was that people would spill over the borders from areas of localised conflict or persecution into adjoining states and that, at the conclusion of the political problems or hostilities, they would return to their own homes. In reality, we have once more in the world a "volkervonderung"—a wandering of peoples who move around for a host of reasons. Whether or not they may be asylum seekers does not mean that their aims or ambitions are invalid. One has only to consider the conditions in some of the countries from which such people come to appreciate that the distinction between an economic migrant and someone seeking political asylum is thin and grey. The Government have an extremely unenviable task that demands from Opposition parties measured support whenever it can be provided. They have to make difficult distinctions, which are particularly problematical when defining whether asylum seekers fall within the criteria under the convention that political asylum ought, as a matter of right, to be granted.

The contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire to the debate was particularly valuable. Rather than adopting theoretical rhetoric, he drew attention to practical problems and emphasised the need for the application process to be speeded up in a way that is fair to applicants without infringing on their

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

human rights. In that context, the reversal of the initial judgment on Oakington is welcome, although it has yet to go to the other place and we do not know what the final outcome will be. No one wants to infringe the human rights of asylum seekers by detaining them, but the problem—of which I have had personal experience before becoming a Member of Parliament—is that asylum seekers who are released into the community present two challenges. First, we must know whether they are receiving the help that they need to conclude their asylum application and, secondly, we cannot escape the fact that certain asylum seekers find such a process a convenient way in which to exploit the system.

I had to prosecute on behalf of the Department of Social Security individuals who had made multiple applications for asylum and who had adopted different personae for the sake of milking the benefit system. In one case, an individual had adopted 30 different identities. Once within the system, such people did not respond to the invitations to present themselves at Lunar house to be interviewed so that their asylum application could be processed. Therefore, there is an enormous difficulty, and the Government are entitled to our sympathy. It is difficult for Conservative Members, who are in opposition and who, therefore, do not benefit from the input of officials, to arrive at hard and fast ideas about the best way to tackle the problem. However, the key to solving it is to increase the speed at which applications are processed. Ultimately, it matters not whether that is achieved by telling applicants that they are free to go into the community but that they must attend their interviews, or by arranging reception centres where their cases can be streamlined. However, it is essential to speed up the system: that will ensure fairness and, ultimately, it will deter those who wish to abuse the system from doing so because they will know that they will rapidly be found out, and that appropriate steps will then be taken to ensure that they are removed from the country if they do not fulfil the criteria.

I will now conclude, as the debate has only 30 minutes left to run, and I want to hear the Minister's remarks.

I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire, because he put forward some sensible and pragmatic proposals, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

12 noon

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. McWilliam.

The debate has been interesting because hon. Members have acknowledged the difficulty of the practical and policy issues involved in ensuring that the asylum system in the United Kingdom works well, and expressed some sympathy which I am happy to accept.

I welcome all the contributions to the debate. They have been serious and they have wrestled with the key practical issues and I assure hon. Members that the Government always listen to representations. I also welcome the opportunity to consider the issues that have been raised by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). However, although the debate is timely and important, it puts me in an awkward position, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will soon make a statement about the matter under discussion, and I cannot pre-empt it.

The Government are determined to adhere to their obligation under the 1951 UN convention to maintain the integrity of the asylum system. With regard to the practical issues that the nation faces, I welcome the fact that not one hon. Member—or anyone else—is thinking, or has thought, that we should renege on our commitments to genuine refugees who flee from torture and oppression. The Government would never do that.

It must be recognised, however, that there is growing concern about the number of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants who have recently entered the United Kingdom, particularly as many of them are economic migrants. It is not wrong for people to aspire to better their lives, and I do not condemn them for wishing to do that, but it is important to examine how we fulfil their aspirations: it must be achieved in a more sensible way than by asking the UN convention to take the strain because it was designed to perform a different task. That is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said that we need to be more rational about economic migration, and I am pleased that, in general, raising the debate about asylum has been welcomed outside the House. A rational debate about the matter is necessary. There is also an emerging debate in Europe about the possibility of creating a common migration system; that would be beneficial to all.

It is necessary to ensure that a credible and faster end-to-end asylum system is created, and that there is closer contact between applicants and the authorities. At the end of the process, those who are given refugee status because they need to be protected must be integrated into society, and those who are not must be removed.

People generally recognise that there has been a huge increase in applications throughout the European Union, not only in Britain. As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said, that trend has continued partly because of changed world conditions, and we must have a way of managing it.

I shall spend some time giving specific answers to some of the questions asked by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire , especially about the Great Gransden site. I am told that it is not true that the site is used for Oakington cases. It is in fact used by Wackenhut, an internal escorting contractor used by the Home Office in the dispersal process, as a satellite-operating base, and it has several such places in various parts of the country. It is intended as a 30-minute transit stop for staff and detained persons being transferred over long distances north to south and vice versa. It is a secure area in which a stopover can be made. Sometimes staff and vehicles are changed, too. It is also an opportunity for a comfort break. It deals not with Oakington cases but with those being dispersed. There is no intention at present to use it for overnight accommodation. It is simply intended for short stops.

Mr. Lansley: I do not expect the hon. Lady to be aware of the physical circumstances of Great Gransden in the Huntingdon constituency, which is next door to mine. Those of us who are should immediately

appreciate that it is not convenient for either north-south or east-west transfers, and that other locations would ostensibly seem to be much more directly on the A1 or A14 north-south or east-west routes. Great Gransden is not, and it still seems an inappropriate location.

Angela Eagle: If the hon. Gentleman writes to me, as I am sure he will, and as his neighbour already has, I am sure that we can continue to debate the matter. I wanted to ensure that any misconceptions about the connection with Oakington were corrected.

I should also like to confirm that we fully expect to be able to end detention on remand in remand wings of prisons, at Cardiff by Christmas and elsewhere in the prison estate by the end of January, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire made some understandable remarks about what he called technical refusals, made on the basis of the statement of evidence form not having been filled in and returned to the appropriate place in a sufficiently timely fashion. He suggested that reception centres might be able to deal with the matter more effectively. It might cheer him up a bit if I tell him that we have introduced a post box system, which has massively cut the number of late arrivals and forms registered late, and therefore the technical refusals about which he was so worried. When the system was introduced, 400 to 500 forms a week went astray and were not appropriately registered on a file, which meant that we had to change a technical refusal to a reply saying that we had received the form but not in the right place. The simple administrative introduction of a PO box cut that number to 50 a week.

Having spent three years at the Department of Social Security, I know that obvious and modest administrative coherence can make an enormous difference to a system. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that we have made progress, although I accept his point that technical refusals are not always the best way of dealing with cases.

A fast system is part of the answer. As hon. Members hinted, the system must be fast but fair. It should give people appropriate time to make representations, but hurry cases along. As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield hinted, people often seek delay because they do not want a decision to be taken. The system must therefore continue to set tight timetables while making them achievable. That is the tension with which we must always deal.

I want to comment briefly on action at EU level. Action to equalise and harmonise the way in which asylum seekers are treated within the European Union can have value-added benefits that prevent the kind of asylum shopping that we have witnessed. Hon. Members will know about the Tampere extraordinary council in 1999, which reaffirmed our commitment to setting minimum standards and establishing a common European asylum system. The Government fully support action at Community level in this field, and believe that moves towards harmonisation of the process should ensure more equitable treatment for those requiring protection across the EU, thereby reducing the secondary movement to which I referred.

To date, the Council has adopted several measures in this field, including Eurodac, which is a computerised central database of fingerprint images. That allows us to deal with people who claim to have different identities and nationalities, and make multiple claims in the same system, to which the hon. Member for Beaconsfield referred, and which I have also encountered. The fingerprinting system allows us to discover fraud quickly, and deal with it. If it is available at European level, it will enable us to ensure, for identity and fraud purposes, that people traffickers and those who seek to abuse the system are spotted quickly.

Proposals under discussion include a directive on minimum standards in asylum procedures, a draft regulation on how to determine which member state is responsible for examining an asylum application—colloquially known as Dublin II—and minimum standards on the reception of asylum applicants. We await a proposal from the Commission in the next few weeks on minimum standards for qualification of refugees. Progress is being made, and Britain is in the forefront of urging faster progress. The Laaken council will assess progress towards the Tampere goals, which will include putting the bricks of a common European asylum process in place. I am therefore optimistic that we can make good progress in that area. That should help us to handle the flows of people currently coming through Europe, along various people-smuggling routes.

The key to establishing an efficient asylum system that is not susceptible to abuse is to process claims quickly. We have taken a range of measures to ensure that that can be achieved, which have included additional financial resources, new streamlined casework procedures, the expansion of the appeal system and the recruitment of new staff. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate now has approximately 10,580 staff. That is 4,180 more than in April 2000, which includes 1,000 new operational grade staff in the immigration service.

A project has also been undertaken—it is now well advanced—to transfer responsibility for aspects of asylum casework from the immigration service to the Integrated Casework Directorate. The ICD will be able to serve decisions in port cases itself rather than sending them back to the immigration service. That will enable immigration officers to concentrate on core enforcement work and other activities designed to establish the true identity and nationality of asylum seekers. As part of that project, the asylum process will be reviewed to enable speedier handling of cases. Asylum seekers will have a clear point of contact, file movements will be reduced—which is one of my bugbears—and unnecessary duplication will therefore be eradicated. I expect to see tangible benefits from those administrative initiatives by the end of the year, and further benefits next year.

Hon. Members have acknowledged that the number of decisions has outstripped the number of applications, at least in the first tier. In the past financial year, 132,840 decisions were made, compared with 52,040 the year before. We must acknowledge that there has been a step change in the past year in the amount of work that has been done. Neither I nor the Home Secretary are complacent about the way in which the system works, but it is important for the morale of those who work in this difficult area that we acknowledge their contribution and the step change that has been made. I

[Angela Eagle]

thank the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire for acknowledging the good work done by the staff at Oakington in making the system work.

The quality of decision making remains high, and the Immigration Appellate Authority dismissed 80 per cent. of appeals in the past financial year. When we examine the coherence of the system, we must have regard to removals, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is no good having a system—however elaborate it is—for reaching decisions, if they cannot be put into effect.

The Labour manifesto said that more than 30,000 people who could not justify their claims would be removed by 2003-04, which is about 2,500 people a month. The Home Secretary announced that the Government had decided that the target must be met by next year. That will enable us to make a commitment to exceed the 30,000 removals by 2003. To achieve that, we are implementing a wide range of measures, and I welcome the acknowledgement by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire that detention will have to play a role at a certain stage in the process if we are to achieve our target.

We have increased the number of immigration staff and are training further immigration arrest teams, which will have the power to apprehend those who will be removed. As has been acknowledged, we are in the middle of expanding the detention estate, which we need to do to establish transit for removals. We are also establishing an enhanced reporting system, improving the existing return arrangements and finding new routes of return to countries to which return has been difficult up until now.

Before people can be removed, they must be issued with papers from the countries to which they are going. The process is not fast, and people cannot simply be put on aeroplanes—it is more complicated than that. We rely for some of our success on co-operation with the countries of return in ensuring that appropriate papers can be issued.

In July, the immigration service and the police signed a protocol, which was formally introduced at a meeting with the Association of Chief Police Officers. That means that the police now have a firmer footing and know where they will be required to assist in the removals process. We have also seconded a chief superintendent to coordinate relations with the police and the provision of police support for immigration service operations.

We are at the beginning of what I hope will be significant increases in our ability to remove those whose asylum claims have failed. Again, however, I ask hon. Members to acknowledge that the process is difficult.

Simon Hughes: Has the Home Office done any work to establish whether there is a link between the speed of applications and the number of appeals, which has recently increased, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire said? I am not trying to put the Minister on the spot, but can she tell us what the trend is for the success of appeals and whether there are more appeals when the process for dealing with initial applications is speedier?

Angela Eagle: I do not have the latest figures on appeals in front of me, although I ran the social security appeals system. There is little reason for people who have claimed asylum not to appeal under our system. I mentioned a figure of 80 per cent., and the rate at which appeals are overturned and original decisions are upheld as valid is extremely high. The figure for overturning appeals at Oakington is 95 per cent. including those who withdraw appeals and those who return voluntarily before the appeal process happens. There is a high level of confirmation by the Immigration Appellate Authority of the original decisions taken by our case workers.

I should like to say a little about the purpose of Oakington. An important feature of our asylum policy has been the introduction of new procedures to speed up the consideration of claims, and the establishment of the reception centre at Oakington has been a key element in the effective operation of tough but fair immigration controls. It is there to help to deal with claims in those cases where it appears that a rapid decision can be taken. Decisions cannot always be taken quickly; any one of a range of issues might mean that appeal is not appropriate because it cannot be done in the seven to 10 days allotted by Oakington—the circumstances might be complex, it could be difficult to obtain evidence or we might be dealing with children. The straightforward cases are taken to Oakington.

Under existing immigration powers to detain, applicants are required to stay at the centre for a short period of about seven days. There is a relaxed regime with minimal physical security—the recent use of some of the spare capacity at Oakington to accommodate the victims of flooding in the area demonstrated that it is not a grimy, horrible place, where people are locked in cells, and says something about the kind of facilities that are there. I welcome the thanks recorded by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire in that regard.

Fast-tracking Oakington applications that are, mainly, unfounded brings applicants to the point of removal sooner than would be the case if their applications were processed in the normal way. That is because, in addition to the seven to 10 day fast-track process, most Oakington appeals are accelerated and can be heard within four to six weeks.

Since Oakington opened, we have been able to deal more quickly with straightforward claims, which has helped to reduce the pressure on immigration control. For example, applications from nationals of eastern European countries—many of whom were accommodated at the centre and whose claims were found to be manifestly unfounded—have fallen by about 50 per cent. In particular, there have been big drops in the numbers of asylum applications received from Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania—down 73 per cent., 55 per cent., and 45 per cent. respectively, if one compares the figures for the six months before Oakington opened with those for the same period a year later.

That effect has been noted. We shall keep an eye on such figures to see whether the drop is sustained. Up until 12 October this year, 12,200 people were referred

to Oakington—9,815 were principal applicants, with 2,385 dependants—and 8,762 asylum applications were decided there, 8,690 refusal decisions were served and 72 grants of either asylum or exceptional leave were made at the initial decision stage. There were 235 allowed or conceded appeals. Of those, 7,826 applicants appealed against the refusal decision and 4,444 appeals have been decided, of which 95 per cent. have been dismissed by the adjudicator or withdrawn or abandoned while 5 per cent. have been upheld.

The fact that Oakington exists in the form that it does sends a strong message that we shall deal speedily with asylum claims, many of which are unfounded and would otherwise impose a considerable burden on the taxpayer and undermine public support for genuine refugees. We therefore welcome the judgment of the Court of Appeal last Friday but recognise that leave to appeal to the House of Lords was granted. The Court of Appeal confirmed that the detention of asylum seekers at Oakington for a short time in order for speedy decisions to be made on their applications is lawful, and that seven to 10 days is not an excessive period for the consideration of an application for asylum. We shall continue our review and to develop our thinking on the reform of the asylum system.

I welcome our serious and informed debate, and assure Opposition Members that there will always be at least a two-way process, because the issue affects us all. I am pleased that all Members who spoke condemned the xenophobia raised by some of the more hysterical coverage of the problematic system. As the Minister with responsibility for race relations, I understand that it is important to make our systems as robust and effective as we can while we continue to tackle such a challenging issue.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): I invite Members who do not want to stay for the next debate to leave quietly.

Sport on Television

12.25 pm

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): I am grateful to have secured this Adjournment debate on access to sport on television, a matter of great importance to my constituents and to people throughout the land. I shall discuss three aspects of the issue: why access to sport on television is important, some of the current problems of access to sport on television, and what may be done to improve levels of access.

We may ask ourselves why access is of such significance. Anyone who was in the country when Tim Henman reached the semi-finals of Wimbledon, or when David Beckham hit that free kick at Old Trafford a couple of weeks ago, will be aware of the sense of national pride felt across the nation when we do especially well at sport. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is keen to encourage participation, and greater visibility of sport on television will lead to further encouragement. Participation in sport helps to reduce unemployment and crime and leads to better health and qualifications.

The formation of a university of Gloucestershire was announced yesterday, and it will concentrate on sports science at a campus in my constituency. I hope that the Minister will join me in congratulating everyone involved in that announcement on their hard work to ensure that the project has come to fruition.

A wide range of parties have different interests in how sport is shown on television, including fans, players, clubs, rights holders, competition organisers and digital, terrestrial, satellite and cable companies. However, at times some effective mediation seems to be missing between those parties, and agreement between them is also missing. Several governmental and non-governmental organisations including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Office of Fair Trading, the Independent Television Commission and Oftel—it will soon become Ofcom—are trying to fit into the mediating role, but we need to look at the issue more closely.

As the DCMS put it, we have a duty as a Government to provide quality broadcasting for the many, rather than the few. In some cases, the Government can safeguard universal coverage due to the listed events under the Broadcasting Act 1996. Come what may, we know that certainly the final stages of Wimbledon tennis will be on terrestrial television, as will the Olympic games and the football, cricket and rugby world cups. Under the 1996 Act, the ITC is required to ensure that a non-free-to-air broadcaster, or a free-to-air broadcaster, can show any part of a tournament live only if a free-to-air broadcaster with at least 95 per cent. coverage has acquired similar rights or been given the opportunity to do so on fair and reasonable terms. It is those terms that sometimes cause confusion.

Thanks to that legislation and to good government, the Minister for Sport, working with ITV and the BBC, was able last week to announce that the World Cup in Japan and Korea will be available free to air. I should like to think that my early-day motion 221 calling for the World Cup to be on terrestrial television had had some effect.

[Mr. Parmjit Dhanda]

I want to take a closer look at the deal that was struck last week. The TV company Kirch Media that bought the rights to the World Cup in 2002 did so with the clear objective of maximising profits by selling the rights to the highest bidder. Kirch insisted throughout that it would make only England matches, the opening match, the semi-finals and the final available to terrestrial television channels. That would have meant their missing the Brazil *v.* Argentina match and games involving Italy, Germany and France. We need greater clarity in the regulations, because in seeking to back up its position Kirch said that selling the rights to the highest bidder in each country was in line with the regulations of FIFA, football's world governing body.

The European Commission investigated the television rights to Champions League games, and it signalled that UEFA may have violated competition laws. An EC spokesperson described the system of auctioning TV rights to the highest bidder in each country as highly anti-competitive. The self-regulatory system of major football rights holders ultimately limits TV coverage and reduces access to sport on television. I am delighted that good government should have prevailed over profiteering for the rights to the 2002 and 2006 World Cup. We must remember that, during the last World Cup, even games such as Belgium *v.* Sweden and Cameroon *v.* Austria attracted 7.3 million and 8.7 million viewers respectively—bigger audiences than for most live games on terrestrial television.

I would like to see the BBC and ITV deal replicated for those rugby matches in which the British Lions are playing. My constituency of Gloucester, a rugby-loving town with a successful team—the cherry and whites—had problems in the summer during the British Lions tour. Live games were available only on satellite television, and in order to watch them my constituents had to choose between signing up to a satellite TV package and visiting a pub, often at 9 o'clock in the morning. Those who wanted to see highlights of the games could do so only by popping over the border into Wales and watching S4C, a far from satisfactory arrangement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): Good for Welsh tourism.

Mr. Dhanda: Yes, good for Welsh tourism, but the British Lions tour games are steeped in such history that they should be on an even footing with the rugby world cup, not least because rugby world cup games such as Tonga *v.* Argentina are better protected for terrestrial viewers than British Lions tour games of Australia.

Access to sport on TV could affect not only how we watch sport; it has the potential to determine the future of broadcasting. When people buy new television sets and choose to subscribe to pay TV, their choice is usually determined by the availability of sports and movies in the package. The massive growth of pay TV during the past 10 to 15 years has been driven by the public's appetite for watching football. The rights to show sport have a positive effect by increasing subscription and are therefore hugely significant as a factor in deciding who will be the dominant provider. Today's debate about access to sports on television is therefore also a discussion about the shape of broadcasting in the longer term. It is a complicated but important debate about a highly aggressive market, in which technical and legal arguments are often used to make things much foggier.

The television market is made up of different providers—Sky, the BBC, ITV and so on—on a range of different platforms such as digital terrestrial, cable and satellite. The TV that we are most used to is the traditional analogue television, which is picked up with an aerial on the roof. The Government plan is to phase out analogue TV at some stage between 2006 and 2010. The reason for switching to digital is obvious: it gives a vastly better picture than analogue, provides more channels and choice, better mobile reception and greater interaction. The advantages are there for all to see, as last week's digital action plan made clear.

The plan, however, did not define a clear date for the switch-off of analogue TV; we know that it will happen at some stage between 2006 and 2010, but we need to take a closer look at the date. The lack of clarity on that point has had some negative effects for sport on television. By setting a date, we would allow our forefront digital companies to plan for the long term, which can only help to bring down subscription costs. Digital television is already available to around 8 million viewers and is currently dominated by Sky TV, which distributes its digital TV package through satellite dishes. ITV is the next major player in the market, but even that company is dwarfed by Sky.

Sky is largely responsible for creating the market. The massive amounts of money going to football and the influx of quality foreign stars and managers into the Premiership are a direct result of the money that Sky has paid for the broadcasting rights. Providing access to sports makes business sense for Sky, which uses them as an incentive to encourage new viewers to take up subscription to Sky on satellite. Sky is doing a good job: it has more than 50 per cent. of pay-TV homes, recoups more than 70 per cent. of pay-TV revenue and is without doubt the dominant player. However, Sky sometimes uses its strength to muscle other opponents off the ball, and its style of play in Europe has required some intervention from European Governments.

Sky has four times the number of subscribers of ITV, its nearest rival, which has only 1.2 million customers. The two companies do not have a good relationship; it is not merely a fierce rivalry between two channels but a more significant battle between two platforms. Sky broadcasts use digital satellite while ITV uses digital terrestrial television—or DTT. Over the past few months, supporters of football clubs such as Liverpool, Manchester United and Arsenal have suffered: having paid for a sporting package on Sky Digital, they find that they cannot receive the ITV sports package that allows them rights to the Champions League. The process works in the opposite direction, however: viewers can have an ITV digital package and watch Premiership football on it. So consumers are sometimes required to buy two packages rather than one, or they may choose between them and have to get rid of the package at the relevant moment.

The communications White Paper, published in December 2000, proposed the imposition of a "must offer" obligation on public service broadcasters without a matching "must carry" obligation on satellite networks such as Sky. Under current arrangements, cable operators carry the public service broadcasters free on their networks and, in return, cable operators are not charged for copyright. "Must carry" also effectively applies to digital terrestrial television because of the capacity on the multiplex gifted by public service broadcasters and the requirements set out in the multiplex licences.

The White Paper envisages the situation continuing for both cable and DTT but does not extend that to satellite. We should consider that matter more closely. The guidelines specifically preclude satellite providers, which are the largest providers of much of the exclusive sport on television. We should look for a way in which to provide greater clarity, vision and leadership in that debate. This week, it has emerged that ITV Digital is suffering under the weight of heavy competition. It is right for the digital action plan to focus on the long-term plan, but there is also a need for immediate action in this volatile market. I would like us to set a date for the end of analogue television.

I am sure that I have given hon. Members a taste of the complexity of some of the issues involved in broadcasting sport on television. Given that complexity and the potentially massive influence of how sport is shown on television, there is a need for a body to monitor and work as a mediator in this highly competitive market. Perhaps it is even time for us to consider an Of-football regulator for football, which is so huge and of such value to us. Such a regulator could not only resolve disputes between players and the industry but deal with arguments over football in the media, such as that between ITV and Sky. If we do not act now, we are in danger not only of taking away from the nation the joy of a successful and beautiful David Beckham free kick but of depriving the nation of its position at the forefront of the digital age.

12.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) on securing the debate. I am aware of the strength of feeling that exists in his constituency, in mine and in the House on this matter. The accessibility of sport on television is an important subject. It is also at the centre of our economy in this—to use a cliché—post-industrial age. Television and communications are huge drivers of jobs, entrepreneurial ventures and new inventions. We need those sectors. The countries that will do best in the 21st century are those that have recognised that their economies must be talent-driven, and television is a classic example of a talent-driven industry.

My hon. Friend has represented Gloucester very well. I suffered badly at the hands of rugby players in Gloucester—they were a rough lot, I remember. Cherry and white shirts used to become blood red very quickly. That is where the art of coarse rugby was invented and is still played.

I enjoyed my hon. Friend's call for a single regulator or mediator. My hon. Friend will know that recently, in another place, we introduced what is known in the jargon of the House as a paving Bill to set up Ofcom, the single regulator. At the moment, there are a large number of regulators. There is also the BBC, which regulates itself through its board of governors, and a small but important broadcasting organisation in Wales called S4C—the Welsh Channel 4—to which my hon. Friend referred earlier.

We are concerned at the great confusion of regulators. I would not criticise any of them, because they have done a good job, but the world has moved on and technology is moving on quickly. We must ensure that the regulation that is in place— especially for the brave new world of digital services—can keep pace with technological advance and that it can accommodate it. We must not institute a new regulatory regime that is already redundant. It is important that we do it.

I disagreed with little of my hon. Friend's argument, but the idea of another regulator—a football regulator—will wake me up at 2 am tomorrow in a cold sweat. There are enough regulators already, without appointing more. However, I can see his point and I hope that when we publish the full communications Bill, which we hope to do in February, my hon. Friend will contribute to the debate. We will publish it in February for consultation, and we want everyone in the industry to read it. The question of sport and regulation is most important.

Mr. Dhanda: On that point about regulation and current legislation, does my hon. Friend believe that Ofcom will be a more effective regulator in bringing together the entire communications field—satellite, digital and terrestrial television with the interactive studies that go with it—than the current more disparate layer of regulation?

Dr. Howells: Yes, I hope that the single regulator, instead of the collection that exists currently, will be a step forward and will accommodate the various platforms. My hon. Friend concentrated on the question of different platforms, and I will do so, too. We are at a vulnerable point in the digital programme. Two ITV companies, Carlton and Granada, have put a lot of money—as much as £800 million—into what is now known as ITV Digital, but used to be called ONdigital. So far, it has about 1.2 million subscribers, but the companies are concerned about the investment, which has been written off—far too often—by the press and the broadcasting anoraks. I am an eternal optimist and I hope that it is safe, because it is important that we have at least three competing platforms.

The digital revolution will be pushed forward by competition, and it is not the business of the state to underwrite those technological and commercial advances. It must be content driven, and people will want to buy digital only because they see it as better than what they have, whether through increased access to programmes on sport or those on any other subject. Competition must drive that forward, not the pronouncements of a Whitehall Minister or official.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): I hope that the Minister was not referring to me as a broadcasting anorak because I am a former member of the BBC's General Advisory Council.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I want to point out some statistics about current access to

[Mr. Khalid Mahmood]

pay television. Some 41.5 per cent. of people have access to pay television of some kind. Of those, 36 per cent. have access from satellite and 11 per cent. via digital. Being a former rugby player, I enjoy the six nations tournament and the good record of the British Lions. People in Birmingham, especially in my constituency wards of Perry Barr and Oscott, are tremendous supporters of both football and rugby. Enthusiasm for sport is high, and Birmingham has a parks cricket league with 58 teams, which is the largest set of teams in any part of the country.

However, pay and satellite channels are not affordable for most of those people, who are in the lower end of the pay scale but still want to watch sport. Sport should be a family event. It should enable people to get together. When there are pay sports, people generally go to their local pubs and so they cannot sit with their children and wider family. Over the weekend, the ITV network decided to reschedule its Premier League matches, but that is different. International and national games should belong to everyone and should be more widely available on terrestrial channels.

Dr. Howells: I thank my hon. Friend. That is a great advert for Birmingham rugby. It was the most concentrated speech I have heard in this place in a long time, although it was really an intervention.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. Had the hon. Gentleman made a speech, I would have called him to order.

Dr. Howells: Thank you, Mr. McWilliam. I love the relaxed atmosphere here.

On the specific question of rugby being a listed sport, it might be a good idea if I reminded hon. Members of the lists of sporting events protected under part IV of the Broadcasting Act. Group A, for which full live coverage is protected, comprises the Olympic games, the FIFA World Cup finals tournament, the European football championship finals tournament, the FA cup final, the Scottish FA cup final, the Grand National, the Derby, the Wimbledon tennis finals, the rugby league challenge cup final and the rugby world cup final. Group B, which protects secondary coverage, comprises cricket test matches played in England, non-finals matches in the Wimbledon tournament, all other matches in the rugby world cup finals tournament, six nations rugby tournament matches involving the home countries—which now include Italy, an idea that I love—the Commonwealth games, the world athletics championships, the finals and semi-finals of the cricket world cup involving home nation teams, the Ryder cup and the Open golf championship.

My hon. Friends are calling for an event like the British Lions tour to be included. BSkyB has purchased exclusive live rights to the British Lions rugby union tours for 10 years. British Lions matches are not listed events because they do not meet the necessary criteria, or they certainly did not meet them until my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Mahmood) made his case. BSkyB must therefore decide to whom, if anyone, to sell the highlights. Secondary coverage of this year's three test matches against Australia was sub-licensed, as I think my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester mentioned, to S4C and was available to viewers in Wales.

The time to make the case is when the next review of the listed events occurs. That time probably starts now, although we do not envisage an early review of the list because there has only just been one. I take my hon. Friend's point about rugby union, which is certainly an enormously popular sport. In some parts of the country, it borders on a religion. A great many people would love to have seen the games in the southern hemisphere. There is a problem, however. I am not making excuses for the broadcasters, Mr. McWilliam, and you are well aware of the problems. If one takes the British Lions tour to New Zealand or to Australia, the time differences are so huge that broadcasters would have to run them through the night. That is not a bad thing, given some of the dross on television during the night, but it is a decision for the broadcasters.

The case for running an entire series as a listed event with that time difference in mind is no easier to sustain in terms of projected viewer figures than is running a cricket test match through the night. At least as many people would appreciate watching cricket. Those who are passionate about rugby would not mind that, though I have to admit that it is a long time since I have been able to stay awake after 10.30 on any night.

The World Cup final tournament is important to millions of UK sports fans. In 1998 the tournament included 64 matches. It has been listed in its entirety since 1985. It is a huge tranche of games. Interest in cup matches goes well beyond those involving the home nations. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester mentioned that matches between what might have been thought of in this country as obscure nations gained audiences larger than "News at Ten" and many other popular programmes.

FIFA requires that the opening game, the semi-finals, the final and games involving a national team should be shown on free-to-air television. One expects such matches to attract large audiences in this country and elsewhere but, as my hon. Friend said, it is much more surprising that 9.3 million people tuned in for Morocco *v.* Norway. I was amazed when I saw that figure. Furthermore, 9.8 million people watched Germany *v.* Iran and no fewer than 10.2 million watched Jamaica *v.* Croatia.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Hear, hear.

Dr. Howells: Clearly one of them is sitting opposite and I have no doubt that it was a cracking game. I was nevertheless surprised at that level of interest.

Mr. Dhanda: I agree with virtually all that my hon. Friend said. However, does he agree that, although we should let the markets decide in most respects, when people have already forked out to watch Premiership football on Sky Digital, they should not have to fork out again for another platform to have the widest choice? That is why they paid in the first place.

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend makes one of the key arguments that I hope will be debated when the draft Bill is published in February. It is an important point.

The manner in which the digital project is carried forward will depend on people feeling comfortable with the system and platform that they have bought into. We know that ITV is having problems with Premier League football on Saturday evenings: it may be shifted to another time and there is talk about selling to another platform, which will remain nameless, for wider distribution. We shall have to examine that carefully.

I hope that my hon. Friend does not believe that politicians should decide the matter. Parliament should certainly debate it, but God forbid the day when politicians such as myself, others in the House or officials tell broadcasters what they can and cannot broadcast. The great achievements of the British television industry—terrestrial, satellite or cable—have been gained not as a result of political decisions but because of the creativity and talent of the people who work in it.

Many curious decisions are made about what sport should be on television and when it should be shown. The market research carried out by ITV revealed that buying the Premiership rights cost £185 million—£25 million more than the deal that ITV and the BBC did with Kirch to buy two lots of World Cup coverage. It looks like a lot of money now, and people wonder about those decisions, but they are commercial, artistic and creative decisions taken by broadcasting companies. We should not be in the business of telling them how to conduct their business.

I am a little confused about the time. Perhaps you can tell me when I should finish, Mr. McWilliam.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Time is up now.

Education Funding (Worcestershire)

1 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I am delighted to see so many hon. Members from Worcestershire. I think that they want to intervene later, and others may turn up. I am not surprised that they are here in such large numbers, because the debate is about fairness, to which we are all committed.

In this Chamber on 24 January, the largest lobby of head teachers that the Commons has ever seen gave all the county's then MPs a grilling of which Jeremy Paxman would have been proud. A few weeks later, it was the turn of the governors, who were equally angry about unfairness in the distribution of education expenditure across the United Kingdom.

Successive Conservative and Labour Governments have not been fair to Worcestershire in a range of sectors: health, social services, policing, fire, regional development and, above all, education. The Government inherited an unfair situation, but far from seeking to address it urgently, they allowed it to get worse. As a result, schools in my constituency have fewer books, teachers and resources than those in neighbouring areas. Now, probably for the first time, we are experiencing difficulty in recruiting teachers to our schools. Appointments are being made because the successful applicant was not the best but the only applicant.

I should like the Minister to address three basic themes: the problems caused by diverse funding streams; the unfairness of the standard spending assessment formula; and the impact of the transfer of post-16 budgets to learning and skills councils. I will not labour the point about diverse funding streams, but I want to knock on the head the common argument that shortfalls in basic funding can be made good through standards fund money. Many of my local head teachers are worried about the complexity of applying for such funds, and I worry about the power that they give Ministers to centralise education policy even more.

Gerry Burgess, the head teacher of Simon de Montfort middle school, told me that the school's basic budget allocation is £900,000, but £840,000 goes on staffing. He needs the flexibility to use every penny that he gets in the school's best interests, not the prescription that inevitably flows from the increasing use of standards fund money.

Some 29 separate funding streams are available to schools. I sought the exact number in a parliamentary question, but Monday's answer avoided the issue. Schools need one cheque, as it were, that enables them to decide how to spend the money available—of course, there is not enough of that.

The current arrangements—the formula at the heart of the debate—were introduced, I believe, for the 1990-91 financial year as part of the background to the council tax or poll tax, as it was unpopularly known. If I have understood correctly—I am sure that the Minister will say so if I have not—what really happened was a freezing of historic patterns of expenditure. In crude terms, across-the-board increases were then applied to those historical levels for future years.

As any mathematician will tell us, if we apply a common percentage increase to a large sum and a small sum, the gap between them will grow over time. That

[Mr. Peter Luff]

growth does not become apparent for a few years, but as the compound interest rate rules have their ruthless way, the rich get richer and the poor get relatively poorer. That has been happening in Worcestershire for 10 years.

The last Conservative Government should have addressed the formula's rough justice before the 1997 election, but did not. This Government have had four and a half years to do something, but have done nothing. The consequences are now becoming desperate for Worcestershire's schools.

The average shire county SSA in the secondary sector is £3,156.83 per pupil; in Worcestershire, it is £3,011.43. I say "shire county" because it is a strictly comparable unit. In the primary sector, the average shire county gets £2,456.41 per pupil; in Worcestershire, we get £2,346.48.

I am not comparing Worcestershire with national averages, but with shire county averages. I am trying to be fair. I accept that deprived inner-city areas are likely to need more than most shire counties. However, we are doing exceptionally badly compared even with shire counties. We are 31st out of 34 in the secondary sector and 32nd out of 34 in the primary sector. In 1998-99, the first year for which the Government must accept responsibility, the gap between Worcestershire and the shire average was £86 per primary school pupil; this year, it has risen to £110. In 1998-99, the gap in the secondary sector was £118; it is now £145. That means that my county gets £4.3 million less than the average shire for its primary and first schools, and £4.6 million less for its middle and secondary schools—nearly £9 million overall.

It is against that background, and in the face of an unprecedented campaign—a campaign so intense that it broke my fax machine—that the Government coughed up a one-off payment of an extra £1.35 million for the current year. That sum is welcome, but it still leaves us approximately £8 million below the shire average, and we have no way of knowing whether that extra million or so will be available again in the new financial year beginning in April.

My parliamentary question on the subject, due for answer on Monday, got a dusty answer from the Minister, saying that he would reply as soon as possible." As my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) said in a letter apologising for his absence owing to a very long-standing engagement,

"There is, I know, cross-party agreement that the expenditure formula works unfairly for Worcestershire when the grants it receives are compared with those of similar counties. Governments of all persuasions have acknowledged this for some time but have been reluctant to do anything about it. The time has come for a change to be made in the formula. Piecemeal, temporary 'solutions' are not the answer."

The current funding arrangements make Prince Henry's high school in Evesham £358,172 worse off than the national average. Just a few miles up the road in Birmingham, the figures are very different. David Braham, head teacher of Bengeworth first school told me:

"Heads have to continue to come up with creative ideas to fund essential resources. In our school, leasing, fundraising and seeking outside funding is becoming routine to keep the wolf from the door and make our budget balance."

The acting head teacher of Chawson first school in Droitwich Spa, Eleanor Sinton, told me:

"If our school were up-rooted and re-sited in say, Surrey, our budget would be greater and we should be able to provide our children with more facilities and opportunities."

Roger Davies, chairman of governors at Cropthorne with Charlton Church of England first school, said in a letter asking seven questions that I will be sending to the Minister:

"Should Worcestershire County Council increase local taxes in order to help the education budget, it is totally unfair that central government should penalise us by effectively rate capping the county."

The funding formula leaves Droitwich Spa high school £460,000 a year worse off than an equivalent school in Hertfordshire, but its costs are roughly the same. The real-terms budget increase for Evesham high school was about 2.9 per cent., not the 5.6 per cent. that the Government claim. I understand that there have been redundancies at that school, as other unavoidable costs squeezed its staff budget.

I wish to be bipartisan and emphasise that both major parties bear a share of responsibility. However, the attempt by the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) to involve parents in his constituency in the campaign was, to put it kindly, mistaken. He sent thousands of letters to schools in his constituency—I believe that the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) may have done the same—inviting schools to distribute the letters to parents, who would then return them to him. I wrote to the Minister to tell him that I would mention that today. Those letters wrongly put all the blame on the last Conservative Government. They do not explain that the problem is not only the formula but its extended life. It should have been put out of its misery years ago.

The letter also claims that all the credit for the extra funding should go to the county's Labour MPs. That ignores the huge efforts made by local head teachers in the lobby, the thousands of letters from governors and parents and the tidal wave of general opinion expressed throughout the county, including in the local media. People power, not Labour MPs, won the useful but modest concession for the current year.

The letter may have been too party political, but I was fascinated. A Minister, the hon. Member for Redditch, and a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Department for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Worcester, were prepared to stoke up such anticipation of an extra sum for the coming year, assuring us that the money was already earmarked. I received from the Secretary of State this morning a letter that assured me that that was not the case, but I remain unconvinced. I cannot believe that people in their position would risk having to criticise their own Government for failing to deliver, so I have high hopes.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): We are also constituency Members of Parliament.

Mr. Luff: That may be so. The hon. Lady is a good constituency Member of Parliament but I do not think she would want to criticise her Government for failing to deliver or that she would encourage thousands of her constituents to write in that way unless she had reasonably confident expectations.

I understand that the Government will change the formula in the 2003-04 financial year. I have pressed for a long time for a commitment to change the formula and

to make a commitment to a time scale. The information was available at the beginning of the summer and I am pleased about that. I hope that the Minister will restate the commitment today.

I want to know, too, how long the transitional arrangements will take, and to have a clear indication of the basis on which the new formula will work, although I appreciate that the details cannot be revealed today. A new formula is all very well, but it must be much fairer than the one it replaces. Put simply, schools have a national curriculum, national targets and standards and national pay scales. It is difficult to see any justification for significant discrepancies in funding, especially between shire counties.

There is speculation that the implementation could be delayed beyond 2003, and that the transitional arrangements will be lengthy. I hope that is not the case and I look to the Minister for some words of comfort when he replies to the debate. If it is the case, another generation of schoolchildren could go through Worcestershire's schools before any benefit is felt from the changes. I know that education spending is rising overall and I am glad about that, but the 1997-2001 Labour Government spent a lower share of the nation's wealth on education than the Conservative Government they replaced. Their achievements are a good deal more modest than they are sometimes fond of claiming.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising the issue. It will not go away; it was the subject of much attention before the last election. I hope that the cynical attempt by Labour Members in the county to raise the letter will be the harbinger of good news for our schools later in the financial year.

My hon. Friend knows that I have to dash away and I will not therefore hear the Minister's reply, but I shall read it later. We will return to the matter if the Minister does not give us what we want. The issue is important for our schools, especially as it concerns learning and skills councils, which my hon. Friend will mention in a moment, as Bromsgrove schools, including high schools and sixth forms, will be equally affected in the most bizarre ways. We want to know more about that.

Mr. Luff: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. I shall now give way to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor), whom I am happy to call my hon. Friend.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene to support him in raising awareness of the unfairness of the funding arrangements for shire counties. As I have the rare privilege of being an independent, I do not have to attack either party for past events. I am looking only for an improvement.

I was concerned to hear from a head teacher in my constituency that at the recent Ofsted inspection, an inspector had told her, mistakenly, that her school was well funded. She could not move him from that misapprehension, even though the school passed the Ofsted inspection well. It is disturbing that Ofsted inspectors are given incorrect information before an inspection and that an inaccurate perception of Worcestershire schools' funding seems to be widely held.

Mr. Luff: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I hope that the Minister will reply, either now or subsequently, to the important point, which has not been made before, about what Ofsted thinks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) mentioned learning and skills councils. I am not happy about those undemocratic organisations; their indicative budgets for post-16 education are very worrying and came as a big shock to schools in my constituency. The head teacher of Droitwich Spa high school, Mr. Cledwyn-Davies, wrote to the Department for Education and Skills, asking to see the formula used to calculate these budgets. He was told that it was not available.

There are bizarre results, as my hon. Friend said. Mr. Cledwyn-Davies's school, with 280 pupils in the sixth form, will receive £675,289, while Haybridge high school, with only 219 students will receive £728,000; it has 61 fewer pupils and £53,000 more cash. We need to know what is behind the formula. At Prince Henry's high school in Evesham, the shortfall is estimated at £40,000—and that is on the back of promises that real-term funding for school sixth forms would be maintained. That is manifestly not happening. Something has gone wrong and if it is not addressed, Droitwich Spa high school will have to make three teachers redundant. The Department is making soothing noises, but the final figures will not be known until December. That adds a new dimension to the unfairness of the SSA formula. There is also the uncertainty and cost caused by the new exam arrangements for AS and A2 levels and the problems of the basic need formula for increasing sixth form accommodation—which has meant that Prince Henry's sixth form has increased from 110 to 340 with no additional accommodation.

The issue is largely, but not solely, to do with the SSA, as I hope the Minister understands. The Government enjoy their image of seeking fairness and justice but while they rightly fight injustice internationally, they ignore a real injustice at home. Indeed, the local government Minister has refused even to receive a delegation of local head teachers for a 15-minute meeting for them to explain the consequences of Government policy in Worcestershire. Are not the 70,000 Worcestershire schoolchildren worth even 15 minutes of the Minister's time? It is not good enough to say, as the Minister will when he replies, that Worcestershire has had real increases in its education funding. Under successive Governments, it usually has had. The problem is that other shire counties, never mind inner-city authorities, have always got even more. Our relative poverty has got worse, year after year. Successive Governments—Conservative and Labour—have valued Worcestershire's schoolchildren less highly than those from other parts of the country. Worcestershire needs to hear from the Minister that that scandal will end, and end quickly.

1.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire

[Mr. Ivan Lewis]

(Mr. Luff) on securing the debate. It is an important issue and all hon. Members who represent areas with those difficulties and uneven funding acknowledge such problems and the need to do something about them. I, more than anybody, relate to the concerns that he expressed. My own area of Bury has those problems and has been involved in the same campaign, as I shall detail in a moment.

I shall first address the hon. Gentleman's reference to sixth-form funding and the concerns about the transfer of responsibility and resources to the learning and skills councils. I reassure him that the Government have made it clear, through their real-terms guarantee, that the funding will be distributed and allocated fairly. There has been negotiation and discussion about reaching a fair definition of pupil numbers in school sixth forms for the purpose of calculating the real-terms guarantee for the year 2000-01. There has been a significant consultation process with all local education authorities to reach agreement on the baseline—the starting point for making that calculation—which will feed into funding allocations in the future.

I am pleased to say that Worcester was one of the authorities that raised concern about the baseline pupil number figure and that the LEA has now reached agreement with the Department on that figure, which will be reflected in an appropriate guarantee that is consistent with the real-terms guarantee and with the numbers that have been agreed between the LEA and the Department.

Mr. Luff: I want to express my gratitude for what the Minister is saying. Does he mean that each individual school will get a real-terms protection for funding?

Mr. Lewis: It depends on pupil numbers and the relationship between the numbers for the year 2000-01. It has been agreed in consultation with local authorities, the Local Government Association and others that that is the appropriate year to look at in calculating the baseline assessment. It is a transparent and fair formula for calculating the figure. The process that we intend to adopt in terms of your local authority—I mean the hon. Gentleman's local authority—has now been agreed between that LEA and the Department.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): I do not mind if the Minister refers to my local authority as well.

Mr. Lewis: We all have similar views on those issues.

There is a genuine worry about the inequality of funding in respect of the standard spending assessment formula. The hon. Gentleman said that he accepts that the Government have acknowledged the problem and are doing something about it, yet he suggested that somehow, in their first four years in office, they should have put right the in-built structural unfairness that has been in place for many years. Such a view is unreasonable. If the Conservative Government were unable and unwilling to change that formula during a 15 or 20-year period, it is extremely disingenuous to suggest not only to hon. Members but to people in Worcestershire that, in only four years, that problem should have been resolved.

Mr. Luff: We had six years in which to rectify the matter and the hon. Gentleman's Government have had four-and-a-half years to do so, so the blame is pretty evenly shared. We did not have 15 years in which to take such action.

Mr. Lewis: The unfairness of the formula pre-dates the poll tax. The problems were crystallised by the local government finance structure that was adopted to introduce that disastrous local taxation policy. The Government acknowledged in the Green Paper that the system is unfair and that they must make it fairer. Subsequent to that, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has now clearly committed itself to introducing a fairer formula on 1 April 2003. That is not a possibility or an aspiration but an unequivocal commitment that there will be a new, fairer and more even SSA formula not only for education, but for local government generally. It will make a significant difference to the hon. Gentleman's constituents and to mine.

It was amazingly bizarre that the hon. Gentleman attacked my hon. Friends the Members for Redditch (Jacqui Smith)—the Minister of State at the Department of Health—and for Worcester (Mr. Foster) for campaigning on probably the most important issue to local people among all the issues with which Members of Parliament are asked to deal. During the past few years, the standard spending assessment has been the major campaigning issue within my community and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). As we move towards the change in the SSA system, we are currently launching a further push to ensure that Ministers are fully aware of the need to change the formula so that it is fair and transparent.

Whatever their ministerial responsibilities, the colleagues to whom I referred would have been failing in their duty to their constituents if they had not made the matter a priority and campaigned locally about it. Accusations that there is control freakery in the parliamentary Labour party are unfounded and undermined by the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch and Parliamentary Private Secretaries insist on campaigning vigorously because the formula matters to their constituents, even when such campaigning may cause short-term embarrassment to the Government. I commend them for their campaign and for working in partnership with parents, head teachers and governors in their constituencies.

I must advise the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire that I have been involved in the campaign and, if my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch knows details of the local government settlement that is about to be announced, I should be delighted to have a cup of tea with her in the Tea Room after the debate and to be reassured that all the activity and correspondence in which I am involved is futile. That she may have access to information that the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are not even aware of when considering

the financial situation facing the country, particularly now, and knows details of next year's local government settlement is a most spurious accusation.

I understand why the hon. Gentleman may be embarrassed by my hon. Friends who led such a campaign in those communities on a matter of concern. He was seen to follow on the tail end of that campaign. Parents, head teachers and governors will be delighted that my hon. Friends led the campaign on a matter of such importance—fair funding for education in their schools. They demonstrated that they are good constituency Members of Parliament. That is the first priority for all Members, be they Minister, Parliamentary Private Secretary or Back Bencher.

It is misleading to suggest that the SSA formula in itself is the whole story. We know, as does every school in Worcestershire, that education funding has significantly increased since this Government came to power. The hon. Gentleman is disingenuous to dismiss that and suggest that that occurs every year and did so under the Conservatives, because it did not. Funding for primary and secondary schools went down under the last Conservative Government. That is a reason why they were turfed out of office in 1997. Extra resources for schools and for education are a primary reason why we had such an outstanding election result in June 2001.

We should examine Worcestershire's funding. Since 1998, Worcestershire's SSA has increased by nearly £30 million—almost 16 per cent. over three years. The amount that it receives from the standards fund increased from £4.3 million in 1998 to £17.9 million this year. The school standards direct grant, introduced last year, is worth £7.76 million to Worcestershire's schools this year.

The hon. Gentleman implies that there has not been a massive and significant investment in education since this Government came to power. When the figures for Hereford and Worcester were calculated jointly, capital expenditure on education in 1996-97—the last year for which the Conservative Government can be held to account—was £6.02 million. This year, Worcestershire will receive £16.5 million for capital investment.

The hon. Gentleman raised the matter of the standards fund and ring-fenced resources. One of the ways in which the Government have tried to address the unfairness and unevenness of standard spending assessments—while coming up with a long-term structural solution to achieve a fairer SSA regime—is to distribute significant amounts to local education authorities and schools outside that unfair formula, which filters in such a disproportionate way and leads to disadvantage and inequality. Hon. Members who represent constituencies where the SSA is low should, as an interim measure, welcome the ring-fencing and the standards funds.

The Government are not willing to apologise for the fact that some of the ring-fencing has been to ensure that our objective of raising standards in schools is achieved. The money should not be spent for purposes outside our priorities, such as literacy and numeracy, class sizes, special needs provision, textbooks and computers. We do not apologise for spending additional money on those vital elements of education. We celebrate the additional money given to education budgets from the school standards fund, and we are proud of it. We accept that the formula must change, and we will change it. We are the first Government willing to tackle that difficult problem. We will do that, and we are proud of the additional funds that we have put into schools in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and others. There is no question about it: education has received tangible additional investment.

Every poll taken of what is most popular about this Government has found that it is their achievements in education. People in schools throughout the country have experienced for themselves the difference between those barren Tory years and the growth in investment, revenue and capital during the first term of a Labour Government. We were not able to do everything. We were not able to make up for all those dreadful cuts in the latter years of the Tory Government, but we are proud of what we achieved.

Fishing Communities Regeneration Initiative

1.30 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): The cumulative effects of reduced fishing quotas, limits on days at sea, the closure of fishing grounds and high fuel prices, even though there is no tax on marine diesel, have all been crippling for this country's fishing industry over many years. That has serious consequences for fishing communities around our coasts, and has been graphically documented in a new report from the World Wide Fund for Nature, which states:

"Our fishing industry is disintegrating before our eyes. The UK fleet declined by 55 per cent. and the value of these catches has been reduced by 77 per cent. As a result of such changes, the number of full-time UK fishermen, after remaining relatively stable between 1970 and 1990, has fallen by 29 per cent. between 1990 and 2000."

That does not take account of many more onshore jobs in fishing communities that depend on the catching and have also disappeared.

We know that the Government cannot suddenly conjure up more fish in the sea, but people expect help in coping with these problems, and they also expect the Government to have a clear plan for the future of fishing. I do not think that the Government have such a plan. In the same circumstances, fishing industries in nearly all other European Union countries are in a much stronger position than ours, especially those in Holland and Spain. The WWF report shows that financial assistance for fishing in this country is the lowest in the European Union.

The report also asked whether the funds that are available are being used wisely, and I want to focus on that question in this debate. The view of fishermen is clear: they feel that they were the forgotten part of the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, when billions were heaped on farmers but little came to them. Matters came to a head earlier this year when the Scottish Executive announced £25 million of new money for fishing. That embarrassed our Government. The response was £6 million from MAFF for decommissioning, and £5.5 million from the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to be delivered through the regional development agencies, recognising their role and responsibility for regional economies.

I want to focus on that £5.5 million today. It was heralded on 2 April in a Government news release:

"Elliot Morley launches aid for English fishing industry",

including £5.5 million for

"retraining and rejuvenation at fishing ports."

What is happening to that money, and how wisely is it being spent in relation to the reason for which it was made available—problems in the fishing industry, and the effects on the people caught up in it? Immediately, I was mindful of a previous scheme run by the European Union called PESCA, which spent millions of pounds, sometimes on cobbles and Victorian lampposts, but did not relate at all to the problems caused by fisheries decline. It was entirely accidental if anyone in fishing, or displaced from it, benefited at all. I was determined to ensure, at least in my area, that that did not happen again.

I spent the summer pursuing the matter. I found a travesty of mismanagement, confusion and rushed bids. I am sorry to say that the target is being missed again, because this is anything but wise spending. There should be two key principles behind the initiative. First, the £5.5 million must be shared out fairly between the regions in proportion to the size of the fishing industry in each one. The bigger the industry in a community, the bigger the dent in the local economy. Secondly, the money should help the right people. Community is not an abstract term: it is about people. The guidance given to the RDAs on this matter by the DETR said that the

"divvy-up between the regions is intended to reflect the relative size of the demersal fishing industry within each region."

I have the official MAFF figures, and there is no correlation between the figures for size or value of catch and the shareout of the £5.5 million. The Yorkshire region accounts for 46 per cent. of the catch by weight, and 33 per cent. of the catch by value, but it is receiving only 24 per cent. of the £5.5 million.

I represent the port of Lowestoft: it accounts for 9.5 per cent. of the fish by weight and value, and yet the entire eastern region is receiving merely 7 per cent. of the £5.5 million. The south-east provides the worst example: that region accounts for only 2.5 per cent. by weight, and 3.6 per cent. by value, but it is receiving 22 per cent. of the total pot.

I asked a parliamentary question to determine the methodology that was employed. I was told that the regional development agencies were awarded £120,000 for each port that is located in their region, and that that accounted for 70 per cent. of the total, with the rest to be distributed in proportion to the weight of the catch. However, that methodology is fundamentally flawed and unfair, because the resources are not being sufficiently allocated to the places where the fishing industry is largest. I learned from another parliamentary question that that allocation was based on a list of 32 ports. I want to know where that list came from, because I have all the MAFF figures for demersal landings and I can find only the 21 MAFF-designated ports.

That matter raises another question: what is a fishing port? How can ports such as Lowestoft, Grimsby, Newlyn, Scarborough or Whitby, which have trawler industries that account for a significant part of the local economy, be compared with some of the other ports on the list, which merely have a small harbour with a small fleet of fishing boats, most of which are operated only part-time? Such smaller ports make an insignificant contribution to their local economies, yet their RDAs are receiving £120,000 for them. Some of those smaller ports, such as Southwold, which is located on the Suffolk coast a few miles south of my constituency, are not poor communities. Southwold is one of the wealthiest communities in the country, yet its regional development agency is receiving £120,000.

Worse still, I believe that the lists were not communicated to the regional development agencies. I visited the East of England Development Agency, which covers my region. Its staff had no idea about which fishing ports it was supposed to help, or the relative sizes of the ports within the region. It had picked six coastal towns, and it planned to divide evenly between them the eastern region's £390,000. It appears to have done that. However, five of the six ports that it chose are not on the

list of 32 ports, and I cannot find any records of landings; moreover, one of the two ports in the eastern region that are on that list is not on the list that the East of England Development Agency was using.

As a result, Lowestoft, which is in my constituency, and which is the third largest fishing community in England in terms of weight of catch—its catch amounts to nearly 10 per cent. of the national catch—has been offered merely £65,000 out of a total of £5.5 million. That cannot be right.

The Minister informed me in a letter that I received in September 2001 that Southwold was on the list of 32 ports. I think that that piece of information was supposed to make me feel better, but Southwold is not in my constituency—although it is in the Waveney district council area. As Lowestoft and Southwold are the only two ports on the list that are located in the eastern region, they should, logically, get all of the £390,000, even taking into account the way in which the Department has made its calculations.

I have established that the money has been wrongly divided up, but is it being spent on the right things? To repeat a point that I made earlier, the initiative under discussion was introduced because of the problems associated with the decline of the fishing industry, which is causing dents in many local economies.

A fishing community is a collection of people, and we must ensure that we help the right people. Help must be provided for the people who have already been displaced from fishing, and for those who are still either voluntarily of compulsorily losing their jobs in the industry. There are many unemployed fishermen in the area that I represent, or former fishermen who are unhappy with the job that they have had to take up, or who want to be retrained or to change their qualifications so that they can work on ships that they are not currently entitled to work on. The people who are struggling to survive in the fishing industry must also be helped. The Government are having to take draconian measures to try to conserve and, we hope, rebuild stocks, but it is important to ensure that, when that job is completed, there is still an industry to catch the fish—otherwise the fish will be caught by fishermen from other nations.

If we do not deal with those who are trying to struggle on in fishing, the inference is that we envisage no future for fishing and are just letting it fall to pieces and using the money to pick up those pieces, which, as the WWF says, is more expensive in the long term. Restructuring is the best and fairest way to help people affected in fishing communities.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a point on behalf of the fishing communities in Scarborough and Whitby. Does my hon. Friend recognise that many key fishing communities in England are on their knees in terms of economic decline? The port of Whitby and many of the wards in Scarborough are some of the worst affected areas in terms of economic decline, with objective 2 status. That is another criterion that should have been taken into account when, as my hon. Friend puts it, the money was divvied up. It is an outrage that certain wealthy communities in the south of England seem to have benefited from a scheme that was designed to help my constituents and his.

Mr. Blizzard: My hon. Friend is right. It is a pity that the people who drew up the scheme did not take note of those points.

I was heartened to read in guidance note 6, which was given to RDAs, that

> "Ministers do not wish to be prescriptive on the sort of project that RDAs may wish to fund."

That encouraged me, but I have a sad tale to tell about my constituency. When I returned from holiday towards the end of September, I found that my council had submitted a bid that had already been agreed with EEDA to spend the £65,000 on free child care places for people in two wards in central Lowestoft, and a community development officer. The council's report told me that the development followed detailed discussions with EEDA about the nature of potential bids. Sadly, no discussions were held with the fishing industry or anyone else. That is unacceptable.

The council tells me that the criteria of the scheme direct what can and cannot be submitted and that the rules feel prohibitive, especially to small authorities. The question is where do the rules come from if Ministers do not want the scheme to be prescriptive? What started out as millions of pounds of aid for the English fishing industry ends up with the country's third largest fishing port receiving £65,000 for child care and a community development officer. That is a travesty.

To be fair, following intervention by the council leader, another bid has now been made in consultation with the fishing industry. I hope that it will succeed, but if it does not I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister to investigate why.

Where is the accountability? I pursued the matter all summer, and various Departments seemed to be in disarray. On 19 July, the Leader of the House told me that the Department of Trade and Industry was responsible for the matter. Indeed, a DTI Minister answered my first parliamentary question. In midsummer, I was told that the matter fell within the remit of DTLR. Eventually, on 5 September, I received a letter from the Minister's colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), and on 6 September an identical letter from the Minister telling me that there was no case for reviewing the allocation.

I hope that the Minister now appreciates that there is a case for reviewing the allocation. I invite her to sit down with me and other hon. Members present to go through it in detail and unpick the tangled mess. The money is not yet spent; there is still time. Sadly, if it is not possible to do that, the only other course open to me in order properly to represent my constituents is to refer the matter to the National Audit Office to find out whether it is satisfied that the money that was made available is being properly shared out and spent in the right way.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend's peroration. He has done an enormous service to the industry, and to Members of

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

Parliament who represent fishing constituencies, in highlighting the problem and showing what has happened. Does he agree that the real problem now facing fishing is how to prise more money from the Treasury so that we can invest in fishing as an industry to help, as the WWF suggests, to bridge it from its present decline to the sustainable catches that lie ahead, ensuring proper conservation?

Mr. Blizzard: My hon. Friend is right. It is clear that the country and the Government need a plan for the future of fishing, which we can ask the Treasury to fund.

I have presented a picture of how the delivery process simply did not work and how policy objectives set in Westminster went amiss. We are left with a fishing industry that feels neglected and unwanted yet again. Worst of all, the £5.5 million which the Government made available because of the crisis in fisheries and which was welcomed by all hon. Members representing fishing areas, is in danger of being dissipated in ways unrelated to fishing.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on obtaining this debate on the Government's fishing initiative. I should make the point that that initiative is a specific part of the package of help for the fishing industry and does not represent the whole story.

My hon. Friend dealt with two main points: the make-up of the package and the accountability and monitoring of the programme. However, I start by dealing with his suggestion that we should sit down and have a meeting. My letter to him, dated 6 September, states clearly:

"If it helps, I would be quite willing to meet you to discuss this matter further."

Since that date, he has not approached me for a meeting. I think that it would have helped and that he should have taken up the offer and tried to find a constructive way forward.

Mr. Blizzard: My hon. Friend has already said that she saw no case for review. I am afraid that I took that as a rebuff. I went on holiday, and since then things have moved on. It is too late now.

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend may have gone on holiday, but the offer was there. It was clearly set out and could and should have been taken up. If he wants to have a meeting, I am still more than willing to do so.

The sea fishing industry has been a traditional and important sector of the United Kingdom's economy, especially in my hon. Friend's constituency, where many people's livelihood depends on the industry's success. However, as he rightly says, like some other of our traditional industries, fishing has been in decline. Colleagues here would no doubt agree that the Government have a duty to consider what extra help they should offer beyond what is already available to the industry and the affected communities.

As I am sure my hon. Friend would acknowledge, the Government's response has been positive. We share with the fish catching and processing organisations the goal of a sustainable, viable future for the industry and are taking firm action to address long-term needs. At the same time, we must address the future direction for priorities. We all seek a sustainable industry that is economically profitable and uses environmentally sustainable practices.

On 2 April, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), then a MAFF Minister, announced various measures to address a range of problems faced by the industry, including the launch of the European Union fisheries structural fund grants scheme for England, with the aim of helping the industry's adjustment. That package relates specifically to the industry and includes £11 million in grants over the next three years. The scheme seeks to improve the quality and value of fish caught and to promote the use of environmentally friendly equipment. My hon. Friend also made available £6 million for extra support in England to assist restructuring in the fishing industry by decommissioning fishing vessels.

The Government recognised that there was a strong case for helping coastal communities that might be affected by the restructuring of the industry. I would argue that that represents a wider remit, which comes under my Department. On 4 April, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), then a DETR Minister, announced a £5.5 million fishing communities regeneration initiative. That is being made available through the regional development agencies during the current year, to provide help for communities in regions with fishing ports, including working up local regeneration strategies and getting help from existing regeneration programmes more easily. That is clearly a wider remit, relating to helping and regenerating communities, as opposed to concentrating on the industry.

My hon. Friend might want to consider whether arguments about the north-south divide are unjust: if a particular industry is in decline, there is likely to be an impact on a particular community, or a pocket of a town. There are pockets of disadvantage even in some of the more affluent areas of the south-east.

Mr. Mitchell: I want to point out that, first, the £11 million was not new money, but was being recycled, and secondly the package was provided because European Governments were giving far greater aid—as was the Scottish Executive—directly to their industries. As it was being put through the regional development agencies, which is a policy that I support, it was surely incumbent on my hon. Friend's Department to impress on the agencies the importance of fishing to the local economy and the fishing communities. The extent to which agencies have realised that—and brought aid, development and support to the fishing industry in their areas—has been variable.

Ms Keeble: The £11 million mentioned by my hon. Friend was announced by MAFF. I have been talking about the £5.5 million that is going through the regional development agencies, and which is relevant to the issues of the wider community. It is a specific scheme for which my Department is responsible and about which we have been in correspondence.

The North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber, East of England, South East and South West regional development agencies each received an allocation to take into account two factors. The allocation was to provide £120,000 for each port with the largest demersal fishing catches recorded in the then most recent MAFF table. That accounted for £3.84 million of the £5.5 million. The rest was distributed in proportion to the weight of the catches at the relevant ports.

The exact list of the ports included has been a matter of some dispute, because when the scheme was announced and proposals began to be made—in consultation with the local authorities—the most recent MAFF figures were from 1999. The list that has been constantly quoted in this debate is the 2000 list.

Lawrie Quinn: The Minister mentions the allocation that was made for ports, but does she recognise that there are nine to 12 shore-based jobs based on the fishing activity out of ports like Whitby and Scarborough? That is not true of some of the other ports. On my reckoning, the Yorkshire and Humber regional development agency should, on the basis of catch alone, have been provided with about £2 million to allocate. In fact it received about £1 million. It is incumbent on my hon. Friend to take account of such matters. Perhaps my community feels, quite rightly, that it has been significantly shortchanged by the allocations calculated by her Department.

Ms Keeble: The allocation of money between different areas was always going to be the subject of great dispute. What was perfectly fair about the decisions that were taken was the recognition that when a sector of industry is affected in a community, the community or area will encounter a problem, great or small. A certain allocation was made with reference to the town, and a proportion was added to reflect the size of the catch. That approach tries to achieve a fair weighting by taking into account a number of issues.

In addition, to ensure that the allocation of the money reflects the needs, priorities and pressures in the different communities, it was made clear to the RDAs that they will have substantial flexibility in spending the money. The weighting tries fairly to reflect the fact that there are several different communities, and there are also different weightings for different catches. There is also a high level of flexibility. To those who think that there is not enough accountability, I should say that the schemes have been worked out with the various partners and that local councils have had an input into the design of the plans and the priorities that have been put to the RDAs.

Mr. Blizzard: The figures that I used were the 1999 figures from the Minister's Department.

Ms Keeble: Fine. My hon. Friend will accept that much of his argument was about the towns and ports that should be included and about the amounts involved. It is important to put on record that the figures were from 1999.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): The Minister cannot deny that Hull, Whitby, Scarborough, Bridlington and Grimsby are some of the top ports in the UK and account for about £25 million worth of the UK catch. Ports such as Poole, Shoreham and Portsmouth account for only £2 million, but the percentage split in the funding to support those communities is 23 per cent. for ports such as Grimsby, Hull, Bridlington and Scarborough and 21 per cent. for ports in the south. That is simply unfair, as my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) tried to demonstrate. Hon. Members present who represent ports feel that the Minister has not dealt with the issue.

Ms Keeble: We must make an allocation that recognises the fact that there are several different areas. One might say—although this would depend on a detailed knowledge of the industry—that large ports could modernise their industry and retain more of it. However, the important point is that the allocation weights for two issues and gives the RDAs discretion. It is also strictly time limited because it is a one-year fund, although I am concerned that we shall spend three quarters of the year arguing about the allocation of the money rather than discussing how it will be spent.

Management of the initiative will follow the same arrangements as the successor schemes to the single regeneration budget during 2001 and 2002. The RDAs will monitor how the money is spent in accordance with existing SRB programme requirements.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) probably knows, two of the five schemes that the East of England RDA is considering come from Waveney. I am not sure whether he is aware of the details of the bids that have been made for his area, but if he is not, I will be happy to write to him. The same goes for my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn). I have some details, although they might not be complete.

Lawrie Quinn: I am aware of them.

Ms Keeble: Good. I am happy to deal with the issue in that way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney asked about the types of scheme. They have been introduced in consultation with local agencies and, in particular, local councils. Retraining needs will go wider than the immediate needs of the industry.

My hon. Friends clearly have concerns, and I am more than happy to go through the finer details with them. However, I urge them also to deal with the councils and the RDAs to ensure that progress is made on the scheme, which is intended to help not only hard-pressed industries but hard-pressed communities to recover from some of the damage that has been inflicted on them as a result of structural difficulties in the fishing industries.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 25 October 2001

[MR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Genetics and Insurance

[Relevant documents: Fifth Report from the Science and Technology Committee, Session 2000-01, HC 174, and the Government's response thereto, Cm 5286.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

2.30 pm

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Today's debate provides an opportunity to promote the forward thinking of a Select Committee that has not received the attention that it deserves—or that, at least, is my view, and I always think objectively. The report that we are discussing was published in April and was the Committee's fifth report of the previous Session. It considers the use that insurers make of the results of genetic tests in assessing risks and setting premiums. The report is short, but it picks up some of the important recommendations made following a year-long inquiry by the Conservative-dominated predecessor Committee. Those recommendations were, sadly, addressed inadequately by the then Government.

In many ways, that 1995 report was ahead of its time and must not be lost only because it is more than six years old. It is a very good read.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The hon. Lady, with her normal courtesy and charm, has just referred to me, as I was the Minister with responsibility for science and technology in the Conservative Government. We took the Select Committee seriously, although we did not agree absolutely with what it said.

Lynne Jones: The hon. Gentleman is right. Eventually, after much persuasion, he accepted one of our major recommendations but, sadly, not the recommendation related to today's debate.

The purpose of the 1995 report was to encourage action that would ensure that society receives the benefits deriving from genetic research while anticipating and controlling possible adverse effects. Issues raised in that report, including those on the subject of genetics and insurance, are only now being adequately recognised and addressed.

As the most long-in-the-tooth member of the Select Committee that produced the 1995 report, I have the honour of introducing the debate, because our Chairman, Michael Clark, the former hon. Member for Rayleigh, did not seek re-election in June. It is a tribute to his skill in chairing the Committee, which is not always well behaved, that we have produced so many effective and influential reports over the past four years.

I shall begin by saying a few words about the science of genetics before moving on to consider the Committee's conclusions and recommendations and the Government's most welcome response.

All genes in the human body are expected to be sequenced in the near future. Genetic tests have already been developed to identify individuals or groups of people who might develop particular disabilities or diseases or have a genetic predisposition for such conditions. Although at present they are few in number and relate to diseases associated with a defect in a single gene, gene sequencing is becoming so rapid that it is expected that genetic tests, with some predictive value for a wide variety of disorders, are likely to become available over the next decade. It is even conceivable that an individual's entire gene sequence will be able to be used as a diagnostic tool. Increasing knowledge of the human genome and genetic variations is being used to discover molecular processes involved in common diseases, such as diabetes, osteoporosis, Alzheimer's and heart disease—and, of course, cancer, which was the subject of another excellent Committee report.

Among the expected benefits are better diagnosis and treatment, including drugs designed precisely to fit the molecules implicated in disease, and new gene therapies. Genetic science, including cloning techniques, holds the hope of new therapies for previously untreatable diseases. The economic benefits of DNA research to Governments and insurers are highly significant, as the management of untreatable or inadequately treated diseases soaks up enormous resources. Prevention, better treatments or even cures could stem major drains on budgets. Increasing knowledge of the genetic basis of disease may be the best chance of halting spiralling health and nursing care costs.

It can easily be envisaged that extensive genetic testing and screening, especially where results are misunderstood, could do great harm. People may be denied health or life insurance or be expected to pay unaffordable premiums. Employers may be reluctant to take on those identified as having a genetic "defect". I should add that abnormal genes may confer beneficial traits. There are fears of the creation of a genetic underclass that faces widespread discrimination. People's choice of a partner might be affected, pressure could be put on parents to terminate pregnancies and there might be less tolerance of people with disabilities. There is a real danger that people would decline to take genetic testing. Such reluctance would not only deny people the benefits of knowing the results, but could hinder genetic research that will be needed if genetic knowledge is fully to benefit society.

Genetic testing does not increase the rate at which disorders appear. On the contrary, if testing leads to prevention or treatment the opposite is likely to be the case. The insurance industry should therefore have little to fear from the increased knowledge that genetic testing provides, and ultimately should have much to gain if it leads to a reduction in susceptibility to diseases. If people who have potential genetic problems were deterred from taking tests or seeking clinical advice, possible health benefits would not be realised.

Our Committee was concerned about the impact of demands by insurers for genetic tests results, not only on people's health, but on research programmes if people were discouraged from taking tests for such programmes. Our predecessor Committee proposed that the individual's right to privacy should prevail in relation to genetic tests. Likewise, we acknowledged insurers' main concern about the risks of adverse

[Lynne Jones]

selection, which was that people whose tests revealed susceptibility to genetic diseases would buy expensive policies to exploit the system. We felt that it should be possible to find ways to regulate the use of genetic information and insurance that protected the interests of society in enabling as many people as possible to obtain insurance, and protected the insurance companies.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): In the Committee's investigations, did it find any evidence—academic or experiential, perhaps from the United States—of widespread use of adverse selection by patients who had received disappointing diagnoses? Is there any evidence that people rush out and buy insurance policies, or does evidence suggest that it hardly happens, if at all? Is there no evidence either way?

Lynne Jones: We found no evidence, although it is theoretically possible that people could react in that way. As I shall explain, few could take advantage of such knowledge.

I return to the protection of insurance companies. The Committee had previously suggested, as an example, the introduction of an exemption from a moratorium on the use of genetic tests for high-value policies. Our 1995 report suggested that possible model, and recommended that the insurance industry should be given a year to propose its own solution or face legislation. I am sorry if it will upset the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) to hear that the then Government, to their discredit, did not accept that recommendation, but placed their faith in the insurance industry doing the decent thing. The resulting Association of British Insurers' code of practice was weak and ineffective, having clearly been formulated on the basis of the least common denominator acceptable to all its members.

Against that background, the Committee decided to revisit the issue, pointing out that the unwillingness of the previous Government to become involved in the subject had contributed to the atmosphere of confusion and ignorance that pervaded the use of genetic test results.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): When Professor Martin Bobrow was giving evidence to the Committee about the experience with HIV and AIDS, the hon. Lady mentioned the many sufferers who had taken out large insurance policies without disclosing their HIV status, and asked him whether the potential costs for insurance and the creation of a level playing field for insuring a client justified the insurers' demands for access to that information. Professor Bobrow said that it was a question of balance, but that insurance companies are entitled to be protected against being taken for a ride. Does the hon. Lady wish to say any more about that knowledge? I come new to the subject, but recognise that there are some concerns.

Lynne Jones: It is right that we should put such points to people like Professor Bobrow. However, the Committee acknowledged that there was a theoretical risk of adverse selection and formulated ways of trying to address such concerns. Genetic testing is not the same as HIV—although now that people with the virus do not necessarily go on to develop full-blown AIDS for some time, the situation in each case has become similar.

The Committee also acknowledged insurers' concerns about the risk of adverse selection and accepted, as a principle, that commercial insurance companies should have access to the same information as applicants, where it is relevant and reliable. Crucially, it added the caveat that that should apply only if there were no adverse consequences for society as a whole—for example, discouraging people from taking tests. In view of the very small numbers involved, the Committee suggested that insurers could afford to ignore genetic test results for the foreseeable future.

Cases involving genetic test results comprise less than one tenth of 1 per cent. of all insurance business, and the Committee questioned the predictive significance of positive test results and their actuarial relevance at such an early stage in the development of genetic science. Adult-onset single gene disorders are so rare that few people would know that they might suffer from an inherited disease within a normal lifespan. As Professor Bobrow pointed out in his evidence to the Committee, genetic tests might be good at distinguishing those who carry a particular gene from those who do not, but they are less accurate at identifying those who will succumb to the disease.

In view of that, the Committee strongly criticised the industry for acting in too precipitate a manner and for being too eager to establish its right to use the results of genetic tests, regardless of their relevance or reliability. However, it praised those enlightened insurance companies which had voluntarily introduced a no-disclosure policy for genetic test results. They deserve a mention—Co-operative Insurance Society Ltd., Standard Life Assurance Company and Virgin Direct Personal Finance Service Ltd.

The Committee also criticised insurance companies for failing to clarify their policies on the use of test results. Many gave the impression that they either did not want people to know what they were doing or, even worse, did not understand the principles behind their own policies. Several companies, and the ABI, changed their policies during the course of the inquiry because questioning had exposed their inadequacies. The Committee called on each insurance company to make a clear statement of its policy and on the industry to publish more actuarial data supporting the changes insurers make to insurance premiums on the basis of positive test results.

The Committee called for a voluntary moratorium on the use of all positive genetic test results for at least the next two years to give time for more research on the actuarial and scientific relevance of genetic test results, and the possible consequences of their use for research and for health care. If the insurers were unable or unwilling to enforce the moratorium, it recommended that the Government enforce it by legislation, although it was not in favour of legislation denying insurers access to all genetic test results, as has been enacted in some overseas countries. Tests can prove that people do not have a specific genetic defect, and it is in the interests of those with a family history of genetic illness that insurers should take into account negative tests.

The Committee also examined the role of the Genetics and Insurance Committee, which is the regulatory committee that the Government set up to evaluate the scientific and actuarial relevance of genetic tests proposed by the insurance industry. We called for the committee's procedures and membership to be reformed. Specifically, we said that it was an unacceptable conflict of interest for a geneticist nominated by the ABI to judge his own test application as a member of GAIC. We recommended that the reformed committee re-examine the decision to approve the use of the Huntington's genetic test by insurers.

We also considered the role of the Human Genetics Commission. We recommended that it should continue to monitor the use of genetic tests by insurers and the consequences of their actions in the widest context. We also said that it should continue to advise the Government on developments and be given extra resources if that meant extra work. The HGC responded positively to our report. Its interim recommendations were published in May and the comments that it made to inform the Government's response were published in June. The reply from the Department of Health was published on 23 October. It was late in coming, and arrived just in time for this debate; nevertheless, it was worth waiting for. It largely accepted the Committee's recommendations.

Published at the same time was the ABI announcement that the industry had agreed to a five-year moratorium on the use of genetic test results for life insurance up to £500,000, and critical illness insurance, long-term care insurance and income protection insurance up to £300,000, with a review of those financial limits after five years.

I congratulate the Government on persuading the ABI to extend the two-year moratorium and the £100,000 limit for life insurance, which it announced in May, no doubt as a gesture of good will. Those developments were brought about because of the Government's stance, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health outlined just after the publication of the Committee's report. He said that he would, if necessary, consider legislation to prevent the inappropriate use of genetic information for insurance purposes. That approach was first recommended by our predecessor Committee in 1995 and finally results have been achieved.

Beyond the £500,000 and £300,000 limits, the industry may use positive genetic test results only where approved by GAIC. The Government agree with the Committee that insurance companies were wrong to use the results of genetic tests to load premiums before those tests were approved by GAIC.

I am sure I speak for my former fellow Committee members when I welcome the Government's acceptance that an independent mechanism is needed to enforce the moratorium and the proposal for an independent complaints system. GAIC's remit is to be extended so that it can monitor compliance with the moratorium and with the ABI's new code of practice. It will be asked to report annually to Ministers on that.

We also welcome the publication of the ABI's first compliance report and its agreement to consult outside bodies on its revised code of practice. The code should be introduced swiftly, and those outside bodies should include patients' groups. The code must make it clear that insurers must not use results that are taken from genetic tests for research purposes. The Government agree that insurers should take negative test results into account where a geneticist confirms their relevance.

We welcome the Government's agreement to review and extend the membership of GAIC and their acceptance that there was a perceived conflict of interest in having the ABI genetics adviser on the committee. We make no criticism of Professor Raeburn's personal conduct, but we welcome his decision to step down.

The Government have acknowledged that the reformed GAIC might need to revisit the committee's decision to approve the use of the Huntington's disease test. They have also undertaken to encourage further actuarial research to evaluate the effects of genetic conditions on insurance risk, and have made it clear that such research should be published and be subject to peer review—quite right too. Also welcome is the Government's acknowledgement of the concern that some of those who carry an inherited disorder may find insurance difficult to obtain because of their family history, and the proposal to consult genetic support groups and the industry to examine what can be done to help such people. I hope that when the Minister replies, she will be able to give us an idea of the likely time scale in which this is to be carried out.

As I draw my remarks to an end, it would be uncharacteristic if I did not make one criticism. However, it is a small one. The Government say that they will keep under review the adequacy of GAIC's and HGC's resources. Such an expression is often a useful formulation for inaction. Evidence to the Committee suggested that such bodies were already overstretched. For example, GAIC has apparently been dependent upon the good will of actuaries nominated by the Faculty and Institute of Actuaries to provide independent actuarial reviews free of charge, instead of paying the normal rate. The HGC's June statement says that it foresees a need to fund external expert advice, surveys and modelling, and further public consultative meetings. I hope that the Government will respond positively to requests from those bodies for additional resources.

I am pleased to have been able to follow through to a satisfactory conclusion, if a belated one, the recommendations to which I contributed in 1995. I will not be a member of the Science and Technology Select Committee when it is reconstituted, which I hope will be very soon, but I have been most honoured to be able to participate in the work of the Committee over the past nine years. I thank other colleagues for their contributions and wish the new Committee well.

Finally, I apologise if I have to leave before the end of the debate, and particularly if I am not able to return to hear the Minister's response. It is expected that there will be a debate on social security regulations some time after 4 pm, in which I hope to participate. I will hot-foot it back as soon as I can, but if I do not make it for the Minister's response or for the contributions of hon. Members who speak for Opposition parties, I promise that I will read the *Hansard* record avidly.

2.52 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones). I, too, have to offer my apologies. I pushed a meeting back this afternoon to enable me to participate in the debate, but I cannot push it entirely back, so I will have to leave before the end of the debate. I find myself, as always, in awe of the hon. Lady. Her ability constructively to criticise her Government leaves us full of admiration. On this occasion she also provided an admirable summary of the work of the Select Committee, and I am delighted that we are debating this matter, which is of broad public significance and in which there is much public interest. A debate in this Chamber can at least give the matter an airing.

As I said in an earlier intervention, I was, in a long ago age, pre-1997, the Minister with responsibility for science and technology. I remember dealing with some of these matters with the predecessor Committee. The issues are complex, and as the then Minister I had to try to balance the principles behind the concept of insurance with an important series of rapidly emerging scientific developments in the area of genetics. I had also to attempt to anticipate how that area would continue to develop.

In the end, we found a roughly amicable solution, with one or two false starts in my relationship with the Select Committee. It is significant that the Human Genetics Advisory Commission, which I had been involved in setting up, considered this issue at its first meeting. Indeed, its first report was on this issue. Its successor committee, the Human Genetics Commission, which has a slightly adapted remit, has also taken a close interest in what is happening and has recently reported its views of the matter.

The report was one of the series that we were considering in terms of advice to the Government. The conclusions that we drew are significant, because they attempted to be constructive in relation to an important industry, which provides assurance to people by giving them insurance, and its needs, and the way that science could raise questions about the public's confidence in the process of research and how that would affect their problems. The Alzheimer's Society summed up our report's conclusions rather well. It stated, first, that

"people affected by genetic disorders are at risk of social exclusion and discrimination".

We found some evidence that that was a real worry. Furthermore,

"the insurance industry failed to demonstrate a need for genetic information".

Again, I think that that was admitted in the evidence sessions, and subsequently.

I understand that four of the genetic tests have been included in a reassessment by the Association of British Insurers as being unreliable. It was clear during our session that the insurers were learning to come to terms with the science. Although one of our conclusions suggested that insurers appeared to have been more interested in establishing their future right to use genetic test results in assessing premiums than in the reliability or relevance of such tests, I took the view that a marker had been set to show the industry that it needed to be more careful about rushing ahead with tests that had not been fully verified. To do so could have produced a very negative effect on the way the industry was perceived.

The summary also stated that the Committee believed that

"the insurance industry was able to withstand the risk of adverse selection."

That emerged in the evidence; certain companies made it very clear. A moratorium would help to prevent genetic discrimination and would encourage families to participate in genetic research without fear. That is an important facet of the Committee's aims.

There is a problem; it may appear that we are just bashing the insurance industry. However, that is not true. We wanted to give the public a wider confidence that the insurance industry was taking into account the progression of science and the existence of tests; that it was being asked to think carefully about its precipitate use of tests, which have subsequently been thought unreliable—even that for Huntingdon's disease may need to be reassessed by the reconformed GAIC—and that we understood that the principle of insurance slightly conflicted with the concept of a genetic disorder, because genetics can be used to anticipate the likelihood of developing a disease, raising the question of what the insurance industry should do to take account of that. Inherited genetic disorders might also need to be considered. The issues are complex and I do not have time to go into them now, but we discussed them at length.

The HGC's commentary brought out a point that concerned many of us. It stated:

"It is our impression that the main principle underpinning private insurance contracts— 'utmost good faith'—bears more heavily on the applicant than on the insurer."

Much evidence showed that the insurance industry was aware that a degree of transparency would be needed in the new areas in which science was creating an impact. I am delighted that that is beginning to be apparent in the statement that we have just received from the ABI.

Genetic tests are important and there is no doubt that we must develop them, not necessarily for immediate adaptation by the insurance industry, but to try to understand how we can use genetics to improve the quality of human life and to lessen disease. Several members of the Committee went to the Sanger centre in Cambridge, and we were impressed by the progress being made in genomics and by the scientists' insistence that they needed volunteers to take tests. It was crucial to their ability to progress with the science of genetics that people, and of course families—because they are important to the understanding of the subject—should come forward. Any barrier to their doing that, in the form of the thought that something that might be discovered about them would prevent them from obtaining insurance, would slow down genetics research and cause a great deal of concern. That has not only been recognised by the ABI. It has been mentioned in many of the other documents that we have. We must assist in research excellence if we are to make real progress.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The ABI code has now been published. If problems arise because certain companies do not observe it in detail, it will still allow ministerial comment to be made. However, I certainly welcome it. I know that my views are not shared by all members of the Committee, but I believe that the industry finding a solution for itself would be better than the Government trying to regulate. I hope that the Minister will not disagree with me—she is now experienced in her job—when I say that Governments are not always terribly good or timely at regulating. It would be much better if we could encourage the industry to regulate itself. If the ABI could be criticised, it would be because, until recently, it has been sluggish—but at least we have now got there.

Dr. Evan Harris: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. I invite him to compare regulation of the insurance industry with our experience under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. That Act has stood the test of time because, 10 or 11 years later, only a few parts of it may need to be tightened. In that sense, the then Government did a very good job by legislating and not leaving the industry, especially the private sector, to regulate itself in such an important and controversial area.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. However, I think that the area that he mentioned, which includes embryology, is a good deal more sensitive and more difficult than that covered in our discussions with the ABI on insurance and genetics. If he reflects on it, I believe that he will follow the point. None the less, I do not disagree with him; not only was the 1990 Act very good, but we have recently been able to extend it to degenerative diseases and stem cell research. I pay personal tribute to him for his leadership role—I am sure that he did not intervene on me in order to be paid a compliment, but he deserves it—in explaining to a sceptical House why stem cell research was an important advance and why we should amend the 1990 Act in order to extend its provisions to degenerative diseases.

I shall be brief. I compliment the Association of British Insurers. I hope that it will police its own moratorium to ensure that there are no exceptions. I hope that it will do its best to stimulate research in genetics. I agree that it may not be appropriate that it should have its own person on the Genetic and Insurance Committee, however much he may be respected by the industry, but I commend it for taking early steps to include a scientist because that will lead to better understanding. That was something that I had encouraged.

My final plea is that if the ABI maintains the moratorium for five years, it must not be used simply a breathing space. Those five years need to be used to allow intense understanding of the problems, and of how research can be developed; a deeper understanding of the positive and negative implications of tests, and what tests could be carried out; and a much better and wider public understanding, so that people realise that being tested for genetic problems could extend their lives by enabling them to change their life styles. People likely to suffer a degenerative disease, be it heart disease or whatever, might be able to take action early enough to mitigate the disease and thereby extend the quality of their active lives.

I welcome the report. It has made a good contribution to the debate. I am delighted that it has received such a wide-ranging and clear response from other bodies and from the Government. I may not be here for the Minister's reply, but I shall read it avidly in hard print.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, and perhaps to liven up proceedings a little, I note that three of those who hope to catch my eye have the title "Dr". I hope that during their opening remarks they might say whether they are doctors of medicine or philosophy, as that will help us to understand their presentation.

3.4 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I am philosophical, Mr. Winterton.

I am pleased to welcome the report and the Government's acceptance of some of our requests; they have gone further than we asked in some instances.

I want to consider in more detail the genetic prediction and personal insurance issue. In principle, genetic testing may predict future health, and insurers have a prima facie interest in it. Whether it becomes an important instrument of insurance policy depends on whether the prediction of common disorders turns out to be quantitatively significant in insurance terms. It is too early to know how that will turn out. The genes that influence predisposition to common diseases are not proving easy to isolate, and it will be some years before a true picture emerges, despite the human genome project.

The relatively uncommon mutations that cause single gene disorders have been known for some time. However, many medical geneticists argue that because our knowledge, even of those, is incomplete, and because they are sufficiently uncommon not to constitute a significant economic issue for the insurance companies, the industry should not discriminate against those disorders, apart from limitations to protect themselves against fraud, as my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) said. Such a voluntary gesture would have allowed co-operative research between geneticists and the insurance industry and created mutual and public trust and confidence.

What were the scientific problems with the Association of British Insurers' list of seven diseases? The gene changes underlying those diseases are known and the laboratory tests are not in doubt; however, there has been little primary insurance research into those disorders. All information is gleaned from medical literature, which contains certain predictable biases when applied for the purpose of life insurance for which the studies were not designed.

The most serious manifestations of a condition are usually the easiest to diagnose. People studying selected series of cases for medical purposes over-represent serious manifestations of the disease, and find out about mild manifestations only much later. For example, the cystic fibrosis gene contains some mutations that cause male infertility. The seven diseases vary in their presentation, some individuals being much more severely affected than others, and the literature probably overstates the true average severity of the diseases caused by mutations in these genes.

[Dr. Ian Gibson]

The more serious manifestations are likely to lead to the most rapid course of the disease, so the medical studies will perhaps overestimate the probability of the early onset of diseases.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Gentleman is making an extremely important point in the context of the report. Does he believe, as I fear, that the five-year moratorium will not, unless there is significant prompting from Government, produce the sort of actuarial, social and socio-medical research into the impact of testing that is required to enable a sensible decision to be taken at the end of the five-year period? I have no doubt that the medical research will continue at a high level; the question is whether the correct research in terms of the social consequences is being commissioned and whether it will be completed within the appropriate time scale.

Dr. Gibson: The report has set up a new culture in the interaction between insurance companies and the scientific community. The matter is being taken seriously. Next week Professor Sandy Raeburn and I will be speaking about these issues at a meeting of the insurance organisation. Science and genetics cannot be studied without considering the social context in which they will be applied. There is a new spirit loose in the land and it will be our job, in a year or so, to ensure that the monitoring and the partnership work achieve the report's aim.

Diseases are often defined before treatments are developed. For several of these conditions forms of therapy may well make a difference in future. For example, renal transplants have transformed the outlook for polycystic kidney disease. I have seen little evidence that the industry has attempted to take account of treatment effects. Science and medicine are moving apace, and who knows how many more discoveries will effect new treatments in a year's time? The human genome certainly holds out that prospect.

Not all people with an abnormal gene get a disease. We all have abnormal genes; there is no perfect genome. Early genetic studies are often based on large families with many affected members and are biased towards over-representing those families in which the gene is particularly likely to lead to clinical disease. That is why they produce large families with many affected members.

Early genetic studies are therefore biased towards high penetrance. For example, the breast cancer genes were initially thought to confer a risk of developing the disease of more than 80 per cent. More recent estimates, however, lower that to 50 or 60 per cent. Who knows what will happen as more studies are conducted?

The Parkinson's Disease Society recently presented a document welcoming the report and the Government response, but said that genetics plays a limited role in most instances of Parkinson's disease and we should take a careful line on it.

The Alzheimer's Society says that there are predisposing genes in familial Alzheimer's disease, but has asked the ABI to withdraw its applications for genetic approval of familial early onset of Alzheimer's. The societies are therefore suspicious too, and I am referring to diseases that are more likely to be offset by stem cell research than by genetics at this stage.

Mr. Heald: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that to take a family history, as insurers do, and base a decision on it is a more robust methodology than to take into account any genetic tests that happen to exist?

Dr. Gibson: When someone asks for an insurance policy, they are asked how their parents died. I believe, as do others, that that is a pretty good indicator of what they will suffer from, without any high-falutin' genetics. That method has been good enough until now, and has created few problems of which I am aware. It will suffice while the genetics and other actuarial evidence are assessed.

Lynne Jones: Will my hon. Friend accept that insurance companies should be more upfront about the actuarial information on which they load premiums where people have a family history?

Dr. Gibson: Yes, I am sure that insurance companies will listen to our requests and present the data. I come from an insurance city, which is now almost dominated by Norwich Union and Virgin Direct. All the feedback that I have received from such companies suggests that they take the matter seriously, and they have said that the actuarial evidence will come upfront. Again, the Select Committee or other organisations will look into the report a year from now and ensure that that is being applied.

Although not true for the relatively uncommon diseases, it is likely to be true in the more complex diseases that a gene that confers an increased risk of one thing may also confer a decreased risk of something else, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak said. A possible example is the gene variant associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer's, which is suggested to confer a decreased risk of heart disease. The jury is still out, and the evidence is being assessed.

Medical studies based on collections of cases will often define the harmful effects of genes long before their beneficial effects are discovered. People will know that there is a good case for linking malaria and sickle cell anaemia: someone can have sickle cell anaemia and be resistant to malarial parasites. From a life insurance viewpoint, the issue is not any one disease, but the total probability of all diseases within a set period. That must be part of the equation, but it has not been up to now.

All these biases in the medical data will tend to exaggerate the seriousness of a gene abnormality in an insurer's view. More sophisticated research and analysis are required to provide a fair picture of genetic effects for insurance purposes. There is little sign that the insurance industry intends undertaking such research or withholding its judgments until better data are available.

We await with impatience its response to the debate and the reports from the Human Genetics Commission, the disease societies and so on. All the problems will be much more severe when considering the predisposition to common, rather than rare, diseases. By attempting to ignore the problems and adopting a rigid approach, the

insurance industry has lost the confidence of many professionals and the public in terms of its capability appropriately to handle scientific information. The hope is that it will take up the cudgels and respond to some of the problems.

It is also essential that during the moratorium we have not the examination of the science and actuarial evidence, but monitoring of what insurance companies are doing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak pointed out, in 1995 there was a tendency to think that there was a solution to the problem. That was clearly ignored and, despite the ABI guidelines, people moved at different paces for reasons that are not clear.

I welcome the recent comment in the *British Medical Journal* by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health that the Government are willing to outlaw the use of genetic tests by insurance companies if the Human Genetics Commission recommends such a step. It has now done so, and we should run with that. However, we must ensure, over the next five years, that the research on genetics and the work done by the insurance industry do not cause the creation of an underclass of people who are frightened to use scientific information because they might be penalised by faulty data.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): It is not often that the occupant of the Chair admits an error, but I said earlier that three Members with the title of "Dr." were seeking to catch my eye, whereas there were in fact five. The two hon. Members whom I did not see, sitting on the left of the Chamber, are medical doctors. I call one of them now.

3.7 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Thank you, Mr. Winterton.

The strengthened moratorium of the Association of British Insurers on the use of genetic tests by the insurance industry is very welcome. It follows the excellent report of the Science and Technology Committee on genetics and insurance and I congratulate those who contributed to it. The science of predicting who will get what disease and when is insufficiently mature for companies to achieve any actuarial precision on the basis of genetic testing. That is not of great moment to the bulk of the insurance industry, given that it is principally concerned with risk that is based on population. The business of the House is very much to do with individuals; that is why we are here. The rare, relatively clear-cut, genetically determined Huntington's disease was rightly identified as the progenitor of possible genetic testing for the future. However, even if insurance companies were inundated with people aware of their genotype and therefore their likelihood of manifesting the disease—so-called adverse selection—the effect on insurance companies would be small, because the fact is that most of us will eventually succumb to degenerative disease.

Early predictions that we may be able readily to determine the medical misfortunes to which we are predisposed have been overdone. The likelihood is that mortality is determined by a cocktail of environment, genetics and sheer bad luck in a way that may never be defined precisely. As we have heard, genotypes may paradoxically give protection for some diseases while predisposing for others. Our first concern must be to protect people from explicit and implicit compunction in genetic testing. Genetic testing raises a raft of ethical and practical difficulties, with implications not only for the index case, but for relatives and even those who suppose themselves to be relatives. Our genes do not exist in isolation and we have to recognise that throwing light on them may have unforeseen implications for the welfare of third parties.

Insurance and financial products so pervade our lives as to be regarded a necessity of modern living. That is all the more so as we seek to encourage personal provision. Given that we are endorsing such a shift, we have a duty not to encourage testing if it might exclude individuals from participation. I well remember the difficulty that testing for HIV caused in the 1980s and the covert means by which worried people procured results to prevent the possibility of a positive test, or even the fact that they had been tested, being recorded in medical documents and subsequently causing difficulty in obtaining financial services and products. There are parallels here.

Although it does not affect the vast majority of people, I am concerned that permitting the use of tests at all—albeit under the direction of an enhanced Genetics and Insurance Committee—for high-value policies tacitly accepts that genetic tests are useful and reasonable. I find that to be intellectually unsatisfactory, and I hope that the Minister will comment.

On Tuesday, the House discussed breast cancer, and hon. Members raised the issue of the evidence base for screening. We must ensure that a thin evidence base does not disadvantage individuals, and I believe that the revised recommendations of the ABI largely achieve that. In five years' time, the science will be more mature, but it may well be that we move towards simply accepting that adverse selection will operate to the disadvantage of those of us with the genetic harbingers of misfortune. Such a view will probably require something more than the ABI moratorium.

3.9 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): In response to your earlier question, Mr. Winterton, I am a double doctor. I have PhDs in philosophy and in science but, in fact, I am a chemist. Therefore, you could increase your figure to six.

I am pleased to take part in the debate. Insurance is a necessity of life for many people; for example, in obtaining a mortgage or credit card facility and, for some, private health care. Those who are socially excluded are usually unable to acquire insurance, and there is a risk that the use of genetic test results may increase the number of socially excluded people.

The Co-operative Insurance Society told the Science and Technology Committee that

"the British public is under-insured and under-protected."

Therefore, it is important that we do not make the situation worse by creating a genetic underclass. For that group of people, insurance would be too expensive or, even worse, unobtainable, because of their genetic fingerprint.

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

There is a fear, perhaps unfounded, that demographic pressures—for example, an increasing elderly population—are rolling back state support for individuals in favour of a greater role for the financial services industry, including insurance-based products. In turn, that leads to cherry-picking, whereby the industry accepts the best risks but rejects others to be cared for by the state; in this case, the genetic underclass.

Apart from mutual insurance companies, the rest—public limited companies—are out to maximise profits for the benefit of their shareholders. As insurance premiums rise, more and more people opt out of insurance. The trick is to decrease premiums for an increasing majority of people and thereby attract the under or non-insured to buy more insurance products. Perhaps the insurance industry sees the use of genetic testing, with the exclusion of the higher risks, as a means of accomplishing that. If so, gone will be the concept of risk sharing, often referred to as mutuality by the industry—not to be confused, of course, with a mutual insurance company. Consequently, the industry will segment, with more emphasis on tailor-made insurance products. I would regret that because I believe strongly in the concept of risk sharing, whereby those in the lowest risk categories subsidise those in the highest risk categories. Wherever there is increased complexity in marketing, consumers find it harder to locate the right product at the right price. Although increased competition might lead initially to cheaper products, in the long term consumers would find it difficult to exert downward competitive pressure on insurers. If that happened, many consumers would find themselves either paying higher premiums or excluded from the market.

The insurance industry has acted precipitately and without necessity on genetic testing. That is why the Science and Technology Committee recommended in our fifth report, published in April this year, that

"the best way forward for the Government and industry would be a voluntary moratorium on the use of all positive genetic test results by insurers for at least two years."

The insurance industry has argued that it will be financially disadvantaged if it is not allowed to use genetic test results and believes that those who have had a positive test result may seek more insurance cover as a result. That concept, which has already been mentioned, is adverse selection. The counter-argument is that the insurance industry has managed actuarially without genetic tests since its foundation.

The general public are not complimentary about the insurance industry. The use of genetic test results, particularly positive results to increase premiums, is also unpopular. In a MORI poll commissioned by the Human Genetics Commission, only 8 per cent. of respondents thought that genetic tests should be used to set insurance premiums, while 78 per cent. disagreed. Research for the Co-operative's social accountability programme has found considerable mistrust of the insurance industry among consumers, which it believes contributes greatly to the under-insurance of our fellow citizens.

In November 1998, the ABI, which represents about 400 insurance companies that provide about 97 per cent. of UK insurance business, published a list of 10 tests for seven disease conditions that it regarded as sufficiently reliable to be used by the industry. However, the list was not readily available, not even for example as an appendix to its code of practice. There is some dispute about the reliability of the tests, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson). The only test that was validated, in October 2000 by the Government's Genetics and Insurance Committee, is for Huntington's chorea. However, GAIC is expected to publish soon its assessment of tests for hereditary Alzheimer's disease, and breast and ovarian cancer. Some insurance companies—for example, Norwich Union—appear to have been using genetic tests before their approval by GAIC.

It is noteworthy that four of the 10 tests that the ABI strongly recommended are no longer considered, even by it, to be reliable. Insurers have given the test results a predictive significance that cannot be justified. As far as I know, only the three insurance companies that have already been mentioned use only negative genetic tests to lower insurance premiums. Other insurers take into account positive test results, presumably always to increase premiums.

Until recently, those applying for life insurance linked to a mortgage for £100,000 or less were not asked for results of any genetic tests that they may have had. Since the Select Committee report, that cut-off figure was increased in May 2001 to £300,000. I am pleased that, following discussions with the Government, the insurance industry this month announced a five-year moratorium on the use of genetic tests that will apply to life insurance policies of up to £500,000 and critical illness, long-term care insurance and income protection of up to £300,000 for each type of policy. For applications over those amounts, test results for Huntington's chorea will have to be disclosed. That announcement should be welcomed, but I hope that all 400 members of the ABI comply. According to the Alzheimer's Society, which carried out a survey in March 2000, the ABI code of practice on the use of genetic information has often been breached by its own members. Fortunately, it seems that public pressure has had some impact on the insurance industry.

Mutuality and the achievement of broad equity between persons of similar circumstances who are in an insured risk pool have always been used by the insurance industry to arrive at its premiums. Family history has always played an important role in arriving at premiums and certain factors—for example, when a non-smoker seeks life insurance or a security system is in place on a property for which insurance is being sought—have always been taken into account.

The use of family histories to arrive at insurance premiums can result in unnecessarily high premiums for many people. The use of negative genetic testing would benefit those affected. The Government have supported that point of view, which begs the question whether the moratorium on the use of genetic tests will apply to negative as well as positive test results. Apparently, it is to be left to the discretion of individual companies.

The seven conditions chosen by the ABI's genetic committee are all relatively rare. The Prudential dealt with only seven applications involving genetic test data in 2000. Norwich Union dealt with only 50 out of 150,000 applications for insurance in the same year and

the Co-operative Insurance Society a meagre 14 out of 460,000 applications in three years—a minuscule 0.003 per cent. of its business.

Let us examine Huntington's chorea in more detail. An estimated 6,000 people in the UK have the condition, not all of whom are relevant for insurance purposes. The gene for this fatal condition has been cloned and a diagnostic test developed. However, the gene's presence in an individual does not indicate whether it will express itself in that person's lifetime or, if it does so, exactly when. Professor Bobrow told our Committee that he was unaware of any scientists who believed that the age of onset of the condition could be predicted with any accuracy.

Significant concerns have been raised about the procedures used by the GAIC to examine genetic tests that it is asked to approve, including the approved test for Huntington's chorea. The Wellcome Trust states:

"The justification for their decision (in that case) was not subject to the rigours of a peer review such as that required for publication in a respected scientific journal".

The Select Committee thus recommended that GAIC re-examine its procedures for approving the use of genetic tests, and I understand that it is prepared to do so.

Nevertheless, traditionally, close relatives of a known sufferer of this highly heritable disease will have their insurance premiums substantially loaded—by as much as 300 per cent. according to the Huntington's Disease Association—owing to the perceived increased risk, based on family history and in the absence of a genetic test result. If the more accurate data derived from a positive genetic test were applied, the loading may prohibit insurance completely. Currently, only about 15 per cent. of those at risk from Huntington's chorea take a genetic test.

Through the network of regional genetic centres many people whose genetic diseases would otherwise escape attention can be diagnosed quickly and accurately, and receive treatment and advice to improve their quality of life. Those who have the gene associated with familial polyposis and who are at high risk of developing colorectal cancer can be kept under regular surveillance and, should polyps be detected in the large bowel, preventive measures can be taken.

Many in the field of clinical genetics are worried that the use of genetic test results by the insurance industry and possible discrimination against those who volunteer for the tests may deter people from seeking the available help and treatment for their disease condition. The CIS has recognised that possible conflict, which has apparently informed its policy on the use of test results in favour of its clients.

We need more research in this area. By comparing which disease, if any, volunteers contract and their genetic make-up, it is hoped that a much greater understanding of the role of the genetic component, as distinct from environmental factors, can be reached. Obviously, anything that might inhibit patients from volunteering for such clinical trials would be of great concern.

Fortunately, the insurers and the ABI have recognised the worry in that they state that they will not seek the results of such clinical trials for individual patients who might also be their customers. However, the Committee considered that they should be more explicit in that connection—for example, by incorporating that principle in their code of practice.

It would help, too, if the insurance industry contributed more of its considerable profits to research into the development of genetic tests to improve the health of our society and the impact of genetic tests in other areas, such as insurance. The genetics and insurance research centre at Heriot-Watt university is conducting research, funded by the industry, and that should help to clarify the link between genetic test results and insurance premiums. I have already referred to the research being carried out by the Co-operative social accountability programme.

I am sure that the debate will continue. As gene technology advances, it will have a greater impact on our thinking and on the behaviour of society and its servants. I am confident that we shall discuss the topic again in the not too distant future.

3.35 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I wish first to make two matters clear. I am a chartered insurance practitioner and I qualified many years ago as an associate of the Chartered Insurance Institute. I derive no income from the insurance industry and, to that extent, while I hope that I have an informed interest, in no way do I have a partial or partisan interest in today's important debate.

I welcome the five-year moratorium on the use of genetic test results by insurers that was announced by the Association of British Insurers. We are living through a particularly dramatic period of change in our understanding of human genetics, which has far-reaching consequences for medicine, pathology and our predictive and diagnostic powers. That in turn has far-reaching social and public policy consequences, not least for life and critical illness insurance.

In the words of the fifth report of the Science and Technology Committee:

"It is therefore becoming increasingly feasible for the identification of disease-associated and other genes to be available at the level of the hospital pathology laboratory, and, within the foreseeable future, also in the primary healthcare surgery."

The advance of science is linked fundamentally to the predictive power of its theses. Of course, it is to be hoped and celebrated that the principal application of such advances in genetic knowledge falls within our capacity to treat and ultimately cure or eradicate disease.

However, predictive power is also an essential element in the business of insurance and the actuarial basis on which that industry rests. Insurance is fundamentally about risk and the pooling or sharing of risk. It is not about public compensation for known and certain loss. That is why we cannot, for example, take out insurance against fire damage when a fire has already started. A body of English law has grown up around the issue of proximate cause, which I shall not rehearse now, but it is precisely the issue of causation and the fact that the preponderance of knowledge of such proximate causes is likely to be with the party seeking insurance that has given rise to the second essential foundation of insurance contracts.

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

To overcome the asymmetry of knowledge, the consolidating Act relating to insurance, the Marine Insurance Act 1906, lays down a fundamental duty of disclosure on the parties to an insurance contract. Classically, that means that insurance is "uberrimae fidei" or what section 17 of the Act describes as

"a contract based upon the utmost good faith, and, if the utmost good faith be not observed by either party, the contract may be avoided by the other party."

Section 18 states:

"Subject to the provisions of this section, the assured must disclose to the insurer, before the contract is concluded, every material circumstance which is known to the assured...Every circumstance is material which would influence the judgment of a prudent insurer in fixing the premium, or determining whether he will take the risk."

That 95-year-old legislation crystallises the contemporary problem that reliable genetic testing poses to public policy. Clearly, it is wrong that, as a result of a genetic test, somebody diagnosed with Huntington's chorea should take out life and critical illness insurance cover of almost £1 million that he would not have purchased otherwise.

Lynne Jones: I want to pick up my hon. Friend's point about somebody taking a genetic test and being diagnosed with that condition. Taking a genetic test does not diagnose a person with that condition; it only indicates that that person may be predisposed to it.

Mr. Gardiner: I accept my hon. Friend's correction, and I shall deal with that issue later. Over the next few years, however, there will be more and more reliable and accurate tests with greater and greater predictive power. We hope that that will occur, because we also hope that, in the field of medicine, we will be able to use such tests to eradicate disease. I am discussing the principles involved, not the vagaries of which tests may be more or less effective.

If somebody whose test proved positive for Huntington's chorea had to take out life or critical illness cover of almost £1 million that they would not have purchased otherwise, that would be wrong, because they would not be seeking to protect themselves and their family from the eventuality that something might happen. They would seek to gain a certain benefit from an event, albeit tragic, that they could predict with almost certain knowledge.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): There seems to be confusion in my hon. Friend's mind. He believes that such tests will have ever-increasing predictive power and he wants that to happen because it will produce ever-increasing medical resources to combat that illness. However, the development of those medical resources will not confer predictive power, because the disease will be short-circuited and stopped in its train. Having a propensity to a disease is very different from having it.

Mr. Gardiner: I accept what my hon. Friend says. However, he must take this on board: until there is a conclusive test that shows with certain predictive power a propensity to what is currently a fatal condition, it will be impossible to develop the counter to it.

Mr. Heald: When Professor Bobrow gave evidence to the Committee, he was asked about that. He said that it is well documented that, at one end of the Huntington's mutations, 3, 4 or 5 per cent. of the people who carry genes that are clearly abnormal by current definitions do not manifest the disease by the age of 70. He is therefore saying that about 95 per cent. do. In the case that he put forward, finding a propensity to Huntington's chorea would mean a substantial probability of onset by the age of 70.

Mr. Gardiner: If the hon. Gentleman allows me to continue, I shall tackle the issue that he and other hon. Members are raising.

In terms of the benefit secured at the expense of fellow policyholders, those fellow policyholders consider themselves to be engaged in a commercial contract of sharing risk, not a public policy scheme of compensating guaranteed loss. I have reached the point at which I can, I hope, address the remarks that have been made.

Dr. Evan Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gardiner: After I have commented on the matters that I wish to discuss.

Before I proceed, I must make it clear that I accept that arguments can be made concerning the validity and the predictive power of current individual genetic tests. The Genetics and Insurance Committee must be our standard on that. I shall use the test of Huntington's chorea because it has been pronounced the most reliable to date by GAIC. However, my argument rests on the assumption that valid and reliable genetic tests will be developed. That is why I seek to address general principles rather than the specifics of an individual test.

Dr. Harris: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I do not accept the criticism made by several hon. Members that, in theory, a test that gives one increased risk—it can be called increased risk if the figures are 100 per cent. or 80 per cent.—could not be gamed with to raise one's insurance. I have always accepted in debates with the insurance industry that that happens, but is that practice, or the potential for it, so substantial that it outweighs the gains to be had from pooling the risk? The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) referred to that point.

Mr. Gardiner: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point, and I will address it later.

The Government have correctly focused on social exclusion. That is a proper concern, and it has informed the report and the Government's response. The key concern is to prevent the development of an insurance underclass of people who are unable to participate in the everyday business of taking out a mortgage or protecting their family. That is the legitimate motivation for the inquiry and for the debate that must develop during the moratorium.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) opened the debate, she spoke of the problems that might arise for people faced with

expensive premiums and of the danger that people might choose to forego a medical test that they need for fear of the possible consequences in respect of their insurance status. With regard to the first matter, the problem already arises separately from any genetic test: in any application for critical illness, family history questions already affect premium rating. I declare an interest regarding that matter, as my family history has caused underwriters to rate me at a substantially higher risk than normal.

It would be difficult to persuade a member of the public that, because they have a family history that might suggest increased risk of disease, they should pay a higher premium or be denied cover altogether, but that a standard rate of premium should apply to their neighbour, who has received a positive test that concludes that the disease will almost certainly develop. Those anomalies will assume greater importance in public debate if and when genetic tests become more numerous and accurate in their predictive power.

Lynne Jones: My hon. Friend seems to have misunderstood the Committee's recommendation. His argument does not apply, because someone who took a genetic test would still be subject to disclosure of family history. However, there is a separate argument regarding the openness with which the insurance industry discloses the actuarial data that it uses to load premiums.

Mr. Gardiner: My hon. Friend has misunderstood me for once. I am trying to point out that if someone with no family history took a test that had a positive outcome and was graded at the normal rate, it would be difficult to explain to someone with a family history showing only increased risk that they would receive a higher rating. That is the anomaly to which I am referring; it concerns a test that might be taken, not by someone with a family history, but by someone without one.

Lynne Jones: My understanding is that it is highly unlikely that someone who tested positively for the Huntington gene would not have a family history.

Mr. Gardiner: Again, I am not focusing on individual tests and the current state of technology and science. I am dealing with the principles. If we move towards circumstances in which tests have increasingly predictive power, those tests will be used in medicine to achieve diagnostic effect in the general population. What my hon. Friend says is no doubt correct, but I am trying to find out where technology may lead us and the principles that we should apply now because of the impact that they may have later.

Mr. Heath: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, although I am not sure that I entirely agree, because he claims a diagnostic infallibility for testing that is not borne out by fact. Will he consider the other side of the coin?

A point was made earlier about people with a familial history of a particular condition who pay significantly higher premiums as a result of a test that shows, however, that they are genetically negative and cannot develop the disease in spite of that familial history. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in such circumstances the insurance company should immediately take that into account and that the additional premium should not be paid?

Mr. Gardiner: Yes. That seems even-handed. However, it is not right that the upside of an equation may be taken into account, but not the downside.

Mr. Heath: I am so sorry. The hon. Gentleman faces a lot of interventions because he knows about insurance and the rest of us know a little about medicine. There is a dialogue between the two, but they are not equivalent. One deals with increased risk, and the other with absence of risk. One relates to a potential for developing a condition, and the other to the absolute potential not to develop the condition, as that is all that the test can prove.

Mr. Gardiner: I hesitate to tread on medical ground, but I understand that if a person shows no genetic predisposition in particular tests that have not yet been approved as normative by GAIC, such as that for ovarian cancer, that would not mean that ovarian cancer could not develop. Again, therefore, I refer to principles.

I am trying to consider the fundamental principles involved and I am not limiting the debate to specific genetic tests such as that for Huntington's chorea. I referred to that test only because GAIC said that it is the most relevant and has the most predictive power. In future, other tests will have that predictive power.

Dr. Harris: I agree. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point that there is perceived unfairness in not allowing a positive genetic test in the absence of a family history. Some conditions will have new mutations and will not involve a family history. Some people know that their parents are not their genetic parents, and other reasons may be involved. Unfairness might be perceived compared with people who have a family history but are not genetically tested. We must recognise that such unfairness exists. It is not an excuse for lack of genetic confidentiality, because there is something precious and special about a person's genetic information that does not relate to and is unique compared with the history of another person who happens to be in his family.

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman makes his point extremely well.

The anomalies that I outlined will assume much greater importance in the public mind if and when genetic tests become more numerous and more accurate in their predictive power. The Human Genetics Commission survey on the future of genetic information showed that the vast majority of people believe that human genetic information could and should be used to understand diseases and identify criminals, but should not be used to set insurance premiums, as the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) suggests. However, that might not long survive the reflection that information about road traffic accidents is used not only to improve road safety, but to ensure that an elderly lady driver in her Nissan Sunny does not pay the same premium as a 19-year-old man in his Ferrari.

[Mr. Gardiner]

I conclude by returning to social exclusion. The insurance industry has shown itself to be extremely capable of refining its products to meet real need. Insurance policies have always admitted policy exclusions. If a conclusive positive test were developed, an insurer could provide cover for all other critical illness risks at standard rates for the period of cover, but exclude that peril. That is not cherry-picking, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East said, because it is not an example in which the insurer would accept a lower but not a higher risk.

The insurer would accept a risk, but not a certainty. Insurers welcome high risk, because without it there would be no high premiums. The professional job of the actuary is to ensure that the contribution made by each policyholder to the pool of premiums reflects the proportion of risk that each person brings to the overall liability. If that is undermined, commercial insurance is undermined. Only Government underwriting from public policy could replace it.

Our Government should be careful before deciding to go down that route. We have a five-year moratorium, but there is no doubt that genetic testing will develop. The response of the Government and of industry to any development during that period must take fundamental cognisance of two principles, which lie at the heart of insurance and must remain there. First, one insures against risk, not certainty, and, secondly, there is utmost good faith between the parties concerned.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), I tell hon. Members that I understand that there may be a vote in the House at 4 pm. If one occurs, I shall suspend the sitting for 15 minutes. I hope that all hon. Members will return, perhaps before 15 minutes have elapsed. We have injury time available and the sitting may continue beyond 5.30 pm in the event of a Division.

3.57 pm

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): For your information, Mr. Winterton, I am the happy possessor of one modest PhD, with which I am quite content.

The debate has two central issues—that is the beginning and end of it—and those are the ethics of using genetic test data and the validity of that.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): As the hon. Gentleman has resumed his seat, I merely suspend the sitting for exactly 15 minutes.

3.58 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.13 pm

On resuming—

Dr. Turner: In my lifetime, the state of knowledge of genetics has advanced beyond the wildest dreams of biological scientists. Even so, despite knowing the human genome sequence and the identification of a large number of individual genes linked to specific diseases, we are still finding out how much more we need to know before we can link people's genotypes with their lifetime's health expectations. It is dangerous to assume that the possession of a diseased gene inevitably means that an individual will develop the disease. Even the most clearly established link, that of Huntington's chorea, gives no indication of the likely time scale for developing the condition. We might all have one or more potentially lethal genes, and we could all find ourselves having to pay increased premiums if our full genetic make-up were known. The only certain outcome that can be predicted from our genotype is that we will die; but we cannot predict when.

The purpose of genetic research is an increased understanding of disease and a search for new therapies. The results so far have been achieved by dint of the enormous and inspired efforts of scientists, which have involved huge financial investment. However, I do not know whether the insurance industry has made much contribution, either intellectual or financial, to that research. Insurers' interests in genetic information can be construed as only financial: there is certainly no suggestion—or very little suggestion—of altruism.

The insurance industry has always sought genetic information. For decades, it has used family histories in its underwriting of life policies and health insurance. It seems to have prospered quite adequately on that level of information. None the less, some insurers told the Select Committee that ignoring the results of genetic testing would be too costly, despite the fact that it is available on only about 0.01 per cent. of the insurance that is written. At the moment, the information is so poor a predictor that family history is as good as any other information available to the insurance industry.

To justify its assertion that ignoring genetic testing would be too costly, the insurance industry would need to show a level of scientific knowledge and an understanding of genetic information that it clearly lacks. The availability of genetic test data would not be of much help, even from the narrow perspective of the insurance industry's financial performance.

Other hon. Members have stated that the primary objective of genetic testing, which is to benefit patients, should not be prejudiced by the potential misuse of the information by third parties, whether insurers or employers. Prospective patients or volunteers must not be deterred from undergoing genetic testing because of fears that the information could be used to their disadvantage. If that were to happen, future research to define the links and mechanisms between the possession of potentially diseased genes and the development of the disease would be tragically prejudiced. It would also deny those individuals the benefit of any therapeutic intervention that may result from genetic testing.

The insurance industry as a whole shows a lamentable lack of understanding of the issues surrounding genetic testing and how it affects individuals, and its voluntary code of conduct is quite ineffective. We must therefore seriously consider whether it is right to permit insurers access to the results of genetic tests of individuals. At present, insurance companies would not be exposed to significant financial risk if they did not have access to that information. Fortunately, that fact is recognised by

the three companies that have acted most honourably by declining to seek that information. There would clearly be a risk to individuals if insurance companies could request such data.

HIV status offers a perfectly good precedent for the confidentiality of personal data, and there are compelling reasons to extend the same principle to genetic test data. Therefore, I am pleased that our report recommended—and the Government accepted the need for—a voluntary moratorium on the use of genetic test data for insurance purposes and on requests about whether a prospective customer has undergone genetic testing. However, I would go further and advocate a much longer period than five years. For the sake of clarity and to avoid any excuses for error, there should ideally be a statutory moratorium possibly lasting 10 years. After that, the situation would need to be fully reviewed in the light of the available knowledge. Only in the light of increased knowledge would it be possible to separate the two main strands of principle involved in testing—the ethics and the practical validity. That can be done only if we have accurately predictive tests.

It has been said that we might undermine the whole principle of insurance if we continue to use genetic test data for insurance purposes. Until now, insurance has been successfully based on the principle of mutuality and of spreading the risks. We rarely hear of insurance companies going bust, and they would have to manage their affairs very badly to do so. Instead, they make some pretty healthy profits. Therefore, there is no risk to any sensibly conducted insurance business in the present context.

Mr. Heald: It is true, as we have heard, that genetic tests have been offered in a tiny number of cases, so the amounts at issue are small. However, does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as the Co-operative Insurance Society said in its evidence, a time might come when the technology is much more widely available, more accurate and more predictive? Important issues of principle would arise in those circumstances.

Dr. Turner: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that information, but increased knowledge is likely to show that we all have potentially lethal genes. None of us will know whether they will be expressed, nor will an insurance company. We would all become uninsurable if the possession of a particular gene were used as the only piece of evidence. I would therefore be reluctant to pursue that line.

If we are to separate ethics from practical validity, we need to have a long moratorium before we can assess whether the test information is a valid predictor of life outcomes. We may decide that we have reached that position with regard to the predictive accuracy of the science, but I for one would still question whether it would be ethical and, indeed, sensible to use such data as a predictor.

Mr. Gardiner: Is my hon. Friend saying that it would be wrong for either party to use the information, or that it would be wrong for the insurance company to use it to the detriment of the policyholder who had taken the test? It may advantage other policyholders who had not taken it by allowing their premiums to be reduced.

Dr. Turner: I am aware of my hon. Friend's fear that someone with a lethal gene might want, to all intents and purposes, to rob an insurance company. That is a small risk. It is a fair point, and would be covered, I think, by the ancient legislation governing insurance, to which he referred.

Mr. Gardiner: I happily respond to that point. Section 18(3) of the Marine Insurance Act 1906, a copy of which I happen to have before me, states:

"(3) In the absence of inquiry the following circumstances need not be disclosed, namely...

(c) Any circumstances as to which information is waived by the insurer".

Given that insurance companies would have waived the relevant information during the moratorium period, it would be legal and proper to conclude a contract under the Act.

Dr. Turner: I do not think that that really helps in the case that I am considering. A conundrum persists. The closest indicators of a link between test results and disease are found in Huntingdon's disease and HIV. Let us not forget HIV.

Huntingdon's disease has a simple genetic basis and the link between the possession of the lethal genes and the development of the disease is extremely strong. One would think that that would provide some justification for the CIS's policy of offering insurance to individuals with a family history if they have negative genetic test results. However, that would leave those with a family history but who have not been tested or who have positive results in an impossible position. How would they provide housing for their families if they could not get a mortgage because they could not get a mortgage protection policy? Even the most socially conscious insurers could run the risk of creating a genetic underclass. I am not sure that mortgage companies would be happy to grant a mortgage on the basis of a protection policy that included an exclusion clause for any specific disease. That would have to be explored, but I see many obstacles to that approach.

Mr. Gardiner: I agree with my hon. Friend, but a common feature of a mortgage and a life insurance policy is that they both run for a particular term. If a predictive test suggested that there was no risk within a certain period, but that there was a risk beyond it, it would be possible within the term of security to conclude both insurance arrangements and, on the back of those, a mortgage contract, on the basis of the test. My hon. Friend is right that we need to examine the issue carefully, but he is wrong in thinking that it would not be possible to reach an accommodation between predictive tests and the need to obtain insurance and a mortgage.

Dr. Turner: I did not suggest that it was impossible, but that there were obstacles. I do not think that there is great disagreement between us.

An equally strong link exists between HIV-positive status and the development of AIDS. However, some years ago an ethical decision was made to deny insurers access to such information. There are far more HIV-positive individuals at large in the population than there are people who have had genetic testing used for insurance purposes. I am not aware that the insurance

[Dr. Turner]

industry has suffered unduly from problems caused by people with HIV status. Fortunately, from the insurers' perspective, although there is a strong link between HIV-positive status and AIDS, the development of that disease has changed dramatically over the years. It has not been cured, but its management has improved dramatically, so that whereas previously an HIV-positive diagnosis constituted a death sentence to be executed within a year or two, patients are now living for decades. There is no known limit to the life expectancy of well-managed HIV patients. That is a good precedent, because it is almost certain that the same process will occur in the case of genetically controlled disease.

At the same time as discovering the link between the possession of a gene and the development of a disease, science will also learn about mechanisms of therapeutic intervention that will make it possible to manage that disease. That will probably—in many cases certainly—lead to that gene being prevented from producing the disease with which it has been linked. It is not solely a question of establishing the existence of a potentially lethal gene: there is also the more complicated question of how, why and when that gene will be expressed as a disease and whether it will be possible for preventive measures to be taken during that chain of events.

The insurance argument runs the risk of being far too simplistic. There is a strong possibility that in, say, 10 years we shall be unhappy not only with the ethics of using genetic test data for insurance purposes, but with their validity as a predictor—not because we do not accept the link between the gene and the disease, but because we will become increasingly confident about the possibility of disturbing that link. In that event, there will still be no clear link between the possession of the gene and an insurance company's having to pay out on a life policy. I suspect that in 10 years' time, we might—in the light of what is then known—want to say to the insurance industry that it will have to do what it has always done and work with family histories, and that a personal genetic identity should remain confidential.

4.33 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I am forced to confess that I am not a proper doctor. I am a medical doctor, and I recognise that those who have a PhD have gone through higher postgraduate training than I did; I just did six years of hard slog—mainly in politics. Perhaps that is why I am here and not on the wards.

It is important to note that doctors of any kind do not have a monopoly of wisdom in this area, and that those who do not have a scientific background have a huge amount to bring to the debate, perhaps more than those who do, because this is a debate about society. I would even include the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) in that. These questions relate to social issues, not just—indeed, not even mainly—scientific ones.

I should like to apologise, if that is the appropriate word, for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). He was here for most of the afternoon, but now has Front-Bench duties in the other Chamber. That is one of the problems of duplication that many hon. Members are concerned about.

There has been talk outside this Chamber about the role of the Opposition. The Liberal Democrats are strongly opposed to the Government's lack of action on this subject. I hate to stress party differences when speaking in this Chamber, particularly given the mood of the debate, but we do have differences with the Government over the way in which they have approached the matter, which are perhaps greater than those of the Conservative party. The Government got off quite lightly in the Select Committee report and even more lightly—breathtakingly so—in the criticisms outlined by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones). The hon. Lady is no longer in her place, but many of us greatly respect her courage in taking on Governments, especially of her own party, on certain issues.

Dr. Iddon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that criticism does not apply only to this Labour Government? It could be a criticism of any Government during the past few decades, in that technology and moral issues move on apace in the public domain and government is always behind. I cite the debates on euthanasia, stem cell research and genetic modification as examples. It is unfair to criticise this Government, because all Governments, of whatever political complexion, are guilty of the same failings in that respect.

Dr. Harris: That is an important point. All Governments are chary of debating some of these issues. Indeed, this debate is long overdue. It should not have required a Select Committee report and a Government response to justify it. I have often bumped into the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) outside the Speaker's office, where we have both put in for Adjournment debates on this subject in the hope of getting some indication of the Government's thinking. I also accept that it is not just this Government who are peculiarly sensitive about discussing scientific, genetic and sexual health issues, although they are particularly sensitive about those subjects.

However, it is a Minister of this Government who is facing me today, not a chemist from another party who was recently in government and whom we could equally charge with certain faults. Having said that, the Conservative Government must be commended for the way in which they legislated on fertilisation embryology. It was brave to open that can of worms, that Pandora's box, at that time. The difficulty that we have had in dragging further legislation on that subject from subsequent Governments of both political complexions shows what a brave and correct step the initial legislation was.

When government gets involved in this area, it usually does a good job because it listens to advice. The problem is one of under-legislating, not faulty legislation. Unlike in some other areas of social policy, it is hard to pinpoint poor decisions in this field. I am disappointed in the discussion in the Select Committee report of the Government's approach. The hon. Members on the Committee are not usually shy in coming forward. I

hope that, if restraint was exercised by the hon. Member for Norwich, North and his colleagues, he gets his due reward.

Dr. Gibson: In heaven.

Dr. Harris: Yes, if one believes in that approach. I hope also that the Government will get their comeuppance thereafter.

Political parties have also been bad at debating the issue. I am not aware—I await correction on this—that the issue has been debated in policy forums in the Conservative or Labour parties. I am not referring only to their party conferences, because many policy decisions are now made in policy forums. The Liberal Democrats have debated the matter on several occasions at our conferences. Our clear policy—I shall justify it in the light of the report later—states that we believe that an individual's genetic record should remain absolutely confidential and that

"insurance companies, employers and others should not be entitled to require genetic testing".

It is not a knee-jerk reaction to take that perspective; it does not mean that we see the insurance industry as a big bad wolf from which people must be protected. I hope that the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) acknowledges that I accept that insurance companies have the right to try their best to identify where risk lies and make corrections accordingly. However, we have already discussed how reliable such data are.

We should not blame the insurance industry for being an insurance industry. I believe that if we want to protect society, we should rely on legislation rather than on the industry's good will. Even with the best will in the world, an insurance company will still have a duty to its shareholders to extract the maximum return for them, and to gain a competitive advantage over other insurance companies that take a more social approach—if they exist.

My argument is not with the insurance industry. I came to the debate open-minded. I have been a member of the UK Forum for Genetics and Insurance and have attended all their meetings, paying the same rate as some of the big insurance companies to do so, and have discussed some of the issues in detail with academics from Heriot-Watt university, Professor Raeburn, Chris Daykin and others. I maintain my belief that we should ensure that society can express its view that we should not go down this path.

Why should we perform genetic tests for insurance purposes? Insurance companies believe that such genetic tests will be reliable and relevant and could be viewed objectively. The hon. Member for Norwich, North explained why, if the insurance industry tried to use results from medical research it could fall into pitfalls due to bias. The bias would not be in the original medical research, but because the patient and sample selection might be geared towards medical research outcomes. I commend him on being so clear that even a lapsed medic such as me could understand him. The fact that something might appear reliable does not make it so, therefore the insurance industry needs to invest in some original research. I understand that it is not short of a bob or two for such work, unlike many medical researchers.

The insurance industry may want to undertake such research because it is relevant. A reliable test may be meaningful in identifying risk, so would enable differential rates to be offered. That is the business of insurance, and we could not argue otherwise. The industry also argues that a test is necessary if it is reliable and relevant, because it does not consider the other possibility, which is to pool the risk. Society could ask or make the industry decide to do so. It may not lose much by being denied genetic testing in the long-term, because many of the major diseases are multifactorial, and their penetrance and relevance is not strong and so hard to establish, so they are difficult to predict. Some of the actuarial models are incredibly complex, even those based on something as simple as the presence or absence of the Huntingdon's chorea gene. Few conditions have a high-penetrance, single-gene detectable impact, so the risk to be pooled is not great.

I do not believe that it would destroy the insurance industry or its general principles if it were subject to a self-denying ordnance for five years, or even permanently.

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman has picked up on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak about the fact that the industry has managed without genetic tests for a long time. Other hon. Members have referred to the fact that there has been no increased incidence of disease in the population as a whole. The hon. Gentleman asks why the industry cannot simply pool the risk. However, so far he has failed to address the basic problem about the asymmetry of information, though I hope that he will do so. The prospective policyholder may have information and use it in a way that would, in other circumstances in the insurance industry, constitute fraud.

Dr. Harris: The very first line on my scrawled note relates to the question of adverse selection. I shall not repeat everything that has been said on that, but I have risen twice to make the point that demonstrating that a theoretical risk of adverse selection exists is not the same as saying that it represents a practical objection. We need to look for evidence to show whether the very small number of people who may be affected would play the system, whether they would get away with it, and whether protection would be available, such as a maximum limit.

I asked for such evidence, because I was aware that it had been presented at a conference of the UK Forum for Genetics and Insurance. I could not find the papers earlier, but a briefing that many of us will have received from GeneWatch—an organisation with which I do not always agree—references that study, saying:

"A recent US study with breast/ovarian cancer susceptibility genes found no evidence that they tried to mislead insurers."

The reference is to pages 29 to 39 of last year's volume 93 of the *American Journal of Medical Genetics*. If I remember correctly, that work was done at the university of Kentucky.

It is incumbent on the insurance industry to demonstrate in carefully designed studies that there is a significant risk of adverse selection and that having a ceiling—which would be a reasonable, possibly legislative, compromise—would have a bad effect on the rest of the insured pool. I do not think that such evidence exists, although it has been sought.

[Dr. Harris]

There are reasons why we may want to use genetic testing, but I do not find any of them conclusive.

Mr. Gardiner: Before the hon. Gentleman concludes this part of his speech, I should like to ask him one question. He was gracious enough, in one of his earlier interventions, to agree with me that we must establish the principles now that will become relevant in future. He accepted the suggestion that we may one day have many more tests with more accurate predictive power. If that is to be the case, does he not accept that one day so many people may be in an asymmetrical position, in which the information could be used for adverse selection, that he may have to review his position?

Dr. Harris: The fact that I support legislation banning something does not mean that I would never rethink my position; it is simply a matter of putting a legislative bar on something. Before the situation that he describes becomes a relevant factor, a huge change in the burden of disease would have to take place, between diseases known to be multifactorial and only somewhat genetic or hardly genetic at all and the impact of smoking, for example.

In principle, it is true that everything must be kept under review. Indeed, in the other Chamber, the Government are discussing a policy on student finance that is being kept under review, although it originally seemed absolute. However, that is not an argument for not legislating—it is an argument for reviewing legislation after the fact.

There are strong arguments, which have already been hinted at by other hon. Members, why it is bad for individual patients and for society to allow genetic testing. One of those arguments is the possible impact on what should be a clinical decision between patients and their counsellor and practitioner about whether to take a genetic test, which has big implications.

If our constituents were forced or encouraged to take genetic testing in order to get life insurance when they were buying a house, for example, it would add a non-clinical factor to the decision. I do not think that I am speaking from a peculiarly medical perspective when I say that in the patient-doctor relationship we try to ensure that big decisions about treatment and investigations are taken on the basis of a partnership between patients and those treating them. Decisions are based mainly, if not entirely, on clinical implications and a judgment about the ability of the patient to cope with the result—be it positive or negative—and its implications. I would hate patients with, for example, familial polycosis, to be discouraged from taking a genetic test because of the fear that it might have to be disclosed if they sought insurance, because in such cases they would be unable to benefit from screening through colonoscopy.

The insurance industry's interest in non-genetic testing is not good. The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) said that there would be great difficulty in getting people to come forward for HIV testing, even though it might benefit them and their partners, if they feared that they would be stigmatised. There is a further worry: it is appalling that an insurance company, on hearing that someone with a family history of the disease had tested positive for a BRCA gene, insisted on a prophylactic mastectomy before offering insurance. I do not bear any animosity towards the insurers; from their point of view it may have been a reasonable actuarial decision, but we should not allow that to intrude into what should be a strictly clinical decision. As well as other, more obvious, considerations, there will be a fundamental loss of equity in such circumstances as those who do not require life insurance because they are better off financially will have an advantage over the less well-off. I hope that the Minister will reassure me that the Government will not allow such things to go on, in spite of their inaction in the past four years. Something that may be reasonable from an insurance point of view is a salutary lesson about what we should avoid.

The impact on society is another reason for avoiding such a course. I will not repeat what has been said about the danger of creating a genetic underclass of those who are uninsurable because of their genetic inheritance. As the hon. Member for Brent, North said, future developments—further predictable single-gene defects, for example—might increase the number of people brought within such a group.

We accept that it is a social good for people to be able to buy their own house, but it is often a requirement that anyone taking out a mortgage must also have life insurance. If we accept that buying one's own home is generally a good thing, we must not deny that right to people on the basis of their genes. There are stronger arguments about people who decide to smoke; although I accept that there are equity arguments in such decisions, it is a personal decision to start to smoke. The matter of genetic inheritance is much more difficult.

There is a stigma attached to having a genetic test and if confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, having such a test may give rise to concern. The stigma associated with HIV and AIDS caused a considerable setback in public education on the issue. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak said that it would also affect the way we regard people with a disability.

The Association of British Insurers has proposed a moratorium and I have a few worries about that approach. The ABI states that only 96 per cent. of the industry is covered. That is significant and an argument for legislation, because coverage should be 100 per cent. If there is a gain or competitive advantage to be had from not complying with the moratorium and the insurance industry is right, that 4 per cent. may expand. A 96 per cent. ban or moratorium defeats the purpose, because it allows the companies that are not covered to gain a competitive advantage. That depends on whether the industry is right, and it may be for certain conditions.

What will happen after five years? When we consider the specific recommendations, we see that that problem still exists and we are left in doubt. Society should be able to give a view now. The debate has lasted a long time, and we should not have to keep revisiting the position before reaching a statutory resolution.

The record is not good. Paragraph 28 of the report shows the tangled web that the ABI has woven:

"The ABI did not initially help to clarify this confusion. The ABI's first memorandum stated that they recommended the use of the ten tests for seven conditions detailed above. During the

inquiry, however, we were informed by the Government that the Association had agreed, after the publication of the HGAC's first Report in 1997, that if any tests were not submitted to the GAIC by December 2000 it would advise its members to withdraw from using them. The GAIC informed us that apart from the test for Huntington's Chorea, the ABI had only submitted applications for a further four tests, namely those for early onset familial Alzheimer's disease and hereditary breast/ovarian cancer."

I do not think that that instruction went out as the ABI said that it would. We are seeing that it is not reasonable to assume that the industry will do what we expect it to.

The final problem with the moratorium is that, in the event of a concern, the appeal is to the person's own insurance company. If they are not satisfied, they must then go to the ABI. In this important sector, I have seen no regulation where the first two stages of appeal are to anything other than the insurance bodies.

In addition, the Government have not acted appropriately. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak said that in 1995 the Conservative Government were unwilling to act on a Science and Technology Committee report. However, it did not die with that Parliament. The report still lies on the table, and for four years the Labour Government have also chosen not to act on it.

The Human Genetics Advisory Commission published a report in December 1997 that made clear recommendations. I was troubled, however, because the Select Committee stated in paragraph 13 on page x that the commission's first report, "The Implications of Genetic Testing for Insurance", was published in March 1997. The footnote refers to December 1997. The report describes itself as being published in December 1997. Whatever the Committee says, the report was clearly published in the time of this Government, so the Conservatives are off the hook in that regard.

There was a clear recommendation that there should first be a moratorium and then genetic tests should be used only after being approved by the Genetics and Insurance Committee. It was extremely disappointing that the Government eventually appointed that Committee but did not insist to the insurance industry that tests were not used until the Committee had approved them. That is a major factor, because only the genetic test for Huntington's disease has been approved so far.

By lack of action, the Government allowed testing to go on, against the HGAC's recommendation. Indeed, there is controversy over whether the industry made promises to the Human Genetics Advisory Committee about a moratorium on tests until they were accepted and passed by any committee that watered down the Human Genetics Advisory Committee report. The Genetics and Insurance Advisory Committee could look only at the technical, clinical and actuarial relevance of tests. It could not take into account, as we would hope legislators could, their impact on society. The fact that the report's conclusions were not, at that time, subject to peer review—as is now being recommended—raises questions about the decisions of that committee.

Another area where the Government have failed is in their response to paragraph 33 of the report. That paragraph states:

"The ABI's decision that four of the tests it recommended insurers use three years ago are now no longer relevant or reliable casts the gravest possible doubts on the validity of all the tests not explicitly approved by the GAIC, being currently used by insurers."

Their response, at paragraph 7 on page 6, is that

"The Government believes strongly that only tests that have passed scrutiny by the Genetics and Insurance Committee (GAIC) can be justifiably used by insurance companies."

If that is the Government's view now, I welcome that, but it could not have been their view four years ago because they did not at that time insist that tests were used only when they had been cleared by the Genetics and Insurance Committee.

Mr. McWalter: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that bringing the human genome project to completion has concentrated people's minds on the issue in a way that may not have been the case in 1998?

Dr. Harris: Certainly scientists' minds have been concentrated on the human genome project but I have not heard Ministers use the relentless onslaught of exciting scientific projects as an excuse—I am sure that they would not do so—for not having legislated. I am sure that the Government had reasons for not taking a tougher view earlier and not bringing forward the moratorium at a time when that would have protected many patients who have been subject to genetic tests that have not been approved by the Genetics and Insurance Committee.

I was, again, surprised that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak did not stress paragraph 62 of the report. Because she did not do so, I shall. That paragraph states:

"The previous unwillingness of the Government to become involved in this area has contributed to the atmosphere of confusion and ignorance that pervades the use of genetic test results."

There has been huge confusion over what the future will be, and that is not to the advantage of the insurance industry. People have told me that they have found it difficult to plan when they do not know what the situation is. I do not believe that a five-year moratorium will make it any easier for them; indeed, the Government's delay in deciding their policy on long-term care insurance, after the royal commission, has also created difficulties for the insurance industry. The Government, quite rightly, want to support British industry but they have to recognise that protracted failure to make up their mind on such issues can have an adverse impact.

The Select Committee raised a question, in strong terms, about resources for the Genetics and Insurance Committee. It did not, strangely, bring that out in its recommendations but it described as alarming the response to the fact that the Genetics and Insurance Committee has 1.6 whole-time equivalent staff while the insurance industry has a huge budget to spend on the area. Will the Government give an assurance that they will not just keep that concern in mind but actively review it? The Committee's recommendation on the funding of the Human Genetics Commission was also clear. It stated at paragraph 74:

"The Government should, as a matter of urgency, review the funding and resources the HGC is allocated. If the HGC is to receive extra work as a result of our recommendations, this should also be reflected in its budget."

[Dr. Harris]

The Government say merely that they are

"committed to keeping the resources available to all their advisory bodies under review".

I had hoped that the Government would say that they have carried out a specific review of that work load.

A major concern that I have about the Government's action relates to paragraph 67 of the Select Committee's report:

"Insurance companies were wrong to use the results of genetic tests in assessing risk before they had been approved by the GAIC."

The Government now say in paragraph 42 of their response that they agree with the recommendations of the Select Committee. I would be grateful if the Minister would say whether she is willing to identify and perhaps compensate any patients or insurants who might have suffered as a result of the Government's failure to act earlier.

This has been a useful debate, but the Select Committee missed an opportunity to be much clearer. I will end with a comment about the recommendation in paragraph 70. The Select Committee fell into a trap of believing that the choices for legislation were all or nothing. It stated,

"We do not believe that legislation denying insurers access to all genetic test results would be appropriate."

The Government agree with that, and so do I. Clearly, there is benefit in having a moratorium below a certain amount so that it is reasonable to use positive results when people are seeking to insure themselves above an amount; however, that could be reflected in legislation. Similarly, it is reasonable to ensure that insurance companies are able to use negative results, which would bring people down to the standard risk; again, legislation could allow that. It is a pity that the Select Committee, having stated that legislation banning all genetic testing would not be appropriate, decided that the logical conclusion was a voluntary moratorium. The middle way between a voluntary moratorium and a ban on all genetic testing would be legislation to introduce a ban—along the lines of the moratorium, perhaps—so that society can be protected.

Despite that criticism of the Select Committee, I believe that its report was good in that it brought the issues together in a timely manner and enabled us to examine the continuing work of the Human Genetics Commission. I hope that the Government will respond to my concerns and accept that the on-going process should not be reviewed by the insurance industry only; Government should review the working of the moratorium as well—thus far, we have not heard anything about that.

5.7 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Well, that was interesting. That speech seemed to raise a few contradictions. On the one hand, the moratorium is a rather good idea, although it is not in statute. On the other, we should pool all risks, ignoring those shown by genetic testing, although we should do it only under a certain limit.

I congratulate the Committee on a thorough piece of work. Michael Clark, who was the Chairman, is well known for being assiduous and careful and for understanding his science. We can see in the evidence the careful questioning by him and other members of the Committee, and it is a tribute to the Committee that the Association of British Insurers and the Government have reached a point at which there will be a five-year moratorium. A Minister in the other place described it as a breathing space, and there is a lot to be said for that in the circumstances.

The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) made the important point, which has also been made by the Co-operative Insurance Society, that medicine might evolve rapidly and many future diagnoses will be made on the basis of genetic tests rather than the existing medical tests. That could extend the boundaries for concessions from the insurance industry and could lead to a series of changes that we cannot foresee.

I find it difficult to be totally critical of the insurance industry in the way that some have been. The ABI was the first such body in the world to produce a code of conduct on genetic testing and it has made efforts over the years to keep up with science and ethical difficulties. It is easy to criticise Governments, but they face the same problems because this is a fast-moving picture. Medicine is not keeping pace with the science, so is it reasonable to expect insurance companies and Governments to do so? We must do our best, and some success has been achieved because of the report and the Committee's work in the 1990s.

I have concerns about the principles that we should follow. We cannot say that, because the tests do not work as well as we would like, they never will and, because there are only a handful of cases in which tests have been used, we should have a moratorium and ignore the question for the next few years. We must examine the issues of principle.

When Professor Bobrow gave evidence, he said that a wider question than that of genetic tests was genetic information and how insurance companies use it. He described taking a family history as genetic information. What is the Government's attitude to the present situation? Family histories, which involve genetic information, are taken with the result that some people are loaded and some are refused insurance.

Is the Minister happy for the well-established principle that only similar risks should be shared to continue? It is important to establish whether the Government are saying that the current moratorium might form the basis of future policy—that is, that certain evidence will be ignored and risks pooled more widely—or is it their position that the moratorium will give us time to think matters through properly, but that they are not planning fundamental changes for the insurance industry?

What is the extent of the problem that genetic tests address? Taking a family history obtains a lot of genetic information and allows the insurer to make a decision. People who are genetically tested will, by and large, have a family history. Is the genetic test element significant in a number of insurance company cases? The present information is that the element is significant in only a handful for each of the big companies.

Dr. Gibson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is not just insurance that has a problem with genetics and

that there is also the question of employability? That question may spill into other industries as well, which is why the broader picture and principles must be examined during the moratorium.

Mr. Heald: I am sure that that is right, and it is an important point. Given my agreement with the Minister, I have only three minutes left in which to speak, so I shall not be able to complete my speech. I shall press on.

If a person is refused insurance and dies in circumstances in which dependants suffer, there is often a cost to the state. The refusal of insurance often has adverse consequences for society, but it would be helpful to know what the Government consider to be the balance. The Select Committee talked about the adverse consequence of positive genetic testing—people may not be prepared to take the treatment that they should. Is that how the Government view the balance? Do they consider that to be the adverse consequence or do they view the problem more widely?

What is the position on enforcing the moratorium? As the hon. Member for Brent, North said, if a material disclosure is not made and a claim is subsequently made on one's behalf, the insurance company can void the policy. That is the law. Does the Government's agreement with the ABI change the law and, if so, in what way, or will ABI members simply change the contracts that they make with individuals?

Mr. Gardiner: Because the industry and its members have agreed to waive that information, it is covered by section 18 of the Marine Insurance Act 1906. Therefore, there is no reason to void the policy.

Mr. Heald: I would be grateful to hear the Minister's view on that.

Are the Government tempted by the idea that all policyholders should share the risk up to a particular ceiling, even though some policyholders have genetic conditions that are known about through genetic tests, but which do not have to be disclosed? In other words, is the Minister tempted by the solution proposed by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris)?

By what mechanism is enforcement to occur? The Minister spoke about GAIC monitoring compliance of the moratorium, but how will that be done? Will GAIC respond to individual complaints of non-compliance or will it take proactive steps to ensure that the moratorium is followed? What is the international perspective? Is the moratorium unique? What are other countries doing? Is there a danger that internet products will be made available in this country at lower premiums because other countries are not enforcing or reaching agreements as our Government have?

I intended to ask many more questions, but I am running short of time. The Select Committee wants to see more published research. Does the Minister believe that the moratorium will contribute to more actuarial research by insurance companies or hinder it? If so, what should be done? What is the overall public interest in this sector?

Is there evidence that those who receive an adverse medical result and are therefore likely to be refused insurance will fail to take medical advice? Presently, the insurance refusal rate is about 3 per cent. Are people acting in the knowledge of that risk and failing to take medical treatment? Is any other independent evidence available to suggest that people will, on account of the risks, adopt the approach identified by the Select Committee—failure to take the treatment that they should?

We have heard several speeches, including those of the hon. Member for Brent, North and my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), which entirely contradict each other. One argued for the insurance company view and the other for community rating in the insurance industry. What does the Minister believe?

5.18 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): The debate has been stimulating and useful. It follows the Select Committee's report, which provided a timely and helpful review of the use of genetic test results for insurance purposes. I thank present and former members of the Select Committee for their work.

Today's debate has also provided a useful opportunity to inform the House of progress made in respect of genetics and insurance since the report's publication. The Government response to that report was published on 23 October. In developing that response, the interim recommendations of the Human Genetics Commission, chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy, proved invaluable. I thank the HGC for its important contribution.

As many hon. Members have said, the pace of developments in genetics in recent times has been impressive and important. The announcements of the human genome project have given us a glimpse of the enormous potential that will come from our greater understanding of the part that genetics play in susceptibility to, and development of, a host of diseases. Genetics is a fast-moving issue and, understandably, one that generates a great deal of interest. The Government's response to the developments must be not only swift and timely, but measured and flexible.

In the past, we have viewed genetics as affecting a relatively small number of people with rare serious disorders. However, in the future we may be offered tests that predict the risk of developing more common acquired diseases, such as cancer and heart disease. Many families carry as part of their genetic inheritance genes that might lead to genetic illnesses in some individuals. Many people in that position agree that the decision to take a genetic test can be difficult. The United Kingdom can be justly proud of the teams of dedicated professionals who care for patients and their families and who may have, or be at risk of, a disease with a genetic basis. The counselling and care offered by those teams can help individuals reach a decision that is right for themselves and their families.

Unfortunately, however, the decision to take a genetic test may be inextricably linked in many people's minds with concerns about the implications of the results for insurance and employment. It is imperative that people should not be deterred from taking such tests because of worries about non-health-related use of the results. As has been pointed out, genetics is not only about diagnosis. Such technologies also play a central role in

[Jacqui Smith]

the battle to develop new and better treatments. Those benefits will not be manifest without public confidence and participation in valuable genetic research. There is a real danger that people will not take part in such research if they fear the insurance consequences.

Politicians and the wider public greet genetic developments with a mixture of optimism and apprehension. As we improve health and health care through a better understanding of our genes, we are charting new waters. Against the backdrop of great promise, we must balance very real worries about the ethical and societal issues that the technologies raise.

The implications of genetic testing stretch beyond health and health care. In particular, because of their potential predictive value, genetic test results have implications for insurance provision. The advent of genetic testing has created a situation that has potential financial implications for both the insurer and the consumer. There are concerns that an adverse genetic test may render insurance unobtainable or unaffordable and worries that consumers may withhold that genetic information from insurers. Clearly, there could be financial implications for the insurer if those people who know that they are at high risk take out high-value policies while concealing relevant information about that risk from the insurer. That is known as adverse selection. That genetic test results represent a double-edged sword in relation to insurance must be recognised. How should we best balance such worries?

Our debate has been important and well informed. When opening the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) gave an excellent summary of the history and the issues involved. I am sure that other hon. Members will want to join me in expressing disappointment that she will not continue to be a member of the Science and Technology Committee. She and other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), raised the important issue of family history. Clearly, concern exists that people whose family members carry an inherited disorder may find insurance difficult to obtain because of their family history, irrespective of whether they have had a genetic test. As my hon. Friend pointed out, the Secretary of State for Health has stated that he will consult support groups and the insurance industry to examine what can be done to improve matters for those whose family history makes insurance difficult or impossible to obtain due to cost. If a person has a family history of genetic illness with a negative genetic test result, insurance companies may use the result to reduce increased premiums to normal levels. My hon. Friend pushed the Government to respond on the time scale in relation to that. The Human Genetics Commission has indicated that it will consider the issue of the use of family history by insurers. It will report on the matter next year, and we shall want to wait to take into account recommendations that it may make on the issue.

The hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) used his long experience of the issue, as a Committee member and as a Minister, in his contribution. He rightly highlighted the positive benefits of genetic testing while urging continued action during the moratorium. I will come on to that point later. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) highlighted the complexity of interpreting genetic testing, the need for more research, and the need to ensure that that testing and research benefits people medically and socially. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) challenged the activities of insurance companies, especially in relation to the predictive use of genetic tests. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East emphasised the need, as did the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire, for compliance with the moratorium in relation to what action the Government intended to take. In an interesting contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) used his insurance background to highlight the principles of insurance cover, and made a useful contribution if only because it enabled another voice and view to be heard during the debate.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) reassured us that the Liberal Democrat conference has addressed this important issue. I must have missed that particular session. I agreed with his emphasis on the social importance of this issue, which I shall address in a moment. However, I agreed with the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire that some of his other conclusions or policy proposals were contradictory. The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire questioned the monitoring that would be in place of the moratorium, which I shall discuss later. He also made an interesting point about the international comparison and international implications, especially in relation to the internet, about which I shall write to him.

Mr. Gardiner: In her remarks about the moratorium, will the Minister clarify for the Committee the Government's position on the interpretation of the policy limits? The Government's response states:

"The moratorium will apply to life insurance policies up to £500,000 and critical illness...up to £300,000".

Will she clarify whether that is per life, per policy or per person taking out the policy who has an insurable interest, as, of course, a husband may take out a policy on his wife, and vice versa? It is important to know what is the total exposure that the Government anticipate will apply to the moratorium.

Jacqui Smith: I think that I shall be covering those issues. If my hon. Friend thinks that I do not so, I am sure that we can follow that up later.

Governments have been actively working with key stakeholders to examine these issues since 1996. In December of that year, the previous Government established the non-statutory advisory body, the Human Genetics Advisory Commission. Following a consultation exercise, it published a report in December 1997. The Government's response, published in November 1998, agreed with HGAC that a permanent ban on the use of genetic test results by insurers would be inappropriate, and that remains our position. However, the Government's response drew attention to the need to introduce an independent mechanism to evaluate the use of specific test results by insurers. By April 1999, a new body, the Genetics and Insurance Committee, had been

established by the Government to fulfil that role. To date, GAIC has reviewed and accepted the evidence for a single test—that for Huntington's disease—for life insurance policies only. GAIC has also begun to review applications for the use of genetic test results for breast cancer and the early onset of Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Heald: Does the Minister agree that GAIC's work on those tests is being examined not only by the insurance industry but by geneticists, and that it is important that its work should not be considered only in the context of insurance, but that it should be seen as important throughout the medical world?

Jacqui Smith: All of the work that is being undertaken in the area that is under discussion is of importance not only in the context of insurance. Specific mechanisms are needed to ensure that tests that are used by insurers are clinically, technically and actuarially relevant—and that is a task for GAIC. However, the Government have also addressed the wider ethical and societal issues that arise from developments in genetics. To maximise potential gains from those developments, the public must be fully engaged in the debate about how they are used, and an understanding of their potential and, more importantly, a faith in the regulatory system, will be crucial. The Government must carry public opinion with regard to such matters.

In 2000, the Government established the Human Genetics Commission as an independent body to advise them on policy issues with regard to human genetics. In recognition of the broad interest and concern that there is in that area, the HGC was specifically tasked with addressing its social, ethical, legal and health care implications.

The Government asked the HGC to provide advice on the specific issue of genetics and insurance, and in May 2001 the HGC produced recommendations for a moratorium of not less than three years on the use of genetic test results by insurance companies. An exception was recommended by the HGC for higher value policies where the use of the test results reviewed and accepted by GAIC might continue. The HGC's recommended ceiling of the moratorium is £500,000 to cover the total value of an individual's insurance policies.

The Select Committee report and the HGC's recommendations have provided an important opportunity to consider whether systems put in place two years ago, with the establishment of GAIC to oversee the use of genetic test information by insurance companies, remain appropriate.

On 23 October 2001 the Government published their response to the Select Committee report. It contains details of our plans for adapting our mechanisms of oversight to meet the needs of today. The Government have agreed a package of measures that are designed to protect consumers and to provide for a suitable environment to develop a long-term sustainable policy. That package contains three key elements: a new moratorium by the Association of British Insurers on the use of genetic tests in insurance; the restructuring of GAIC, and a new expanded remit for it with regard to the monitoring of compliance with the moratorium; and a recognition of the need to develop a sustainable policy to replace the moratorium.

The moratorium, which the Government have negotiated and agreed with the ABI, will take effect from 1 November 2001. It sets out high financial ceilings underneath which genetic test results will not be used in the calculation of premiums. The new moratorium covers all types of policy up to the value of £300,000, with the exception of life insurance, for which the ceiling will be £500,000. The moratorium will stand for five years with a provision for a review of the financial ceilings after three years. The ceilings exceed the recommendations of the HGC, which sought an agreed limit of £500,000 to cover the total value of an individual's insurance cover. Under the new Association of British Insurers moratorium, should an individual wish to take out life, critical illness, income protection and long-term care insurance up to the ceiling value of each product, a total maximum value of all those added together would be £1.4 million.

Let me respond to worries about the clinical and actuarial relevance of tests that are accepted. Above the moratorium's ceilings, insurance companies will be allowed to use only the results of genetic tests that have been approved by GAIC. The introduction of those thresholds is designed to protect the insurance industry from potential high-cost adverse selection.

A five-year voluntary moratorium was agreed. That is longer than the minimum recommended by the Select Committee and the HGC. It essential for the moratorium to be sufficiently long to allow agreement about a long-term policy. We recognise that genetics is a fast-developing field and that we need to allow for the consideration of new data derived during the moratorium by stakeholders, and we have included a review point of the financial limits at three years.

The Government are committed to reviewing the membership and remit of GAIC. In line with the Select Committee's recommendations, the membership of GAIC will be expanded. We plan to advertise such vacancies later this year as part of a nationwide recruitment campaign for a number of health bodies. We will seek to strengthen GAIC by appointing additional members. They will include a person with expertise on consumer affairs, an insurance broker and a genetic councillor.

In response to a point made by the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire, let me say that GAIC will be charged with an expanded role in monitoring compliance with the terms of the moratorium. That will go beyond providing for an independent review of the annual returns that insurers provide to the ABI, and will include giving GAIC a new remit to investigate individual examples of non-compliance with the moratorium. If a policy applicant is unhappy about the way in which an insurance company dealt with their application, they should initially take that up with the company. If they are not satisfied with the results, they will be encouraged to contact the ABI. Importantly, if the applicant remains dissatisfied, they will be able to take their complaint to GAIC. If GAIC cannot resolve the matter, an independent tribunal will be set up with wide-ranging powers, including the provision to impose unlimited fines on insurance companies.

Mr. Heald: A matter that was also raised by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon is what happens about insurance companies that are not in the ABI, such as Virgin Direct.

Jacqui Smith: On the whole, insurance companies that are not in the ABI have tended to have a more generous interpretation. However, the Government will carefully examine such insurance companies and would want to take action if they were acting in a manner that is not in line with the moratorium.

Dr. Harris: Will the Minister give way?

Jacqui Smith: No. I am running out of time. The hon. Gentleman took plenty of time with his contribution.

GAIC will be asked to make annual reports to Ministers about insurers' compliance with the moratorium and the code of practice. Let there be no doubt that any failure of the agreement will lead to a reconsideration of the Government's position regarding the need for statutory control. If there is evidence of serious and persistent non-compliance with the moratorium by the insurance industry, the Government will, if necessary, enforce the moratorium through legislation.

I thank the Select Committee for its work. Its report and the recommendations of the HGC have been invaluable in helping us to identify the best way forward. The terms of a strong and effective moratorium were negotiated with the ABI. I am particularly pleased to note that the financial ceilings on the moratorium are substantial. There will be robust and independent arrangements for monitoring compliance. That provision is important if the moratorium is to be effective. Taken together, the moratorium and the arrangements for monitoring compliance will provide a suitable environment to develop—

Dr. Harris: We have a little time before the end of the sitting. What about people who suffered as a result of paying a higher premium because of the use of genetic tests up to 1 November, before the moratorium that the Minister negotiated comes into force?

Jacqui Smith: Considerable action has been taken, as I outlined. I would not consider it appropriate today to make the sort of commitment that the hon. Gentleman is trying to force out of me.

The Government believe that the moratorium and the arrangements for monitoring compliance will provide the environment that will, as hon. Members said, be important in ensuring that we develop a long-term sustainable policy in a field that is changing and developing quickly. We are confident that the package of measures will help both protect the public and maintain a competitive insurance industry.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): That was an excellent and informed debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Six o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 30 October 2001

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Sexual Health

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Angela Smith.*]

9.30 am

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): I start by welcoming the publication of the national strategy for sexual health and HIV. It is the first such strategy, and the Government are to be commended on their work. The document is not the end of the story: it is out for consultation, and the policy development work continues.

Hon. Members might be aware that my interest is in HIV-AIDS, on which I shall focus in the main. I am sure that other hon. Members will talk about other sexual health matters. My interest in HIV was triggered in the 1980s as a result of my being an Edinburgh Member of Parliament. Hon. Members will be aware that Edinburgh had a huge problem with HIV transmission caused by injecting drugs. In 1985 and earlier, 81 per cent. of HIV diagnoses in Scotland were for infections caught in that way. That has all changed. Injecting drug use accounted for 11 per cent. of diagnoses in the first half of this year, while sex between men is now the largest exposure category.

Many people have been tempted to see HIV as a threat of the past, but that is far from true. It would be helpful to take a quick overview of the HIV epidemic in the UK. There were 3,550 new HIV diagnoses last year—the highest number on record. The majority of cases stem from heterosexual sex, mostly in high-prevalence countries—the number has been rising steeply for several years. However, the majority of transmissions in the UK still arise from sex between men, and there is little evidence that the number of new infections is declining.

The UK's performance in limiting HIV transmission from mother to baby has been poorer than that of several other European countries, but there is evidence that rates have begun to improve. The number of cases that result from intravenous drug usage remains low, but the rate of works sharing is thought to be worsening.

The Government have said that the rise in the total number of HIV diagnoses could be accounted for partly by increased antenatal testing, and I would be grateful if my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), could elaborate a bit further and tell us what proportion of new diagnoses results from antenatal screening.

The final point that I want to make in this overview was mentioned in the Government's strategy document. HIV is not distributed equally through the population. The Terrence Higgins Trust recently published a report showing the association between HIV infection and social exclusion.

The life expectancy of people with HIV has been transformed by combination therapy, and as a result many people with HIV are alive today who would otherwise not be. However, it is equally vital to prevent the spread of HIV. Against the background of the progress made in previous years, it is a matter of great concern and disappointment that high numbers of new infections occur in this country every year. In this day and age, every new HIV infection represents a failure of prevention.

I do not want to exaggerate—it is not all bad news. The HIV epidemic here is not as bad as that in many comparable developed countries, and there has not been the explosion in numbers that many people feared in the 1980s. Prevention work in the early years of the epidemic achieved successes—for instance, needle exchanges, which were controversial at the time, and the high-profile public information campaigns. I am concerned that such prevention work has been allowed to go off the boil in the latter years of the epidemic. In 1998, Peter Piot, the executive director of the joint United Nations programme on HIV-AIDS—UNAIDS—said that, at the very moment when we knew most about preventing HIV infection, there had been a weakening of the global effort to do something about it.

My hon. Friend will be well aware of the National AIDS Trust paper "HIV at the Crossroads" by Professor Peter Aggleton. Professor Aggleton said:

> "Almost without exception, governments in the developed world no longer see HIV prevention as a top priority, and there has been a progressive weakening of support for the provision of public information and other prevention initiatives . . . In Britain, prevention initiatives for the population as a whole are presently conspicuous by their absence, and because there has not been a significant heterosexual HIV epidemic, many health authorities across Britain have sought to 'mainstream' their HIV and AIDS work into other programmes and activities."

Hon. Members may be aware that the Department of Health funding for prevention has not kept up with inflation since the mid-1990s. Funding in Scotland was frozen for several consecutive years, until this year. Good people are doing good work in HIV prevention, but there is a real sense in which prevention work has not kept up with the changing nature of the epidemic.

I draw attention to the words of "John", a gay London man in his 30s, who was diagnosed HIV positive on 10 July. When interviewed by BBC News Online, he said:

> "Clearly the message about safe sex is missing the target, if it is being delivered at all. In one internet chatroom used by many gay men in London you can find an area where up to 50 men a night are looking for unsafe 'bareback' sex. I think the reasons behind the rise in unsafe sex are complex. The fear of HIV and AIDS has undoubtedly subsided, making many people complacent. The appeal of taking a risk alongside sexual excitement is another factor. So is the belief among many gay men that sex without a condom is 'better'. Drink and drugs are also part of this potent mix. Lack of self-esteem among many gay men plays its part as well. Two years ago I rarely met people who wanted unsafe sex. In the last six months the numbers grew significantly. If we are really to challenge the spread of HIV and do it in an intelligent and effective way, we need to get to the heart of those issues."

John managed to capture many of the key points. The epidemic—or epidemics—among gay men are complex and changing, and the safe sex message is simply not getting through.

I am aware that these matters are now largely devolved, but I should point out that Scotland might suffer a second wave of HIV infection. This summer,

[Dr. Gavin Strang]

Dr. Jamie Inglis, director of public health at the Health Education Board for Scotland, called for prevention campaigns to be stepped up and warned that if there were a delay in taking new steps to raise awareness about the dangers of unprotected sex, it could be too late to stop a dramatic increase in the spread of HIV.

Derek Bodell, chief executive of the National Aids Trust, said that people becoming sexually active now will not have been influenced by the campaigns of the 1980s. He said:

"I think people are starting to think we don't need to think about this anymore. There is a danger that people don't remember the safer sex messages about wearing a condom which are so important."

Meanwhile, as Professor Roy Anderson of Imperial college London said,

"you get a growing body of evidence that suggests that young people believe the threat of HIV is much less than it was because there's effective treatment. Well that's very far from the truth. This organism, this disease, is in my view the biggest threat human society has seen."

HIV prevention work aims to prevent the suffering and hardship associated with HIV infection. Even with combination therapy, life with HIV is often hard. Resistance to the drugs is growing: around 20 per cent. of newly infected individuals are infected with a resistant virus. HIV is a young person's disease, and while other diseases that rightly attract funding priority tend to affect people in later life, those most vulnerable to HIV have their whole lives ahead of them. It is also fair to make the point, as the Government do in their strategy document, that the monetary value of preventing a single onward transition is estimated at somewhere between £500,000 and £1 million in individual health benefits and treatment costs.

I welcome the Government strategy and the additional money that they have announced. The Minister may be aware that there is some concern, which I share, that very little of the new money attached to the strategy is intended to increase HIV prevention efforts on the ground. I would be grateful to receive assurances on that point.

"Mainstreaming" has been a buzzword in the HIV field for a few years now, and it has several aspects. The mainstreaming of HIV policy is nowhere better illustrated than in the subsuming of the proposed HIV strategy into the current strategy for sexual health and HIV.

I understand the motivation behind the integration of HIV policy with other sexual health policy. Benefits may be secured from an integrated approach. However, there are dangers. We must ensure that the policy framework is not so tightly integrated that the specificity of HIV-related concerns is mainstreamed away, and that the growing skills and knowledge base acquired around HIV is lost.

Funding is also mainstreamed. From 1 April 2002, the HIV-AIDS budget ring fence in England will be scrapped, so the only central mechanism that has required health authorities to spend in this area will be abolished. The worry is that while good work will continue to be done in some areas, HIV work will disappear in others. The most vulnerable spending areas will be the unpopular ones, such as health promotion among gay men and African communities, and voluntary sector grants for social care.

Although the Government's strategy document contains helpful proposals, there are no mechanisms to ensure that they are implemented. I hope that the Government will consider delaying the removal of the ring fence, because it is the main weapon that ensures that the money set aside for the purpose is spent on tackling HIV. There is enough concern about it to justify further consideration and consultation.

As well as the removal of the HIV budget ring fence, the existing health authorities will be scrapped on 1 April 2002 and commissioning responsibility will pass to primary care trusts. That will give rise to two dangers. The first is the risk that we will lose the expertise in HIV-AIDS that some health authorities have developed. A great effort must be made to equip the primary care trusts with the knowledge and resources that they will need. The second is that, in the upheaval of the changes, we may lose sight of the areas for action on HIV that are set out in the strategy.

We can all agree that what is important for HIV prevention is what works, but that is where agreement ends. I read with interest in the strategy document that the Government's view is that the evidence base for HIV prevention is still dispersed and unsystematic. It is regrettable that that is still the case, but it is good that the Government have recognised it and that the Health Development Agency has been commissioned to address the problem.

The Minister knows that I piloted the AIDS (Control) Act 1987 through the House of Commons as a private Member's Bill. I hope that she is also aware that I have set out proposals to bring the Act into the 21st century, so that its provisions for accountability and information are improved, and it allows a better vision of what should happen regionally and nationally. The all-party group on AIDS has also recommended that the Act be updated to include a requirement to report more widely than within the health sector, to provide for greater consultation and to require health authorities to account for discrepancies between spending and local epidemiology. Accountability and communication are as necessary now as they were in 1987. The reports have a valuable role to play in that regard. The strategy promises that the Act will be reviewed, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has in mind.

The Government announced in December 1997 that they would draw up a strategy on HIV. The membership of the strategy steering group was announced in April 1999. The strategy was published in July 2001 and the Government are now embarking on further consultation to refine it, as is right and proper. However, the situation is urgent, and I hope that the publication of the strategy and its implementation, combined with the work of the Health Development Agency, will prove to be a landmark in the efforts in the UK to reduce the spread of HIV.

Some countries have worse epidemics than we do. However, that is largely thanks to the work that was done in the earlier years of our epidemic. The commendable effort of those years has not been sustained. That complacency might be because combination therapy has allowed many people who

would not otherwise be able to do so to lead relatively normal lives. Whatever the reason, complacency is a mistake. Every new HIV infection is a failure. We should take the opportunity that the strategy offers significantly to step up our efforts, especially in higher-risk groups, and to reduce the number of people who become infected with HIV in future.

9.44 am

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) on securing this debate. As he rightly said, the health service in Scotland is a devolved matter, so my comments will be relatively brief. Although the matter is devolved, there is the possibility of a second AIDS problem arising in Scotland very quickly. AIDS is a worldwide problem and the virus does not respect borders. Given that we are all travelling more, we should consider the problem more on a pan-European and worldwide basis, not just in terms of the UK or Scotland.

The right hon. Gentleman stated that the highest rate of HIV infection in Scotland was originally among intravenous drug users. However, that has changed over the years. Last year saw the highest levels of HIV infection on record in Scotland, and the number of new cases of HIV diagnosed among heterosexuals was almost the same as among gay men—60 compared with 61. That shows that AIDS has moved out of the groups that were originally hit, and is hitting people throughout the population.

It has been suggested that Scotland's young heterosexual middle classes are becoming the new victims of AIDS. Why is that happening? The right hon. Gentleman hit on it when he said that the message of safe sex has been lost to some extent. Those of us who are now in our 40s remember the almost apocalyptic advertising about the dangers of AIDS that appeared in the 1980s, which had a great effect on young people at that time. That effect has largely disappeared, and many young people have become complacent about the dangers of AIDS. That is shown by the rising number of infections in Scotland and throughout the UK.

There may be other reasons for that increase. I draw the Minister's attention to an investigation carried out by the Sandyford initiative in Glasgow, which found that the recent rise in HIV cases in Scotland may be set to accelerate dramatically. The institute specialises in sexual health matters. It carried out tests on 59 people who were receiving the highly active anti-retroviral therapy HIV treatment. Its study, which was published in *The Lancet*, showed that 11 of the 43 men and 16 women had become infected with sexually transmitted diseases while they were receiving the treatment, so there is evidence that people infected with HIV are not practising safe sex. The right hon. Gentleman hinted at that.

The Government Minister and Ministers in the Scottish Executive must consider how to retarget the message at young people who are becoming sexually active. Young people are travelling much more than they would have done many years ago, so if there is a problem in other countries, it can be imported into the United Kingdom. Moreover, the message about the importance of practising safe sex should be reinforced for those who are already infected with HIV. The right hon. Gentleman quoted John, a young man in London. That was a frightening intimation of what might happen if the safe sex message were not reinforced. I urge the Minister to meet health officials in England and Wales, members of the Scottish Executive and our European counterparts to consider a strategy to cover the whole area, because the virus knows no borders.

AIDS is not the only sexually transmitted disease with a rising rate of infection: there has been a dramatic rise in instances of chlamydia over the past few years. The figures from my own area of Tayside show that infections have more than doubled during the past three years. The reasons for that worrying trend may be complex, but I suspect that the safe sex message is at the root of it. If the message has been lost in one area, it has probably been lost throughout the population, and that has led to the rises.

Although sexual health is a devolved matter, it concerns everyone in the United Kingdom and Europe. I welcome the Government's strategy. More funds must be made available. Ultimately, the message of safe sex must be put across to our young people. We must be on guard for changes in how the disease appears in Scotland and in the UK as a whole.

9.50 am

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) has secured the debate, as it is important that we consider the strategy on sexual health and HIV. As he said, the strategy is long overdue. It was announced in 1997, and progress appeared to have been made in 1999. I want to concentrate on HIV, for which we initially had a separate strategy that struggled to make any progress until it was merged with the sexual health strategy. That led to the publication of this strategy document earlier this year.

I recognise that the strategy covers many issues other than HIV. There are obviously relationships between actions on the prevention of HIV and those on the prevention of other sexually transmitted infections, such as hepatitis B. Some subjects not mentioned in the strategy may not be directly relevant, such as hepatitis C, which is not sexually transmitted but which remains an important issue and one that the Department of Health needs to tackle.

Anyone who read the strategy would accept that its scope was comprehensive and that it covered a wide range of issues. Someone described it to me as ticking all the right boxes, and it picks up on all the questions that need to be answered. Few would disagree with the key aims in the section on objectives and targets, which are to reduce the number of newly acquired infections, to discourage the practice of unsafe sex, and to raise awareness of services. Nor would many disagree with the methods that it proposes to achieve those aims, such as work in collaboration with health authorities and the voluntary sector, improvements in outreach services, and enhancing the role that HIV treatment and care services play in prevention. We have tended to regard treatment and care as a separate service from prevention, but it can affect prevention so we should ensure that it plays a role.

[Mr. Neil Gerrard]

My right hon. Friend mentioned the building of an evidence base. It makes sense to find out precisely what has worked. When we develop new programmes, especially to prevent HIV and other diseases, we often do not consider what has been effective in the past.

The strategy document for the first time sets specific targets. Paragraph 3.12 sets a target

"to reduce by 25 per cent. the number of newly acquired HIV infections and gonorrhoea infections by the end of 2007".

I am not clear exactly how that target will be achieved, and I shall return to the problem of implementation. How was the figure of 25 per cent. determined? Why was not 20 or 33 per cent. chosen? I suspect that the figure has been plucked out of the air, especially in the light of what has been said about the evidence base, and the uncertainty about what works. We clearly need to monitor progress towards the target.

Few people would fundamentally disagree with much in the strategy. However, the Department of Health will not be directly responsible for implementing most of it. That will be carried out by health authorities, primary care trusts and the voluntary sector, which has a significant contribution to make. It is unclear to me how some of the proposals will be put into practice and what mechanisms will be used to ensure that that happens.

Much of the strategy is about encouraging health planners to do the right things, but it is unclear how some of their actions will be monitored. We know from experience that monitoring is necessary. For example, it became clear from a survey by the National AIDS Trust in 1999 that money from the prevention budget, which has existed for some years, was not necessarily being targeted at the groups most at risk.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the AIDS (Control) Act 1987, and I am far from clear how that will operate within the new NHS structures. At present it requires reports from health authorities. I do not understand how the new structures will relate to the Act—as it is now or as it might be if reformed—if there are changes as to where commissioning takes place, and in responsibility for commissioning.

I am concerned about mainstreaming, which my right hon. Friend mentioned in opening the debate. We know that as from April there will be mainstreaming of all HIV budgets, at least within the health service. Various budgets exist, including the care and treatment allocation, the prevention budget, section 64 grants to voluntary organisations and the AIDS support grant to local authorities. The different allocations are not always planned together terribly well. However, we are told that the money will be mainstreamed. As my right hon. Friend said, that will remove the central mechanism that requires spending by health authorities on particular areas of work.

I understand the argument that ring-fencing does not apply to many other medical conditions, and I know that people ask why HIV should be considered unique. However, one of the achievements of the ring fence was to ensure that the money was spent on HIV. Without that pressure, some health authorities may not have spent it on that. The approach has led to the development of services that may not otherwise have existed. It has been a factor in developing the work of non-governmental organisations, including service delivery, and in developing the interest and involvement of many people in NGOs in what is happening with respect to HIV. Money can be tracked to see where it is being spent.

It is particularly worrying that the change to mainstreaming is happening while health service structures are in a state of flux. Primary care trusts and the new strategic health authorities are moving from the present system towards much more commissioning. Although I have read the strategy, I am still very unclear about how HIV commissioning will fit into the new structure. Most commissioning is expected to go to PCT level, but HIV services such as care and treatment have been regarded as specialisms. Will the new strategic health authorities have a role in commissioning? Will commissioning responsibilities be split in any way? I am not at all clear about the new structure of the health service.

As my right hon. Friend said, if mainstreaming and changes to the structure take place at the same time, there is a danger that we may lose some expertise. Such expertise usually involves a fairly small number of people providing specialist HIV services for a health authority. Some of those people are not clear where their jobs will be in a few months time, or whether they will even exist. Some GPs are well aware of what HIV means, and what type of services and prevention should be provided. However, many are not. If a lot more commissioning is to take place at PCT level, how will we ensure that services are developed and that GPs and PCT boards are aware of what is happening?

My right hon. Friend mentioned the worries that do indeed exist throughout much of the sector. Mainstreaming is an issue that we must think about very carefully. I realise that we cannot argue for ever that HIV should be funded in a unique way, but perhaps we should at least delay removing the ring fence for a year or two, until the new structure has settled down and we are clear about where the money will go and where the responsibilities will lie.

The strategy recognises that HIV is not simply a medical issue. It refers to social care and support for those living with, and affected, by HIV, and to how access to education, employment, leisure, housing and advocacy could be provided. It also refers to the Department's efforts to help deliver social care and support, but it makes little reference to other Government Departments. It discusses developing standards in consultation with the social services inspectorate, local authority commissioners, service users and voluntary organisations, but it says little about the involvement of other Departments.

Earlier this year, the all-party group on AIDS published a report on the United Kingdom, HIV and human rights, which made recommendations about what we should be doing. The report, and all of us involved in its production who talked to those working in the field, made it clear that HIV is much more than a medical issue. We made recommendations about the way in which other Departments should be involved. The Department of Health must clearly take the lead in certain areas, but the Home Office and Departments responsible for employment and for education have a

role to play. As we develop the strategy, I would like clear indications of how links between Departments will be built up.

There must also be links with international policy. In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend mentioned that many people diagnosed in the UK acquired their infections overseas. At the United Nations Special Assembly in June, at which the Department for International Development played an important role, it became clear from the discussions that domestic and international policy must be related, even though strategies may differ. We must make sure that those policies are linked.

Given yesterday's announcement on changes in the asylum system and the setting up of reception centres, perhaps the Home Office could re-examine what health checks could be carried out in those centres to help to deal with the problems affecting asylum seekers with HIV infection, who do not always find it easy to disclose that fact.

Those are the areas that concern me. There is a great deal in the strategy document to be welcomed, and I am glad that it has been published. I think that there is very little in it that people would fundamentally disagree with, but we need to consider how it will be implemented, how to ensure that its targets are met and how we can drive its policies forward within the new structures in the health service.

10.7 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I should like to thank the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) for securing this debate. His long-standing interest in HIV and AIDS is known by all hon. Members. The Edinburgh clinical community has played a leading role, and its paediatric work on identifying the epidemiology of maternal transmission from the intravenous drug-using community was staple education for those of us in medical school at the time. I remember the papers authored by Dr. Jacqueline Mok, who was active in the Edinburgh clinical community.

We have heard useful contributions from the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), and the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on AIDS, the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard). He has been tenacious in advocating the need to address the issue of HIV-AIDS, as he has been over the issue of refugees, which he mentioned in the last part of his speech. The two issues come together, especially over heterosexually acquired infections that are acquired abroad.

The right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh made the point that new infections represent a failure of prevention. I want to concentrate my first remarks on why there has been such a failure, as the number of infections increases, and why the Government delayed introducing the strategy. Information was available from an early stage that made clear the extent and the shape of the epidemic. While we have been waiting for the strategy, all the key indicators have shown that the sexual health of the nation has worsened.

Figures covering 1995 and 1996, which showed the worsening situation, were known to Ministers by 1998. Since then, the number of new cases of sexually transmitted diseases has increased dramatically while the Government were delaying the publication and release of their report. Figures from the Public Health Laboratory Service show that between 1998 and 1999 diagnoses of syphilis rose by 58 per cent. in males. It more than doubled in males between the ages of 20 and 44, and rose by 27 per cent. in females. The number of new cases of gonorrhoea in England rose from 12,462 in 1997 to 15,572 in 1999, with the sharpest increases in males aged 20 to 24 and females aged 16 to 19. Genital chlamydial infection has increased by 76 per cent. from 38,997 in 1997 to 51,083 in 1999, with significant increases in both the female and male populations. Asymptomatic HIV infection has risen from just under 1,500 in 1997 to well over 1,600 in 1999, and the position with regard to newly diagnosed HIV infections is worsening and is of serious concern.

Projections made by the PHLS clinical diseases unit suggest that cases of HIV infection are set to increase by 50 per cent. between 1999 and 2003. According to what they describe as conservative forecasts, the total number of people diagnosed with HIV or AIDS may increase from 20,800 in 1999 to 29,000 in 2003. Within that, the figures for heterosexually acquired HIV infection are projected to increase from 6,579 to 11,215. Those figures show a worsening situation. The commentary by the PHLS points out:

"Perhaps the most consistent trend throughout all countries and regions in the UK has been the gradual and sustained increase in STI diagnoses since 1995. Prior to the rising numbers of diagnoses of many STIs in the UK throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, figures had been declining or were stable, possibly reflecting the changes in sexual behaviour brought about in response to the HIV epidemic. The subsequent rises suggest that recently these behavioural modifications have not been sustained.

The highest rates and increases in STI diagnoses are focussed in those aged 16 to 24, peaking earlier in females than males. Young people are behaviourally vulnerable to STI acquisition as they are more likely to have higher numbers of sexual partners and a higher frequency of partner change than older age groups. Young women may be at particular risk through lack of skills and confidence to negotiate safer sex resulting in inconsistent use of barrier contraception."

Even the Government noticed the urgency of the problem. In July 1999, the public health White Paper, "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation", stated:

"Sexually transmitted infections are increasing, particularly chlamydia and gonorrhea".

It then set out the figures, and continues:

"HIV and AIDS remain serious threats to health . . . we cannot afford to be complacent."

However, there has been significant delay in bringing forward a strategy: not in starting the work—that has been announced and is under way—but in making progress. The public health Green Paper of February 1998 contained only two paragraphs on sexual health and no mention of STDs generally, only of teenage pregnancy and HIV and AIDS. The absence of that information was explained away by the sentence:

"The Government is preparing a separate strategy to combat the spread of HIV infection and to meet the challenge to services which HIV and AIDS present."

[Dr. Evan Harris]

Plans for a new strategy—the first promise—were set out in a keynote speech by the then Minister for Public Health, the right hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Tessa Jowell), at an HIV and AIDS strategy meeting in October 1998. She said:

"The policy development process started today will be overseen by a Steering Group whose membership I will announce shortly. But I hope that it will be possible to issue a draft strategy for wide consultation early next year."

However, no draft strategy was issued during 1998, 1999 or 2000, and the membership of the steering group was not announced until April 1999.

The second promise was also made by the then Minister for Public Health at a conference of the Family Planning Association in March 1999. She said:

"The Social Exclusion Unit's work on teenage pregnancy and parenthood . . . has highlighted what we already knew—how much we need an integrated health strategy . . . Over the next 12 months, the Government will be developing a framework that takes the radical approach that provides for the first time, a strategy that covers the whole of sexual and reproductive health . . . We will publish it next year"—

that was to be 2000—

"but I want to get cracking on it now."

Of course, there was no sign of it. The public health White Paper described the strategy on HIV-AIDS as "forthcoming".

The third major promise, which was announced in a Department of Health press release on 24 April 2000, was of an integrated strategy. The Minister for Public Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), announced the integration of the HIV-AIDS and sexual health strategies into a single programme. She said:

"We need to make rapid progress . . . This is important public health work and I want to see it progress as rapidly as possible. I take a keen personal interest in this work, and look forward to working closely with Mike Adler and Sheila Adam to ensure an agreed strategy is in place by next spring."

She was referring to spring 2001, which came and went without the strategy being published.

The fourth promise was made in June 2000 by the Minister for Public Health in a written answer. She stated:

"A draft strategy will be issued for consultation in the autumn."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 2000; Vol. 352, c. 59W.]

Autumn became winter, and still no strategy was issued. On 6 February 2001, in another written answer, she announced:

"We plan to issue the strategy for consultation shortly."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 2001; Vol. 362, c. 508W.]

Finally, at the end of July, we got the strategy.

I understand from members of the steering group that during the time they were appointed they never saw the draft strategy. One member publicly criticised it after it was produced, which was presumably the first time that he had seen it. Derek Bodell, the chief executive of the National AIDS Trust, is quoted in *The Guardian* on 27 July 2001 as saying:

"For such an important public health issue this strategy is far too limited in its scope, and fails to look at the broader social impact of HIV such as employment, education in schools and housing. We are disappointed that this strategy is not as far-reaching as we would have wanted."

Although the Government, in their holistic approach, talk about "education, education, education", we appear to have had procrastination, prevarication and yet more procrastination. The signals were not good, because the Health Education Authority was abolished and its replacement, the Health Development Agency, has had a lower profile than its predecessor. Perhaps that was the Government's aim because they were embarrassed by the messages being sent out by the Health Education Authority, but it was a pity that that professional unit was abolished when there was such a challenge in this area, and in many others.

As the hon. Member for Walthamstow said, there is much in the strategy that is unarguable, and can be welcomed and agreed with. It is important to state that—but I want to stress that we have been waiting an awfully long time to make the point—many of the Government's ideas can be welcomed. The Government point out that little clear evidence on prevention has been gathered. It is sad that the Health Development Agency has only now been asked to gather evidence to find out what works. One would have hoped that that had been done from 1997 to 2000.

Despite recognising that little evidence is available, in paragraph 3.5 of the strategy the Government state that various initiatives, including

"the Department for Education and Skills' revised Sex and Relationship Education Guidance are all helping to expand young people's knowledge of and understanding of sexual health and relationships."

I am sure that that was the intention, but I do not believe that there is any evidence that it has worked. Indeed, people working in the field, who were disappointed by the guidance, suggest that it may not be working. We need to ensure that we do not limit ourselves in our examination of what might work. In that respect, the Government have been timid when considering European models that have worked. In paragraph 3.15, the Government state:

"An evaluation of safer sex campaigns in Holland shows attitudes and intentions towards safer sex were affected positively but that the effect was lost when the intervention ended."

We do not have much in the way of a co-ordinated Government health promotion campaign related to safer sex. It is not a question of worrying about behaviour changing when intervention ends; we want intervention actually to start. As the document makes clear, the Government have not set out a health promotion strategy with an advertising campaign or a sustained, co-ordinated programme through schools and youth activities.

Is the Minister convinced that helplines, such as the national AIDS helpline and Sexwise, are coping with demand? Is too much or, as I suspect, too little money being spent on those helplines? As the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh said, the Government cut funding in real terms for prevention work in earlier years, and that has made it very difficult for professionals in the field.

Reference has been made to targets, and I want to question the Government further. I have always wondered whether setting targets is sensible because they are targets also for Opposition parties who are more interested in making attacks than examining policy—I do not include myself in that. They are also a

distraction to delivery. I have never pressed for rigid targets in this area because they may confound policy. More HIV testing would produce more positive HIV test results, and that would not help to meet a target to reduce the number of detectable newly acquired HIV infections. It is difficult to explain the context of increased HIV infections against a background of decreasing prevalence in anonymous testing, and it will be difficult to get the message across. Setting a target is unhelpful and I would not criticise the Minister for downplaying the target, so long as we agree what the policy should be. The danger is that, ultimately, the target may become the symbol. If professionals believe that their performance will be measured on the outcome, they may decrease their outreach work in the hope of escaping censure.

A fascinating meeting took place last week to examine the national strategy on HIV and sexual health. A number of matters were raised, and I should be grateful if the Government would respond to them. There is potential tension between the PCT's commissioning of sexual health services and specialised HIV treatment and care that is planned at the appropriate strategic level, which may not be PCT level. Split level commissioning following abolition of the health authorities and the need to involve the strategic health authorities will not lead to integration. There is also tension between open access and local funding, because people may congregate on one service and funding may not follow that flow.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow hinted at a significant worry about funding. Money has been announced, but it is only for two years, and if we are to develop new services in this area a commitment to long-term funding and a 10-year funding strategy would be most welcome. The fear is that money is available only for projects and not for the necessary major systemic change. Indeed, primary care organisations have been asking when the money will arrive and when they will know exactly how much they can do. There is also a significant worry that the organisations that currently deliver the service are about to be abolished. The Minister must accept that the effect of continuous change is causing major difficulties.

A spokesman for the Association for Genito-Urinary Medicine has said that general practitioners do not want, or are unable to, become more involved in genito-urinary medicine. Diverting funds to GPs who are not motivated to deliver the service would diminish the service in the short term. Education and training of GPs is needed, but genito-urinary specialists are already overloaded, so who will provide the training?

There are many other issues but not enough time to raise them. I shall finish by asking the Minister some specific questions. It is well recognised that the presence of section 28 on the statute book impedes the ability, whether legally or not, of teachers and other professionals in schools to deliver effective sexual health education. During the previous Parliament, the Government were committed to its repeal, so it is reasonable to ask the Minister whether that will happen sooner rather than later and, if sooner, how. When will the health promotion strategy start, and will it take the shape of a national advertising strategy as well as local initiatives that are properly funded? Will she say whether she thinks the prison service is winning or losing the battle on HIV infection, whether it be sexually transmitted through men having sex with men, or through intravenous drug use?

I want to finish on the same point as the hon. Member for Walthamstow. I am no great believer in ring fencing and bids for funds; I would be inconsistent if I were. There should be more flexibility locally to deliver services. It is wrong to worship on the altar of eternal ring fencing. However, there will be significant structural changes when ring-fencing ends, so will the Minister consider retaining ring-fencing for one year so that we can track whether funding is being retained in the services?

10.25 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) on securing an extremely important debate. Given that it has been 20 years or so since the emergence of HIV-AIDS, it is depressing that in the area of sexual health, which is dominated by HIV-AIDS and other important issues, many of the problems of 20 years ago remain. In that time there has been a move forward, although sadly not far enough, in research, in the development of drugs to alleviate medical problems and in the work done by the voluntary sector, charities, the health service and the Health Department to improve public health.

Unfortunately, three critical areas remain that I think are unacceptable: stigma and prejudice; ignorance and complacency; and delay and procrastination, to which many hon. Members have referred. The first is a matter not only for government; we need to deal with attitudes throughout the country. Any hon. Member who receives constituency mail on the subject is left in no doubt about the prejudice and stigma attached to those suffering from sexual ill-health, particularly, but not solely, from HIV. We all have an important role to play in that area. We must provide a lead to break down the barriers caused by prejudice and to help to educate public opinion. The media also have an important role to play.

While listening to the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh, I was reminded that 10 years ago, when the House of Commons was sitting, I was living in London not 20 yd away from where Freddie Mercury died. I was appalled that the paparazzi and tabloid photographers turned up before his death and patrolled the area for six weeks until he died. To be able to remove his body after his sad death, the coffin had to remain in his home for 12 hours until the Sunday evening. The police then emerged to clear the street of the press so that his body could be removed with dignity and without the glare of press photographers. Photographers and the press would not intrude on other people's private grief if it involved any other illness that has resulted in death. That is all part of the picture of prejudice.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has seen submissions to the Government on these issues, particularly on prejudice. Most submissions call for the abolition of section 28, and point out that however symbolic it is, it makes it more difficult for those working in this area to deal with

[Mr. David Borrow]

prejudice and the prevention of HIV and AIDS. Has the hon. Gentleman taken account of that, and has he given serious consideration to the sexual health consequences of his party maintaining its position on section 28?

Mr. Burns: I confess that I had expected a question on section 28 if certain hon. Members were in the Chamber. I sincerely believe that a genuine difference of opinion on an issue does not necessarily mean that there is prejudice. That there is ignorance may seem staggering to many of us, given what has happened in the past 20 years, such as the campaign to explain the problems and to show the preventive measures that people can take in their active sexual lives.

The Government's strategy document for sexual health and HIV shows that the extent of the problem is depressingly formidable, even now. The number of visits to departments of genito-urinary medicine has doubled in the past 10 years. According to Public Health Laboratory Service statistics, since 1995 syphilis has increased by 143 per cent.—by 225 per cent. among gay men—chlamydia by more than 106 per cent. and gonorrhoea by 99 per cent. The number of new diagnoses of HIV last year was the highest for more than a decade. The 3,616 people diagnosed last year represented a 20 per cent. increase on the previous year.

Although the United Kingdom can be reassured by the fact that it has one of the lowest rates of HIV in Europe, it is estimated that more than 30,000 people in this country are HIV positive. Every year, about 400 of them die, although, as has been said, it is reassuring that developments in medical science and drug treatments are helping people to live longer and to sustain a better quality of life than was possible a decade ago. That is a step in the right direction, but until a vaccination is possible or a cure is discovered more must be done to try to reduce the death rate.

Sadly, it is estimated that by 2003 HIV prevalence in the UK will be 40 per cent. higher than in 1999. More worrying in some respects is that, as predicted many years ago, the problem has increased in the heterosexual community to a greater degree than in the gay community. In 75 per cent. of cases recently diagnosed the disease had been picked up abroad. Far more must be done to bring it home to people that they are playing Russian roulette with their lives if they do not heed the message of safe sex, or are ignorant of it, and do not know how to minimise the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections.

The extent of ignorance and complacency is staggering. Recent studies show that between 33 and 50 per cent. of teenagers do not use contraception when having intercourse for the first time. A 1999 survey of gay men showed that 58 per cent. under the age of 20 did not always use a condom, and that of the 44 per cent. who were HIV positive who had sex with a new partner, 40 per cent. reported that they inconsistently, if ever, used a condom. That is partly due to a lack of advertising, particularly on television. In the mid to late 1980s, advertising on television and in newspapers, magazines and specialist communications was considered highly controversial and, as I understand it from reading political biographies and autobiographies, it presented a squeamish problem for some of my former colleagues. However, the fact is that the advertising was effective: it was hard hitting and got the message across. People began to understand that they should consistently practise safe sex.

Sadly, time and the lack of constant reminders has dulled the message, and we have slipped back considerably. It is a dangerous position and the Government must act quickly, so that they do not undermine work being done in other sectors. For example, a survey showed that 90 per cent. of teenagers thought that the pill would protect them from sexually transmitted diseases. That is equally staggering and shows the depth of their ignorance. I urge the Minister to do more to back up other work and her Department's strategies by ensuring that the message is brought home to people across the board that they cannot afford not to indulge in safe sex.

Dr. Evan Harris: Some people have said that there is too much sex education in our schools. On the basis of what the hon. Gentleman has just said, does he identify himself with those of us who believe that there is too little or the quality is too poor? Does he believe that what we require is not a return to Victorian ignorance, but more information for young people?

Mr. Burns: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I accept that the question of sex education in our schools is controversial. I believe that it is up to individual parents to decide whether they wish their children to attend sex education lessons in schools. As a parent, I would want my children, at a suitable age, to gain the benefit of impartial sex education from both their parents and schools.

The final strand of my speech concerns delay and procrastination. I have great sympathy with what hon. Members have said about that. The Government announced the idea of a strategy in 1997. Four years later, in August this year, the strategy document was published. It is now out for consultation and has not yet been implemented. We must await the end of the consultation process and the Government's final decisions. On an issue so crucial to the country, that was an unusually long delay and a wasted opportunity.

Steve Jamieson, a key sexual health adviser to the Government, told delegates to a conference earlier this summer:

"The Government sat on the strategy for a long time before finally launching it at the end of July. That was a political decision because Tony Blair and his government were so embarrassed by the level of STIs in this country."

He went on to say:

"While they were sitting on the strategy, there were still people out there who could not access services and who were contracting STIs. I also believe the lack of a government advertising campaign has been a factor in the rising levels of STIs."

He also suggested that the strategy was launched on a Friday in mid-summer in an attempt to ensure minimum media interest. I am quoting not an Opposition spokesman, but one of the Government's key advisers on sexual health. I emphasise that we cannot tolerate such a delay any longer. It is time for the Government to act quickly and put the strategy in place, and to make sure that it is backed up by a proper advertising campaign to start to reverse the trend.

It is crucial that we have a strategy to deal with such a problem. However, given the four-year delay, it is slightly surprising—it shows an odd sense of priorities—that the Government spend time telling people to eat more vegetables rather than producing a coherent strategy to minimise sexually transmitted infections. I accept that the sum of £47.5 million has been described in the strategy as an initial investment, but I echo the comments of other hon. Members that it could be seen—if the Government are not careful—as too little money overall to develop the programme. I urge them to keep an eye on the position, particularly as that investment was described in their in-house NHS magazine as comparatively modest. I am sure that few hon. Members here today would dispute that description.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) referred to targets. The Government seem to need a target for everything. Their target for the waiting list initiative led to gross clinical distortions. It would be a disservice to this area of health care if targets were imposed that caused clinical distortions. I therefore warn the Minister against having targets. Has an assessment been made of the extra work that the strategy will place on GPs? We already know of the pressures that are placed on them, so if the strategy is to be delivered successfully, what consideration has the Department of Health given to their extra work load? How will the Government ensure that GPs are not so burdened and overworked that the whole strategy falls flat on its face because of their inability to deliver?

The Minister will know of the worries that have been expressed by GPs in the past few months. For example, how confident is she that they will be able to provide the sophistication that is required for them to undertake HIV counselling? It is a crucial area, and I hope that the Government have given some thought to it.

Given the publication of the strategy three months ago, it is extremely fortunate that the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh has enabled us yet again to discuss this subject and to explain our genuine worries to the Minister. We are united in wanting the problem to be tackled successfully. We want help to be provided to bring down the figures and to relieve the suffering that STIs have caused to far too many members of our population.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I, too, thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) for having given us the opportunity to debate this subject. I also thank all hon. Members for supporting and welcoming the strategy in spite of the issues that they have raised today.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh has a tremendous record on the issue. Indeed, it was he who brought the AIDS (Control) Act 1987 on to the statute book through his private Member's Bill some 14 years ago; and he has continued to take an active interest in the development of policy on the issue. He wrote to the Department when the strategy was first announced, suggesting that a review of that Act would be timely. We entirely agree. Experts have already started reviewing the Act, and the review will be undertaken as part of the process to implement the strategy. In particular, we need to consider appropriate reporting mechanisms. Tremendous progress has been made in collecting data and analysing the treatment that is available, but changes to the national health service have shifted the balance of power and commissioning has been devolved to primary care trusts, so the reporting elements of the Act will need to be reviewed.

I thank the all-party parliamentary group on AIDS for its comprehensive report, to which reference has been made this morning. It is entitled "The UK, HIV and Human Rights: recommendations for the next five years" and was published almost simultaneously with the strategy, at the end of July. Work on several of its recommendations is being pursued as part of the strategy implementation. The report is extremely helpful and contains several practical recommendations that we shall be extremely keen to pursue.

As hon. Members said, the strategy is the first ever national strategy for England. It recognises the need to take a holistic approach to sexual health. It covers HIV and AIDS as well as the broader issues of contraception and sexually transmitted infections.

Several hon. Members mentioned delay and procrastination and the fact that the strategy has taken some time to emerge. Some delay was perhaps inevitable with the merger of the sexual health strategy and the HIV issue. We also wanted to make absolutely sure that we consulted extensively with voluntary groups, NHS organisations and service users to try to ensure that the strategy was in touch with the experience of people in the field. In spite of the delay, I am pleased that they gave the strategy a broad welcome. The Terrence Higgins Trust welcomed the proposals, and although the National AIDS Trust expressed reservations about the need to join up the proposals throughout government, it has given the strategy broad approval.

Many hon. Members asked what is being done to promote the safer sex message to the groups that are most at risk. A fundamental part of the strategy is to improve health promotion work with those most at risk and those who already have HIV, and to try to reinforce safe sex messages for both those groups. Several contracts are already in place that are designed specifically to target those at risk from HIV and sexually transmitted infections. Health Promotion England undertakes sexual health promotion work aimed specifically at young people aged 16 to 24. The Terrence Higgins Trust undertakes work with community-based groups directed towards those most at risk of HIV and AIDS, including gay and bisexual men in England. The Department of Health has funded health promotion work for African communities, including a pilot African AIDS helpline, a Health Africa radio show, a website and printed information resources. We have used the mass media and funded the National AIDS Trust's work to support World AIDS day. We are funding a National AIDS Trust project to tackle the stigma suffered by people with AIDS, which the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) mentioned. It is important for that work to continue.

A great deal of health promotion work is already being done. A key aim of the strategy is to build up an evidence base on effective promotion work, but little is done in the field. It will be important to draw together the evidence on what succeeds, otherwise there is a

[Ms Hazel Blears]

danger that we will not get maximum value from the proposed new investment. We also lack evidence on which information campaigns work, other than those that concern sexual health. For instance, the same issues apply to drugs. We must discover where messages are best targeted, what media to use and how messages are most likely to be conveyed to those at greatest risk. We are determined to do that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh asked about the effect of antenatal testing on the number of diagnoses. He is correct to say that diagnoses are increasing as a result of the introduction of the test. However, it is right to offer a test to mothers. If it is part of normal health care—not special or singled out but treated as part of general good health—it will reduce stigma, and we should continue it.

Many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), raised worries about the effect on funding of removing the ring-fenced budget and putting the money into mainstream health authority budgets. I assure hon. Members that the Government are determined that when the funding goes into mainstream allocations, it will continue to be monitored through the service assessment frameworks that performance manage all NHS funding. We will closely monitor where and how money is targeted. In the future, health authorities will receive a fair share of the funds. The distribution of HIV infection is uniquely skewed and we want to ensure that allocations take account of that. Money should go to the areas in which there is greatest need and the most people who need treatment. We will ensure that we follow the money through the mainstream budgets.

All hon. Members asked how HIV services will be commissioned, following shifts in the balance of power and the creation of strategic health authorities. Services will be commissioned at primary care trust level, and we will ensure that a number of primary care trusts come together to share their expertise and knowledge. Perhaps one primary care trust in each area could take the lead and develop the expertise that is the key to specialist commissioning. Such an arrangement will apply not only to services for people with HIV and AIDS, but to other specialist services, such as those for burns and haemophilia. The development of specialist commissioning expertise in primary care trusts is crucial if people are to rely on the quality of those services. That will require support, and that is already provided in the system. We must ensure that the experience gained at specialist commissioning level is available to primary care trusts, so that their commissioning process is of a high quality and provides correct services to local people.

The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) asked whether there is a strategy for Scotland. I am delighted to tell him that the Minister for Health and Community Care has committed the Scottish Executive to producing a strategy for Scotland, and preliminary work on that is under way. Obviously, we keep close contact with colleagues in the devolved Administrations to ensure that expertise and knowledge is available for developing strategies. The hon. Gentleman also asked about chlamydia screening, and the extent of that disease in the community. A phased roll-out of targeted screening will start next year. A couple of pilot projects are under way, and we will learn from those experiences to try to deal with the disease.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow asked, as did other hon. Members, why we have a target. Clearly, that is a matter of controversy, but it is difficult to persuade an organisation to focus its work without having a target. Targets were drawn up following extensive consultation with voluntary groups and service users, not just plucked out of thin air by the Department of Health. Targets were developed that were intended to be realistic but challenging, so as to have a major impact on public health. We want to maintain focus on those targets, but accept that that must not distort our other policy objectives. We have to get the balance right. Having done that extensive consultation—we did not simply decide on a figure ourselves—we hope that the targets will have broad support within the community.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Walthamstow raised the issue of commissioning. I hope that he will be reassured that we intend to make the role of primary care trusts as robust as possible. He also referred to cross-governmental work on education, housing and social care to support people in the community with HIV and AIDS. The strategy has a health focus—we did not want to dilute the health focus message—and mechanisms at official and ministerial level will ensure that we implement the strategy across the board. We are learning from the teenage pregnancy strategy, in which those mechanisms are already in place and which, two years on, is beginning to show some real results.

I can tell the hon. Member for West Chelmsford that our strategy on teenage pregnancy has resulted in a downturn in under-18 conception rates. Under the Conservative Government, teenage pregnancies went up by 25 per cent., but I am delighted to say that our strategy is beginning to work.

Mr. Burns: I did not mention teenage pregnancies, but it is nice to know that the Minister can blame the Conservative Government even for that. Will she comment on the work load placed on GPs, which is far more important in the context of this debate?

Ms Blears: The achievements of the teenage pregnancy strategy are a matter of record.

Training for professionals will be a key part of the Government's HIV strategy, not only for GPs but for people involved in supplying the full range of services for people with HIV and AIDS. However, we want to mainstream not just the finance but the general approach to HIV and AIDS. It is a serious health problem but it should be treated like many other health conditions. We should not single it out, but should provide support and training for a whole range of professionals, which they can integrate into their practice. That commitment is part of our strategy.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) raised the issue of repealing section 28. The Government remain committed to that, although we will clearly need to find appropriate parliamentary time for it. He also referred to the Prison Service. It is fair to say that the message we are receiving on the Prison Service's practice of supplying condoms in prisons is

that it is pretty variable, and a great deal of work remains to be done to ensure consistency. That will be an important part of our work.

The hon. Gentleman also asked us to delay the ring-fencing issue for a year in order to track the funds. I hope that he will be reassured that our commitment to track the funds through the single assessment process will ensure that funds are targeted where they are needed for best effect.

The strategy is the first ever to cover such matters. It has been improved by the length of time taken to involve all the interest groups, and there will be a further period of consultation until 21 December. Comments from people in the services and the voluntary sector, and from users themselves, will be welcomed as they will inform the development of the implementation plan. We have been encouraged by the work that has been done on our campaigns to target teenage pregnancy, and we want to learn from them. The evidence base for information campaigns is poor, but we are beginning to build that base and we hope that we can continue to make similar progress with this strategy. The consultation period will enable us to learn even more about building evidence of what is effective.

People with HIV who live in the community clearly need the best services that we can provide. I want to make sure that the strategy helps us to make a real difference to essential services in the community, such as care, treatment, support, counselling and screening. We have a real opportunity to make significant step changes in the way in which services are provided. I look forward to working with all hon. Members to implement the strategy and to ensure that we improve services for people with HIV.

Transport (South-East)

11 am

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Since 1997, the Government have painted a rosy picture of the future of our transport system. Their commitment to public transport meant that road schemes were dropped, and huge figures were bandied about for a 10-year plan to transform our transport infrastructure. Their plan said:

> "Our vision is that by 2010 we will have a transport system that provides modern, high quality public transport, both locally and nationally. People will have more choice about how they travel, and more will use public transport."

However, eight and a half years before 2010, in the fifth year under a Labour Government, the problem is that that glorious vision is anything but a near-term reality. The practical experience of the traveller in the south-east is worse than ever, and improvements are nowhere in sight.

Anyone who commutes into London daily by train, as I do, knows how overcrowded virtually every peak-time service is. Anyone who drives to work knows how full our roads are. Anyone who relies on buses knows how vulnerable they are to the vagaries of our traffic, but our roads do not have the capacity to create long bus-only routes without making the motorist's life impossible.

The Conservative Government started—I emphasise the word "started"—to get to grips with the problem. For the first time in 30 years, services were opened, not closed, on the rail network. For the tube, we built the Jubilee line extension, rebuilt the Central line and introduced new trains on the Central, Jubilee and Northern lines. Even the latest, very welcome tube project—the extension of the East London line, which has been confirmed—had its origins under the Conservative Government. We oversaw the introduction of fast modern train services to London's three airports, and started the process of introducing them at Luton. We encouraged the development of light rail in London's docklands, and of the highly successful Croydon Tramlink, London's first street-level tram for decades.

On a smaller scale, stations, such as Haddenham and Thame Parkway in Buckinghamshire were opened, and lines such as that to Bicester town were reopened. There were also major improvements on existing lines, such as the service from London to Southampton.

As regards the roads, we widened the M25 and set out plans to expand the most overcrowded stretches still further. We turned the M20 into a modern link through Kent to the continent. We set out plans and began to buy land to end the bottlenecks on the A40 into London. We turned the A14 into a high-speed route from Essex to the midlands.

Then, in 1997, despite the Deputy Prime Minister's continual statements that he would get motorists off the roads and on to public transport, and despite the high-sounding words about an integrated transport policy, everything seemed to grind to a halt. Since then, words seem to have taken over from action. We have enough multi-modal studies to employ an army of civil servants. We have 10-year plans that are scheduled for review months after they are launched. We have a Government who are keen to pass new regulations for rail companies to adhere to, but who avoid giving them any long-term

[Chris Grayling]

commitment. Roads were out, but now seem to be slightly acceptable again. New schemes are in the pipeline, but only after five wasted years.

As for the tube, it has taken five years to get where we are with the public-private partnership, which means that modernisation has not started, and discussions and planning are continuing. In the meantime, investment is being squeezed, and not a single new train has been ordered.

What can we expect to be done to solve the problems that so many people face when trying to travel in the south-east? What can we expect to be open for business by the end of this Parliament, almost 10 years after the Government took power? The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) kindly gave me some of the answers in a written answer in the summer.

Let us start with the railways. The Government said that without major investment in the network to meet growing demand, levels of service would deteriorate and overcrowding would increase on many lines. By 2006, only two schemes that affect passengers in the south-east are likely to have been implemented: the first phase of the channel tunnel rail link, and the widening of the Chiltern line between Princes Risborough and Bicester, which was singled for no good reason in the bad days of British Rail, and is being restored to its previous state.

Among the passengers still waiting will be the hapless users of the South West Trains routes into Waterloo. The company says that the hiatus in rail financing means that even its less ambitious plans, to lengthen trains from eight coaches to 10, cannot be implemented for at least another five years. Last week, the south central franchise postponed its upgrade to the Brighton line for similar reasons. Other schemes, such as the modernisation of the Uckfield line, seem a country mile away from starting, let alone being completed.

Then there are the bigger projects. Yesterday, I received another answer from the Minister, for which I thank him, about the projects likely to be built under the 10-year plan. He wrote:

"We look to the Strategic Rail Authority's forthcoming Strategic Plan to prioritise investment projects that deliver the greatest value for money for both rail users and the taxpayer."

With the 10-year plan well under way, we are having another strategic review to decide what to do. The Minister's response makes no mention of the schemes that could make a difference to the south-east. What about the next generation of large-scale projects to follow on from the Jubilee line, the docklands light railway and the Croydon Tramlink? Thameslink 2000, perhaps the easiest and most achievable of the bigger ideas for improvement, and part of the original 10-year plan, is nowhere near starting, let alone being completed. Now I fear that it may have disappeared altogether from the Government's planning. According to the Minister, even if they press ahead straight away, it could not happen until late 2007—and that is the optimistic spin. Will it now be dropped? Perhaps the Minister could deal with that question today.

According to Bob Kiley, the transport commissioner for London, crossrail is the project that would make the most difference to London. However, according to the Minister's response last week, that project cannot be completed and open for business for at least a decade, whatever happens. I fully expect the Minister to offer me some history lessons about the structure of the privatised rail industry, so let me anticipate his comments by making three points.

First, when the Government took office they were fiercely critical of seven- year franchises, which they said were a disincentive to invest. If that was true, why have they failed to use section 54 of the Railways Act 1993, which was designed to provide a mechanism to give the operators long-term security to invest? Section 54 has been used only a handful of times—small wonder we have waited so long for new trains. If short franchises are such a bad idea, why is the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions now granting franchises of only two years? How will that encourage rapid investment of the kind needed by our commuters?

Secondly, the Government set out in their strategy a clear role at the head of the industry for their new creation, the Strategic Rail Authority. The SRA, they said, would decide what quality and capacity improvements were needed, and would work to directions and guidance from Ministers to provide a bigger and better railway. So why is the head of the SRA leaving his job early, criticising Ministers for not being willing even to talk to him? Last week Sir Alastair Morton told the Transport Sub-Committee that he had placed a memo about the future of the industry on the Secretary of State's desk the day after the election—but to date he has received no response.

Thirdly, if the structure set out for the industry by the previous Conservative Government was so fundamentally flawed, why have the Government not taken advantage of the expiry of the initial franchises and the placing of Railtrack in administration to launch a major restructuring of the industry? If they believed that we should have kept the railways in public ownership, they could simply cease to issue new franchises—or if they believed that we should have had regional companies with control of the tracks and the trains, they could now do that, too. However, they seem not to be choosing to do so.

There is the potential to improve matters with light rail. The 10-year plan states clearly that we will have more light rail systems. After the success of the Croydon Tramlink and its counterparts in Manchester, Birmingham and Sheffield—all started under a Conservative Government—we might have expected a rush to build new schemes. Instead, the only scheme on the way in the south-east is in Hampshire—very welcome for that area, but not likely to provide real solutions for some of the most overcrowded routes in that part of the United Kingdom.

The Mayor of London, to his credit, is exploring one or two possible routes in central London—but only as part of a long-term consultation exercise. For now, once again, we have words and not action. At last the Government seem to be beginning to realise that they cannot drive motorists off the roads if there is nowhere else for them to go. The Minister's response to me suggested that the M25 widening is on the way, but most of the schemes that the Government promote and that the Minister listed are outside the south-east, away from areas where congestion is at its most acute. My list of the

schemes initiated by the Government and due for completion by 2006 that involve road improvements in the south-east is extremely thin.

According to the Minister's list, the only scheme due for completion by 2006 in my county, Surrey, is the introduction of a school bus initiative. That is an admirable scheme originated by the Conservatives on the country council to try to reduce congestion by starting an American-style yellow bus service. The Minister will no doubt say that he has recently announced funding for the A3 improvements at Hindhead. That is very welcome, but for much of the rest of the decade, even that will not be open.

What about other parts of the south-east? Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire each receive a bypass. Berkshire gets nothing, despite all the growth in the Thames corridor. West Sussex is given one scheme, but East Sussex none at all. Only Kent and Essex do better, with five schemes between them. On the fringes of our region, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hampshire will have no road improvements at all by 2006, according to the Minister's reply to me.

Do not get me wrong; I am not clamouring for road improvements at the expense of rail, as I too want people to be able to use public transport rather than their cars. I want longer trains into London, light rail schemes and other ways to improve public transport. However, the motor car is a fundamental part of our national and regional life. Supporting public transport does not mean that we should have no road improvements at all, and we are getting precious few of them in this overcrowded part of the country at the moment.

Many authorities consider buses their only short-term option. They set aside road space for more bus lanes or, in the case of London, set aside huge areas of the capital as congestion-charging zones to free up space for buses and reduce traffic. But will shoppers in places such as Guildford choose to carry all their shopping on the bus? Will the delivery vans that clog up central London bring their goods on the bus? Motorists who can afford congestion charges will grumble and pay, but those who cannot will clog up roads in the suburbs and make it even less practical for passengers to travel by bus through the congestion into the centre. We must be careful about what we do in city centres. Every retailer whom I have spoken to in a town or city centre says that in today's world, being anti-car kills town centres. People will ask why they should dodge the bus lanes on the way in to town centres if they can go to Lakeside or Bluewater instead.

The south-east of England is already too congested. It is becoming worse all the time, and its people want solutions. They want not more consultation, studies and reviews, but some alternatives that have a fighting chance of being open for business before we have all retired. The Government need to stop trying to wrap inaction up in seemingly endless consultation exercises. They should take some decisions and begin construction on some projects that can make a difference. They say that they have the money, so it would be nice if we saw some of it used.

In a report this summer, the Institute for Public Policy and Research stated:

"If in five years time, after a sanctioned period of increased funding, customers feel that services are still failing to deliver, there could be a major political backlash."

The funding appears to be stalled, and the projects that could make the difference are not happening. In 2006, Labour will have been in power for nine years. After such a time, people have a right to expect something to have happened. On the current rate of progress, they are likely to be sorely disappointed.

11.14 am

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) for securing the debate. He could not have raised a subject more dear to the heart of my constituents, as thousands of people commute from Orpington to the west end or the City. Their concerns are my concerns. I apologise to my hon. Friend and to the Minister as, unfortunately, I have to go to a funeral, so I might not stay until the end of the debate. In view of that, I shall be brief. Many of my colleagues will be able to stay until the end of the debate, and it is important for them too.

I should like to back up my hon. Friend's comments about what we now call cattle truck commuting—the necessity for people to make their daily journey to and from work in conditions that are worse than those for cattle. They have to stand shoulder to shoulder and back to back, and often have to allow more than one train to pass before they can even get on one going to or from London. A young constituent told me that he had started a new job three months ago in central London, full of the optimism and enthusiasm of the young, but was horrified by the conditions that he endured going to and from work. The worst thing was that after three months he had become inured to it—he accepted the miserable journey, packed like sardines or cattle in old Connex stock, as the daily routine.

What my constituents complain about most is overcrowding. The other enervating factor is that not only is there no prospect of immediate improvement, there is no prospect of medium or even long-term improvement. As a result of their maladministration of transport over the past five years, the Government cannot reasonably hold out any prospect of improvement over the next five years.

What possibilities are there? They do not inspire optimism or enthusiasm in the hearts of my constituents. One is to have fewer seats and more people standing in the trains. Ironically, some of my constituents would welcome that, after all the trouble that they have had in recent years. A second is to put up prices—to price people out of the rush hour scramble. Does that not conflict with what the Deputy Prime Minister has always reckoned is his true test—the number of people he can get off the roads during the lifetime of a 10-year transport plan? Anything that we consider in the short term is confounded by such difficulties. The real solution is to have more and longer coaches. That means longer trains, and therefore longer platforms, and the resiting of signalling between areas such as Orpington and central London. That requires investment, probably of millions of pounds.

As I understand it, in the debates during the summer, Connex—and perhaps others too—was talking to the Strategic Rail Authority and Railtrack about precisely such detailed improvements, and exactly what the planning and investment would be.

[Mr. John Horam]

Can the Minister tell me—again, I apologise because I might not be here to hear his reply, but I shall read *Hansard* with close attention—about the talks that were to be held in September between the SRA and a number of railway companies in the south-east of England about an investment plan to cover such improvements as lengthening platforms and resiting signalling to allow for longer trains, and thus less overcrowding? That is what I was expecting to happen this autumn—and what Connex told me that it was expecting.

The decision that has been taken about Railtrack does not redound to the credit of the Government. Whatever their criticisms may have been of what the Conservatives did, they have had five years in which to get Railtrack off the ground, but instead have driven it into the ground. Their comments over the years, and their continual trashing of the company, destroyed the morale of the managers and the workers, contributed enormously to the difficulties that we now face, and delayed investment. As a result, there are now no discussions going on about the matters that I have mentioned, and I read in the papers that discussions with the company that runs the line to Brighton have been put back by at least three months. I do not know what is happening on the Connex South Eastern routes.

Will the Minister tell us the time scale for decisions on the issues of daily concern to my constituents? They come into the centre of wealth-making in the United Kingdom, and must start their ordinary day after putting up with such journeys. When they leave in the evening they face a journey of equal horror in the rush hour. Ironically, the only immediate hope is recession, which might lessen the overcrowding. What a prospect, to have to rely on recession in the City to achieve that. This is an absurd state of affairs, and the Government must tackle it in a time scale that will bring my constituents some hope.

11.19 am

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I want to talk about roads and traffic, and the general mayhem in Surrey. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) made a wide-ranging speech covering many issues affecting the south-east, but we need to think much harder about what should be done in Surrey.

We have several difficulties. One is that there is a great deal of inward commuting into places such as Guildford, as well as outward commuting. The high cost of living means that we need to bring in the people who can only afford to live in cheaper areas outside. Our problem is the increasing congestion because employees do not live close by. There are constant problems for the Arriva bus company in managing a service. We experience regular reduction in cross-county routes, such as Guildford to Kingston. In Guildford there are not even enough bus drivers, because of housing issues.

In an ideal world, people would live close to their work. The reality is that as people's jobs change and they are required to go all over the country, or to travel internationally, that is not always an option. Although many people hate commuting long distances, they do not have a choice about it, especially if they have children settled in schools or partners in local jobs.

We have heard much about overcrowding on trains and I shall not repeat it, but I support all that has been said on the matter. However, we should appreciate that parts of Surrey would be in easy reach of London if tube routes could be extended. The East London line to Wimbledon could be extended as far as Chessington, through an area of very heavy traffic. It would not even be necessary to build new track for much of the way. Raynes Park would need additional track and an additional platform, but in other areas existing assets could be re-used. We should examine such approaches, in strategic travel plans and multi-modal studies.

With more underground trains serving the Chessington branch, the odd slot to Waterloo could be released. That would be good news for commuters travelling through Surrey. There would be two slots an hour in and out of Waterloo. There could be more frequent services to Hampton Court and Guildford. Perhaps the Chessington line could be taken out to the World of Adventures and the new Epsom housing cluster, through centres of population and traffic movement. It might be possible to move the traffic on to public transport.

Chris Grayling: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's comments. Can I take it that she and her party will offer their support to my campaign for the extension, with a view to bringing public transport to the Epsom cluster? Although substantial longer-term issues arise about the Chessington line and the possibility of reintegration into a different part of the London network, as opposed to making it a simple branch line on the Waterloo route, none the less the extension of the Chessington line to Epsom would attract significant popular support. The more support that is given, throughout the community, the more chance the plan has of becoming reality.

Sue Doughty: My understanding is that the proposal would receive support from Liberal Democrats across the county.

I raise the case of Epsom not simply because it is the hon. Gentleman's constituency but also because it is one of those places on the boundary between county transport and commuting transport. There are many people in the area contributing to the congestion, but who would like late-night buses to come out from London to the Epsom area. That also applies to people working late shifts. The cost of coming out to Epsom from central London is about £40.

There is chronic congestion on the A3. Although I welcome the improvements to the bypass at Haslemere, they will increase congestion in Guildford. Anybody who has ever tried to drive through Guildford during the rush hour, especially when it is raining, will recognise that it is not an option—the town is completely gridlocked and one has to crawl through inch by inch. That situation will only get worse when the improvements at Haslemere come on stream. We must consider what can be done to relieve traffic in Guildford.

There are many ways to improve the links between Surrey and London. The underground connection could be further improved by a link between the termini at Wimbledon and Richmond over the Kingston loop and back again towards Epsom, or by carrying out work on the tube line from Morden.

Bus services are important in areas such as Guildford. There is a perception that Guildford people are rich and that all they want to do is to drive their children to and from school in their Range Rovers. In reality, many people do not want to drive their cars around Guildford, either because it is expensive or because they would add to the congestion; however, the fact remains that they have many journeys to make. We have a deeply unreliable bus service that continually lurches around.

Several factors are involved, including affordable housing. Bus drivers cannot afford to live in Guildford, and if there is no bus driver there is no bus. Another problem is the amount of overtime that bus drivers need to earn to make it feasible for them to live in the area.

We must consider the whole infrastructure of areas such as Guildford. Why are we destined to get more houses in Surrey? Why might 8,000 more houses be built in Guildford when the infrastructure cannot support them? Nobody disputes the fact that we need additional affordable houses, but large numbers of houses will make a bad situation much worse. Such matters must be considered in the context of transport. We cannot just say that it is a housing problem or a regional development problem—transport is right there in the middle of it.

When people draw up plans to impose housing on the south-east, they must ask how residents will get around. If some of that building is executive housing, it could bring with it two or three more cars per household, which would worsen the problem.

Mr Mark Hoban (Fareham): The hon. Lady speaks eloquently of the problems of housing and traffic in Guildford, and having lived there until early this year I concur with much of what she said. However, I have a problem with her party's stance on the matter. Many Liberal councillors who represent boroughs in the Serplan group vote in favour of, not against, the Government's housing targets. Is she out of step with their views?

Sue Doughty: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that Liberal Democrats have reviewed those views and will not be voting in the same way again.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): A U-turn.

Sue Doughty: Indeed. It might be helpful to add that in the meeting to which the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) refers there were deputies present, and particular circumstances applied to the wording of the motion. Liberal Democrats do not vote in support of extra housing.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Sue Doughty: No. I have made the point that we do not support extra housing for the south-east other than affordable housing—not in Surrey, at any rate.

I turn to the problems faced by elderly people who do not wish to drive, cannot drive, cannot afford a vehicle or should not be driving. Although there are transport schemes for such people, they need to know that buses will call regularly—that the bus that takes them to visit family members on a Sunday will always turn up. They do not want to be isolated and unable to go to, say, bingo on Sunday because the bus is not there. There are important issues associated with isolation, and they are getting worse for certain sectors of the community.

During the general election campaign, I was approached by an old lady who wanted to know only one thing: whether the Sunday bus between Guildford and Woking, which was extremely unreliable, would continue to operate. Shopping for her housebound friends was something that she, and they, looked forward to, but the loss of the bus would stop her helping them. Given the poor state of our bus services, a Sunday bus can make a lot of difference to one's quality of life.

Chris Grayling: As the Minister knows, one of the great problems for bus services in Surrey is that once outside the borders of London the subsidy from the public purse falls off a cliff. London buses with routes from the outer London suburbs across the border into Surrey are to charge a flat rate of £1. As a result, north Surrey buses, which lack the same subsidised support, will be hugely uncompetitive. In terms of bus operators' ability to provide services, there will be a knock-on effect across the county. Because the subsidy stops dead on leaving the borders of London, it is highly probable that in constituencies such as the hon. Lady's bus services will disappear.

Sue Doughty: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point.

One of the things that we in Guildford have done is to introduce cross-town buses and shuttle buses from the station. Regrettably, however, Conservative members of the council have voted against our having as many buses as we would like. As a result, the habit of catching the train and taking the bus up to the high street to go shopping will not be so easy to establish. Nevertheless, our cross-town buses are a start. Some of our employers subsidise them heavily and I welcome that.

However, the reality is that since deregulation—introduced by the Conservatives—bus operators are no longer required to operate on the less profitable but more socially desirable routes. As a result, continuity and reliability of service have broken down. Because they are unable to catch a bus home, people cannot go out after 8 o'clock at night, for example, to attend evening classes in an effort to get better qualifications. That tends to affect girls rather than boys, who often have their own transport. Girls in lower-paid jobs need to be able to rely on a bus to get home safely at night.

I ask the Minister to take a good look not only at expensive infrastructure projects such as rail and tube extensions, but at simpler ways to improve matters, such as better support for bus services in the counties, as well as in London. Older people, the less affluent and young students in my constituency need to know that, in future, they will be able to return home safely at night.

11.33 am

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): May I begin by apologising to you, Mr. Griffiths, and to the Minister for the fact that I must leave at noon because I am

[Mr. Gregory Barker]

leading a delegation to discuss flooding in my constituency with one of the Minister's colleagues at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs?

I would like to believe that the historical legacy of poor transport links in East Sussex is the result of successive Governments trying to strike the right balance between preserving the environment in a region heavy with areas of outstanding natural beauty and catering for the needs of the travelling public. However, that is not the case. Transport problems are in fact the result of a benign indifference that has turned into real and serious neglect. The whole county of East Sussex has only a few miles of dual carriageway. Train services from Hastings and Bexhill to London are now slower than they were in 1922. In terms of travelling time, Bexhill is further away from London than York.

As a result, the Rother area, especially around Hastings, has some of the worst social exclusion problems in the county. Hastings is a very visible sign of the decline in the county's economy, and its economic and social problems radiate out into my constituency of Bexhill and Battle and the whole Rother area. We all realise that any solutions to the problems of Hastings will necessarily involve my constituency as well.

There was, understandably, huge and bitter disappointment at the Government's decision in the summer not to build the Hastings and Bexhill bypass. After years of dither, the making of such an important decision immediately after a general election, at which the bypass was a crucial issue in a key marginal seat, has been viewed extremely cynically. However, I sincerely welcome, and am grateful for, Lord Falconer's encouragement of the initial responses of the taskforce, led by SEEDA—the South East England Development Agency—which was set up in the wake of that disastrous bypass decision.

Any future plans for Hastings and Bexhill will rightly look for a more holistic solution to the problems of regeneration, and will aim to balance care of the environment with economic development. New plans will put far more emphasis on environmentally sustainable regeneration. Education, a new university, information technology and broadband communications networks for both business and the community will help to deal with the problems of social exclusion.

However, the contrast between the area of Bexhill and Hastings and that of Brighton and Hove is marked: for example, there is a high-speed rail link to London from Brighton, which takes about 45 minutes; improvements have been made to the A23, most of which is now the M23; and there is easy access to Gatwick and the Crawley hub. By contrast, it takes nearly an hour to go from Bexhill to Gatwick, and nearly two hours by road or rail to London. It is not enough to rely on improved education, or improved IT and broadband links. Better transport links remain absolutely vital.

Despite that need, I echo some of the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) about threats to local buses. Last week I met some of my constituents from Stone Cross, on the outskirts of Eastbourne, who are extremely concerned by the threat to local bus services. If those buses are withdrawn, thousands of people will be stranded in an area whose incoming population is increasing as more and more houses are built. Unfortunately, the possibility is largely the result of the threat to rural bus grants from the Government, through East Sussex county council. The council has been left in a parlous financial position by the former Lib-Lab coalition that ran down reserves from £24 million to little more than £3 million. Fortunately, after the county council elections in the summer, a new Conservative administration took over, but some difficult financial decisions must now be made.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Will the hon. Gentleman put on record the level to which he expects the new Conservative administration to increase those reserves?

Mr. Barker: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a specific figure, but I can assure him that the Conservatives came into office with a steely determination to restore the financial health of the county after the appalling years of Lib-Lab misrule.

We are looking for holistic regeneration in Bexhill, Hastings and across Rother. However, such regeneration must include a fast rail link to London, improvements to the A21 south of Lamberhurst, extending dual carriageways and widening bottlenecks and a new link road from Bexhill to Queensway that avoids the notorious Glynde gap and it must relieve the A259 and Battle's A2100 to end the appalling traffic jams that choke both residents and through traffic.

We must also make safety improvements to the A21. The safety record on the A21 in my constituency is wholly unacceptable. People are dying unnecessarily on that road year in and year out. One of the most difficult visits that I have made as a Member of Parliament was to serving officers at Battle fire station who have been called out time and time again to cut dead youngsters from cars on the A21. The blackspots must be eradicated regardless of the overall plans for the county or the regeneration of the area because they require urgent and immediate attention. Will the Minister tell us what he will be doing with respect to safety on the stretch of the A21 south of Flimwell?

I welcome any partnership with the Government, other parties or stakeholders that will deliver the prospect of regeneration to my constituency. The Government must recognise that regeneration still depends on better roads and better rail. We want to safeguard the terrific natural environment in Bexhill and Battle, and I will be extremely mindful of the environmental impact of any proposals, but we look to the Government to deliver: we want action, not spin.

11.42 am

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): I add my commendation of my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) for obtaining this debate on a subject central to the quality of life for people who live not only in my constituency in west Kent, but in the whole of the south-east.

The subject should not be a matter of party political difference. It is common ground that the level of congestion and the state of public transport in the south-east is absolutely lamentable, and that it has deteriorated in the past four and a half years. It is also a shared view that the south-east has been the engine of the British economy. It incorporates the financial centre of Europe and the highest density of population in the country; indeed, it has one of the highest population densities in Europe. It provides the gateway for foreign investment and tourism into the United Kingdom.

That has all been recognised by the Government in their commitment to a huge amount of new house building in the south-east. Let us remember that the Government, through Serplan, are committed to building 900,000 new houses there. Approximately 50 per cent. of those houses will be occupied by families who have moved out of London or the cities of the midlands and the north to migrate to the south-east. By most estimates, half of those houses will be built on greenfield sites. The new houses will substantially add to the stresses and strains on existing public infrastructure, especially the transport system. Many families who will be relocating from deprived areas in inner London to Surrey, Kent or Sussex will want to commute back to London for work, yet no provision exists in the Government's plans for enhancing and increasing the capacity of the transport system. That is a fantastic example of unjoined-up government.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) comment that the Liberal Democrats did not support new house building—apart from affordable house building. That represents a substantial change from their previous position. The Liberal Democrats supported the Government on Serplan and other matters.

Sue Doughty: In making that statement it would have been more accurate if I had said that we oppose the additional housing numbers announced, not all new building.

Mr. Norman: I thank the hon. Lady for her clarification—but I do not want to dwell on it, because that is not the main matter for debate. We welcome Liberal Democrat support in opposing, in whatever way, the absurd new plans to force councils in the south-east to build housing where no public infrastructure exists to support it.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I appreciate that house building targets are not the main focus for this debate, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) and would like to ask him a question. Does he agree that as district and borough councils begin to anticipate their new local plans and look ahead 10 years, the capacity of transport infrastructure to cope with a large increase in housing should be a key element in the public inquiries that are likely to follow? As the Government continue to thrust such schemes down their throats against their will, local residents should make that important point about the difficulty that transport infrastructure has in coping with new houses.

Mr. Norman: I agree with my hon. Friend. A great anomaly is that county and borough councils must plan for new houses and communities, but do not have the resources to plan for the infrastructure to support them. That puts them in a highly invidious situation. Despite a commitment to an expansion in population, an increase in the number of houses, and incidental destruction of green fields, the Government have made no consequential commitment to public transport infrastructure.

The Minister may wish to contemplate the fact that one of the first actions taken by the Government when coming to office was to cancel almost all major road schemes in the south-east, including improvements to the A21, under the Weald and Downlands DBFO—design, build, fund and operate—scheme, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell referred. Those improvements would have directly met the concerns about safety that he raised, and would have saved many lives. They are now being contemplated again, and if they are implemented they will happen five to 10 years later than when they could have been brought into force.

The cancellation cost the Government some £6 million to compensate contractors—money that could have gone into road improvement. It has been replaced with a plethora of reviews, such as the trunks road review and the access to Hastings study, which produced almost nothing and, as my hon. Friend said, was a tremendous disappointment. Now we are told that a feasibility study into dualling the A21 at Castle Hill and possible improvements south of Lamberhurst will be carried out.

Recently, I had a meeting with staff at the Highways Agency to discuss the new feasibility study. They were clearly suffering from severe review fatigue. They were the same people who undertook the public inquiry into the A21 in 1991. When I spoke to them, they said that they understood the issues exactly, because they had studied them consistently during the past 20 years and they had not changed at all. They told Ministers about them in 1990 and could produce the same study again in 2001. There is no need for reviews, because the answers are known. Some improvements are blindingly obvious—the A21, is a good example; there are many others in the south-east. Dualling the A21 at Castle Hill between two stretches of dual carriageway should have happened many years ago, and is not contentious. Economically and in terms of social benefit it will pay off many times over. We do not need a feasibility study. We need a private finance initiative, and we need to get on the with the job.

Another aspect is that in cancelling all the major programmes, and in a fit of centralisation, the Government have starved the county councils of funds to undertake minor reviews, with the result that all those environmentally acceptable and sensible minor actions that are required to ease traffic have not taken place either. That has added to congestion and reduced the power and effectiveness of local government to make a difference to transport problems.

Hon. Members have referred to the state of the bus industry. My only comment on that is that the south-east must have brought enormous benefits to the white paint industry, because thousands of miles of bus lanes have been painted on our roads. However, I think I am

[Mr. Norman]

right in saying—the Minister may want to comment—that the increase in bus passenger traffic in the south-east, excluding London, has been negligible during the past five to 10 years. The result of creating those bus lanes is that car passenger traffic has slowed down, but the response from the bus industry, which operates as a monopoly in many parts of the south-east, has been so poor that there has been no increase in bus passenger traffic. As a public transport initiative it has been a disaster.

Even worse is the state of the rail industry. It is important to say that, following recent developments, almost all the improvements to which Railtrack was committed as part of the network maintenance statement are now at risk. The investment holiday that is likely to result from the period of administration following the demolition of Railtrack means that investment will not be available. The plans for improvement to the infrastructure of the railway lines that we have discussed today—including the London to Hastings line, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) referred—are negligible for the next five or 10 years. There is no plan to create a high-speed railway line to Hastings, an area with 10 per cent. unemployment.

Connex South Eastern plans to introduce new trains. The Minister may believe that that is a good thing, as most people do, but those new trains will have no more passenger-carrying capacity than the old trains—with the result that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell said, the queues and the number of people standing on those trains will increase. Our commuter capacity will, if anything, diminish. We have no investment for longer platforms. We do not have investment in stations. Access for disabled people is appalling, and would be unacceptable elsewhere in the private sector. Will the Minister tell us specifically whether the Government have any serious commitment to ensuring that commuter train infrastructure improvements will start to take place? Will the period of administration and the extraordinary period of chaos in the rail industry result in a complete holiday for that investment programme, or can any of the schemes now proceed?

It is also worth making the point that all those schemes that have buoyed up the hopes of commuters in the south-east—for example, Thameslink and the Crossrail project—are at risk. Most experts on the rail industry now believe that they will not proceed during the next 10 years. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that. The situation of commuter railways seems desperate.

Where does that leaves us? The lead time for major transport projects means that the legacy of eight or nine years of Labour Government will almost certainly be slower travel in the south-east, with more congestion. The level of congestion will be unprecedented, and among the worst in Europe. We shall have a worse public transport infrastructure. The standard of road maintenance will be the poorest we have ever seen, with reduced expenditure on road maintenance since 1997. We are looking at standstill Britain, and it is vital that the Government get serious about matching their commitment to increase the overcrowding in the south-east with breaking the deadlock on public transport and intitiating some of these projects. They are not contentious, and they are necessary to improve the road system and get the south-east moving again.

11.54 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing the debate. Transport in the south-east is a cause of concern to Liberal Democrat and Conservative Members of Parliament— I do not extend the concern beyond those two parties.

As I waited on the platform at Wallington this morning, I pondered the key issues in this debate. The station board showed that a train had been cancelled, and a notice stated that the 8.10 am train would be late because it was a slam-door stopping train; people therefore take longer to get on and off, or it goes slower—I do not know which. Presumably, the train will be late for as long as it remains in use.

Yesterday, I was at Carshalton Beeches station, just one stop up the line, as a constituent had invited me to look at the large number of missing or broken knots—I do not know what they are called in technical railway terms; they lock the rails on to the sleepers—along the track. Such anecdotal experience of the public transport infrastructure confirms that it is in appalling state of disrepair and disarray. I could dwell briefly on the Tory legacy, but even Conservative Members have confirmed today that they recognise that their party's performance on transport infrastructure was not good. I suppose that if one believes in the great car economy, it is inevitable that public transport infrastructure will suffer.

Chris Grayling: I mentioned a range of significant schemes introduced by the Conservative Government that made a difference to the transport infrastructure—light rail, rail and so on. I emphasised that they were a start; they stopped abruptly in 1997.

Tom Brake: I am well aware of the list. However, my experience, and that of commuters in London in the past 20 or so years, is that despite that list, public transport has been deteriorating for many years and there is no sign of improvement. I shall not dwell on the Tory legacy—

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tom Brake: I shall give way shortly.

As the train I was travelling on this morning was at a standstill somewhere between stations, I started to dwell on the Labour Government's responsibility, as they have been in power for four and a half years, and on the impact of the GoVia franchise, which affects large parts of the south-east. I am interested in the fact that the Labour Government have been in power for five years; I do not know what happened in the last six months of Tory Government—not very much, presumably.

I tabled a parliamentary question asking what assessment had been made, before the Government made the Railtrack announcement, of the impact on GoVia's existing and new franchise. The answer was that the Secretary of State's announcement

"was intended to pave the way for those issues to be better addressed."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 235W.]

I think that means that the Government did not actually consider the impact on the GoVia franchise before they made the Railtrack announcement. A further Government response to a similar parliamentary question stated:

"The recent Railtrack developments will not impact on the existing or new franchise."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 478W.]

The Minister is an honourable man, who will want to take this opportunity to apologise for what is at best an extremely misleading answer to a parliamentary question. It was reported in the newspaper *Metro* recently that GoVia, the owner of the south central franchise, has already suspended a £330 million upgrade of track and signalling on lines into Victoria. Far from the Railtrack developments having no impact on the existing or the new franchise, we know that the plans have been put on hold. This is an opportunity for the Minister to apologise for that statement, and I hope that he will.

Mrs. May: The hon. Gentleman attacked both the Government and the Conservative party for their records on improving public transport. Will he tell hon. Members how much of the tax increase that the Liberal Democrats proposed at the last election would have been spent on improving public transport?

Tom Brake: I am sure that the hon. Lady is familiar with our tax plans, which were limited. They focused specifically on education.

Mrs. May: Nothing on transport.

Mr. Jamieson: Nothing on transport.

Tom Brake: Our proposals for Railtrack and the establishment of a not-for-profit trust, and for London Underground, would have addressed the problems that we see on rail and tube today much more significantly and quickly.

The GoVia-Connex handover, which is another area of Government responsibility, demonstrated a lack of joined-up government. The Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions—as it was then—approved the awarding of the franchise to GoVia. Unfortunately, that was then held up by the Department of Trade and Industry as it considered the details. The impact of the stalled handover was that more drivers left Connex, while there were no recruitment proposals to take on additional drivers. Negotiations took place about terms and conditions for Connex drivers, into which GoVia had no input because of the extended handover. When GoVia eventually took over the franchise, it needed to recruit more drivers just to stand still, because of the enhanced terms and conditions that had been agreed by Connex. There were major failings in areas for which the Labour Government have responsibility.

These are early days for the Crossrail proposal, and the Minister will know that Cross London Rail Links Ltd. had its first meeting yesterday. Have the Government decided whether to proceed with a transport and works order or a hybrid Bill as the means of taking the project forward? Can the Minister guarantee any funding beyond the £154 million that has been agreed for the feasibility work? That work is welcome, but if nothing will be there to take the project further forward once that budget is exhausted, it would be a major disappointment.

The Government's responsibility for the tube is well publicised, and continues to be a source of embarrassment. The public-private partnership has achieved nothing in the past four years, other than the production of enormous and complicated documents at great expense. I understand that the Government have now appointed Ernst and Young as the accountants to examine whether the public-private partnership represents value for money. I welcome the fact that they have not appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers as the arbitrator, because it is so closely involved with the Government. However, will the Minister set out if Ernst and Young is involved with any consortium bidding for a tube franchise? If it has a close connection with any group, there will be concerns that it will find the Government's proposals to be good value for money simply because a partner will derive some financial benefit. Will the Minister confirm that that question has been closely examined?

Other hon. Members have referred to the Hastings bypass. Given that it was difficult to demonstrate overwhelming economic benefits of the project, the Government have probably come to the right decision. However, the multi-modal study identified the need for substantial investment of about £240 million in other local transport improvements. I hope that the Minister will tell us what funds may be forthcoming to deal with that investment.

I understand that we may receive an announcement about terminal 5 tomorrow—if we do not receive one today. After a little less than four years, the inquiry finished in March 1999. A decision is expected imminently on the way forward. Liberal Democrats believe that allowing terminal 5 to proceed would be wrong. We are worried that it is unlikely to help the airlines that the Government presumably want to help—the United Kingdom's regional airlines that want access to Heathrow slots but are not currently gaining them. If terminal 5 goes ahead, our airlines may not benefit, and it will have a significant and detrimental impact on the communities surrounding Heathrow airport.

Chris Grayling: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that most of our regional airlines are part of foreign-owned airline groups?

Tom Brake: Many of our regional airlines are a part of British Airways, which is to be renamed City Express. Clearly, not all UK regional airlines are owned by foreign airlines.

Such issues are of a regional, national or even international nature. I echo the worries of other hon. Members about local transport schemes and Transport

[Tom Brake]

2000. It is often local schemes, such as small road improvements and additional subsidies for bus services, that can make a significant difference at a local level. They can play a major part in reducing congestion in Reading, the Thames valley and a host of small areas in the south-east. Indeed, there is a strong demand for a tram link in Sutton in my area. Will the Minister say what priority can be given to small local projects as opposed to the major regional, national or international projects that have been mentioned?

Mr. Griffiths—no, I mean Mr. Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]* I apologise, I should have called you Mr. McWilliam. It is always helpful to have a name-plate in position so that hon. Members have clear guidance on how Deputy Speakers like to be addressed.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): The sign has my name on it on the side facing me, too; I do not know what that says about me.

Tom Brake: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. McWilliam.

I should like to think that transport in the south-east will improve, but the evidence of the past 20 years shows that it has deteriorated, and continues to do so. I hope that that will not go on happening. As a daily commuter I, like the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell, suffer from such transport difficulties, just as others do. Unless the Government start to tackle such fundamental failings in our transport infrastructure, transport will deteriorate in this country to the point when a German diplomat can say in all honesty that the United Kingdom has turned into a third-world country.

12.9 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to do so. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) not only on securing the debate but his excellent opening speech. He spelt out many of the transport problems that face the south-east, and referred to the Government's failure to deliver in that area. It is notable that the Government's lack of interest in the south-east's transport problems is shown by the fact that not one Labour Back Bencher has attended the debate.

I am pleased to speak, not only because I am a Transport spokesman, but because my constituency is in a part of the south-east that, as my hon. Friend pointed out in his opening speech, has done worse than many in receiving Government transport improvements. Berkshire does not receive much from the Government for road developments. We got a bus lane on the M4, but I am not sure that many people would call that a road improvement. The Minister looks excited, and I should certainly be grateful if he were to tell us that the Government were willing to support the local project pursued by Reading borough council and Wokingham district council to put another bridge across the River Thames. If he wants to give something to Berkshire, perhaps he could offer that to my constituents.

I remind the Minister why transport is so important: it is not only a key issue about the quality of life for individuals, as was pointed out by my hon. Friends the Members for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) and for Orpington (Mr. Horam), who mentioned cattle-truck commuting. People face transport problems every day, and that has a real impact on their quality of life. People try to travel to get to and from work, and also for leisure and personal purposes.

Transport also relates to economic development in the south-east. Last week, I attended a meeting with a number of south-east business men and women who bemoaned the south-east's transport problems and the Government's lack of delivery. They emphasised that good transport infrastructure is necessary for the good of the economy, both to retain economic vitality and to develop economic growth. As companies look to expand or locate in the south-east the state of transport links will be a consideration when they make their decisions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells and the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) mentioned housing development and policy. That is a problem because when the Government consider the number of future houses, they do not examine the infrastructure requirements that the new developments will bring in their wake. Insufficient attention is given to infrastructure with regard to the transport system.

It is interesting to learn from the hon. Member for Guildford that the Liberal Democrats on Serplan who supported the Government's proposed housing figures for development in the south-east until 2016 did not mean to do so, and were deputies who did not know what they were doing. We were all confused by her intervention when she tried to clarify the point by saying that the Liberal Democrats are not in favour of additional houses, but are in favour of new-build houses. If the hon. Lady wants to intervene and explain the position, I will be happy to give way.

Sue Doughty: We accepted, with reluctance, the original figure of 35,000. We opposed the additional 13,000 for Surrey that was planned above that figure.

Mr. Jamieson: Eh?

Mrs. May: As the Minister says, that has obviously sorted things out. I also note that as far as the hon. Member for Guildford is concerned, any new housing should only be affordable.

Tom Brake: I invite the hon. Lady to reflect that when her party was in power, 60 per cent. of housing was developed on greenfield sites.

Mrs. May *rose—*

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Lady replies, I remind her that this is a transport debate, although I understand the relevance of the points being made.

Mrs. May: Thank you, Mr. McWilliam. I return to my original point.

Transport links are essential for housing development and there is no point in the Government trying to build extra homes in the south-east without a transport infrastructure. That will create further problems and further deteriorate people's quality of life.

Several hon. Members referred to the misery of commuters. I emphasise to the Minister that the problem is not only about quality of life; people's jobs will be affected if the Government fail to improve transport infrastructure in the south-east.

In the past four and a half years we received from the Government only vague promises, plans, reviews and reports. It is typical of the Government to talk about something but not to deliver on it. In 1997, they promised to cut congestion and pollution but delivered the highest fuel taxes and the worst traffic jams in Europe. In 1998, the transport White Paper promised to make road maintenance their "first priority", but they have delivered a record backlog of poorly maintained roads and little prospect of constructing the hundreds of bypasses necessary. In 1999, the Deputy Prime Minister promised "Quality, quality, quality" for Britain's rail network, and now the Government have driven Railtrack into the ground. Finally, in July 2000, the Deputy Prime Minister produced his 10-year transport plan. Like a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat, he expected his latest trick to silence his critics, but I fear that it was merely smoke and mirrors. A year on, there is real doubt about whether the Government will deliver the £180 billion of investment that we were promised as part of that 10-year plan.

After what the Government have done to Railtrack, it is now unlikely that private sector investors will be so eager to produce the necessary £34 billion of private-sector rail investment. If private sector investment is forthcoming, it will be at an extra cost. Indeed, by increasing the political risk to the private sector of being involved in major transport infrastructure projects, the Government may find that they now have to provide the very blank cheque, through guarantees, that they claimed that they could not provide for Railtrack.

The public spending sums promised last year may also be in question and may have to be re-evaluated, not least in the light of economic slowdown. The south-east will lose out if Labour does not deliver.

It is interesting to read Ministers' answers to questions on the future of rail projects in the south-east. For example, when asked about the future of Thameslink 2000, the Minister responded:

"The Government are keen to ensure that the Thameslink 2000 project should not be put at risk by Railtrack being taken into administration."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 222W.]

That suggests that the Government paid no attention to the future of such projects when they put Railtrack into administration. They have no idea about the future of many rail infrastructure projects, as that answer shows.

It is evident in much of transport policy that Labour is still pursuing short-term political needs rather than making the long-term decisions necessary to get the country moving. An example from the railways is the decision made in July in awarding some of the new rail franchises. Instead of making the sensible long-term decision to grant 20-year deals to allow companies to plan future investment—when the Secretary of State could have demanded strict service improvements so that passengers would gain from the decisions—the Secretary of State opted for two-year contract extensions. He is kicking the problem into the long grass, and that means no improvement in services. The problems will not go away.

I hope that the Minister will confirm that that decision is not part of a wider agenda for train operating companies. In 1997, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"If rail franchises come to an end, I will keep open the option of the public sector running the railway".

After what has happened to Railtrack, will the Minister assure us that that is not his plan: that the Government have no intention of taking any of the train operating companies into the public sector or of imposing the same structure on them as is being imposed on Railtrack, and that they will shortly take the long-term view and grant longer franchises for train operating companies?

Nor are the Government failing only on railways: my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) gave a concrete example of how they are failing on rural bus services. London Underground is subject to strikes and strike threats, and is paralysed by disputes over funding. We have no aviation policy, in spite of having been promised one in 1998. The south-east has a huge congestion problem in aviation that the Government have done nothing to tackle.

We have had four and a half years of delay, dither and wasted opportunities. I hope that the Minister will give concrete examples of how the Government will deliver, with firm timetables, on getting the south-east moving. To give him some help, I have several questions.

When can we expect an announcement on the timetable for road building in the south-east? When will the Minister make an announcement on the long-term future of rail franchises in the region? Will he assure us that the Government's intervention in Railtrack will not set back the timetable for any planned rail or station improvements in the south-east, such as the Brighton upgrade, the Shortlands flyover in Kent and proposals to expand track capacity at Reading station? Will he set out the timetable for those improvements, and suggest where the funding will come from and whether it is assured? Many fear that the move to special-purpose vehicles will simply cause delay in such infrastructure projects, or even lead to some being cancelled. When can we expect an announcement on Heathrow's terminal 5?

My constituents and others in the south-east will listen carefully to the Minister's answers, not only because the problem affects their quality of life, but because it affects many of their jobs. The economic vitality of the south-east depends on the Government's answers to the transport problems. Plans are no good unless the Government are willing to deliver. People in the south-east have waited for four and a half years. Their quality of life is being affected day by day, so it is time for Ministers to stop talking and start delivering.

12.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing the debate, and on raising matters of considerable importance to his constituents and others living in the south-east. Some of the bright young things from the Conservative Back Benches sat with him at one stage, and I read yesterday that the shadow Leader of the House had organised a group of them to create a

[Mr. David Jamieson]

nuisance for the Government. That will be a considerable relief, after the extinguished volcanoes who usually occupy the Conservative Front Benches—of course, I make an exception for the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), for whom I have enormous respect and regard.

One reason for increased congestion in the south-east, and many other conurbations in the country, is that the economy is doing so well, and so many more people are travelling to work. The hon. Gentleman did not have time to mention the fact that in his constituency the number of unemployed people has fallen from 1,032 to 363 since 1997. Throughout constituencies in the south-east, far more people are in work and travelling—a reason why there has been further pressure on the system. As the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) suggested, economic activity, certainly in the south-east, is at record levels. We are pleased about that, but it puts pressure on the road and rail system that we inherited from his party, which was in government before 1997.

Several hon. Members spoke about the funds available for local road schemes and transport plans. Listeners to the debate would think that nothing had happened at all. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell said that improvements were nowhere in sight—but he needs to get out a little more, and speak to people in his local authority. His highways authority in Surrey has had a 91 per cent. increase in funding for local transport plans. In Kent, the increase is 76 per cent. In Berkshire it is 67 per cent., and in Windsor and Maidenhead 72 per cent. Funds for local schemes are available.

Mr. Norman *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He spoke for long enough, and I have only a few minutes.

An interesting feature of the debate was the rapier-like intervention of the hon. Member for Maidenhead on the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). As usual, he gave us 15 minutes of platitudes and huge wish lists of schemes. I lost count of the number of schemes and questions that he raised—but when it came to the question of where the money for the Liberal Democrats' schemes would come from, it turned out that their extra penny would go into education and there was nothing extra for transport. Members will have noted that carefully, and I thank the hon. Lady for teasing the information out. We hear much talk from the Liberal Democrats, but they never back it with action or appropriate funds.

I should briefly put some of the subjects for debate into context. The south-east has one of the United Kingdom's busiest and most important transport networks. Most of the country's international traffic passes through the region, via either the airports or the major ports, and about a quarter of the national motorway network is in the south-east.

Excluding London, the south-east accounts for more than 15 per cent. of the United Kingdom's GDP. Good strategic road and rail links have aided the considerable prosperity of the region, but they have also brought severe congestion. Significant improvements are urgently needed to the road and rail infrastructure to enable this prosperity to continue.

Quality of life is equally important. As well as areas of economic success, there are areas of significant deprivation. In many cases, strategic and local transport improvements would contribute to their regeneration. However, such developments must not be at the expense of the environment. We should not forget that the south-east includes many areas of great natural beauty and environmental importance—6,500 sq km of the region are in designated "areas of outstanding national beauty".

I cannot agree with those who criticise the Government for not taking action. We are taking vigorous steps to tackle the transport problems that have been mentioned, and I would like to remind hon. Members of the measures that we are taking at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels.

The integrated transport White Paper, published in 1998, was the first White Paper on transport for more than 20 years; there had not been such a thing under the Conservatives. It set the broad policy framework for integrated transport policies. We followed this with the 10-year plan for transport, which announced national investment of £180 billion for new transport measures. Just as importantly, it made clear our objectives for transport. For example, by 2010 we want to reduce congestion below current levels on the inter-urban trunk road networks and in large urban areas. We shall achieve that by promoting integrated transport solutions and investing in public transport and the road network. We should also like to achieve a 50 per cent. increase in passenger rail use in Great Britain, improved punctuality and reliability, and the doubling of rapid transit use—that is, light rail and trams.

In the south-east, contrary to the impression that was given earlier, 11 major trunk road schemes are progressing as part of the Highways Agency's targeted programme of improvements. They will bring safety and environmental benefits. A further 15 improvements affecting congestion and safety will be made across the region by March 2002, and there is scope for much more. The 10-year transport plan will deliver substantial rail improvements to the region; the completion of the channel tunnel rail link to St Pancras will open up fast travel from London and Kent to Paris, and overcrowding on rail commuter services into London is to be targeted. Other improvements are under active consideration.

I shall answer some of the individual points that have been raised, but I fear that I shall not get through them all. If hon. Members wish, they can write me a note later, and I shall try to respond. The light rail scheme was mentioned. A number of such schemes are being considered by local authorities in the south-east—for example in Oxford, Milton Keynes and Reading, and on the Isle of Wight. Some of their bids are expected in the near future. It was always intended that the 10-year plan be reviewed, and it is proper that that should happen. It is nonsense to suggest that revising it is a panic measure.

What a grim picture the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell painted of his area. I wonder whether people reading his speech in *Hansard* would be attracted to invest there. Sometimes we should reflect on our words,

and the influence that they might have. His description was nowhere near reality as most people understand it. The hon. Gentleman almost told us that we should have renationalised the railway system when we first came into government in 1997. That was an interesting U-turn from the Conservative Back Benches. Perhaps we shall hear more about it at some other time.

I have very little time to respond to all the points in this debate, but it is clear that we cannot deliver any of our transport solutions without effective partnership. That is what we will have with agencies such as the Strategic Rail Authority and the Highways Agency. Most importantly, the local transport plans, which have been given so much extra funding—

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. Time is up.

Fireworks

12.30 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I am pleased to have secured this debate at such an appropriate time, as there is somewhat less than a week to go until 5 November and bonfire night. It is particularly appropriate to debate such a topic in this place. I enjoy firework displays. I have always taken my kids to see them and they have enjoyed them. It is right that we commemorate a momentous occasion in British history. However, some serious issues must be tackled.

The sale of fireworks through retail outlets should be prohibited. I would like the Minister to comment on that. I hold that view for three key reasons. The first is the level of injury to individuals, in particular young people. In the most extreme cases, fireworks cause fatalities—two were recorded last year. My second key reason is the incidence of criminal damage. For example, I have had conversations in the past couple of years with British Telecom, which recorded 5,000 incidents of firework-related vandalism involving public payphones last year. The criminal damage costs so far this year are running at about £1.2 million and the burden of those costs is ultimately born by the taxpayer and the consumer.

My third reason for seeking a prohibition on the retail sale of fireworks is that they make people afraid. Fear is a less tangible phenomenon than the other two that I have listed, but it is none the less profound. Fear, anxiety and distress particularly affect some of the more vulnerable members of our society. I receive letters every year from elderly people and their relatives, telling me that those people are very nervous about going out of doors when darkness falls. Some of them are frightened to go out at all at this time of year. I also receive similar letters from other groups, but I use elderly people as an example.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Like the hon. Lady, I have received many letters on the subject, including a petition bearing many names. If the sale of fireworks from retail premises is not banned, would she agree that perhaps there should be some control over the time of year during which fireworks are used? Nowadays, it seems as though they are used throughout the year.

Joan Ryan: I agree. When I was thinking about this debate, I considered saying that firework accidents and attacks are now considered an inevitable, seasonal event, but in fact that is no longer the case. Fireworks are let off at new year and for other festivals, so it is not feasible to rely on the provision in the voluntary code for a three-week sales period before bonfire night. There are other festivals at other times of the year, so relying on that provision would not be fair and would not tackle the problem of the level of injuries and criminal damage. That is why I want a ban.

I have outlined three key reasons why a ban should be imposed. With respect to fear, many hon. Members, including myself, receive letters from people concerned about the distress and fear caused to their pets and animals by the—generally illegal—letting off of fireworks in the street.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend is right to focus on the number of accidents and

[David Cairns]

on the distress that animals can be caused. Is she aware of the increase in the use of fireworks as weapons? In two incidents in my constituency at the weekend, a cat and a dog were severely injured by gangs of thugs who were using fireworks as weapons, firing them at the animals.

Joan Ryan: My hon. Friend makes his point well. It adds further weight to my argument that we should consider the prohibition of sales through retail outlets, rather than regulation. That way forward has not proved effective.

The misuse and abuse of fireworks and the injuries caused by them continue, despite the well-intentioned Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997. Those most notably banned the sale to, and use by, the general public of aerial shells and similar devices. The statistics unfortunately and overwhelmingly demonstrate the impotence of the regulations in securing greater public safety throughout the firework season. The number of injuries from fireworks was higher in 1999 and 2000 than in 1998, which illustrates that the 8 per cent. reduction in casualties from 1997 to 1998 was merely arbitrary and owed nothing to the implementation of the regulations. The present legislation makes it extremely difficult for trading standards officers and the police to deal effectively with the sale and misuse of fireworks. Statistics demonstrate that tightening laws and increasing penalties for those guilty of the criminal use of fireworks will not be enough to curtail firework injuries.

For the past five years, the illegal use of fireworks has consistently been the second largest cause of firework-related injuries, but the primary cause has been family and private parties. Deliberate misuse is therefore not the only culprit; we must also consider the genuine use of fireworks as instruments of celebration. The evidence demonstrates that merely trying to eradicate the misuse of fireworks will not combat the high rate of firework-related injuries. It is therefore necessary to conclude that the thorough prohibition of the sale of fireworks to the general public is the only means by which firework-related injuries, accidents and damage can satisfactorily be tackled.

Those with vested interests, such as commercial manufacturers whose profits and employees would be affected, would obviously object to such a measure. Their economic gains are economic losses for others, such as the health service and ultimately, therefore, the taxpayer who must pick up the tab for firework-related injuries. Others who might face losses include individuals and private sector companies whose property incurs severe criminal damage.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): My hon. Friend will be aware that there was a serious incident in my constituency last week—a fire in premises where fireworks were being stored for the retail trade. Does she agree that attention needs to be paid to not only the immediate point of sale, but the whole chain of sale? Does she agree that such incidents require the Government and industry to reconsider their approach to the voluntary code of practice to prevent incidents at any point in the sale chain?

Joan Ryan: I agree with my hon. Friend. As I said, and my hon. Friend confirmed, regulation simply has not proved effective.

There is a fundamental assumption in any social democracy that commercial viability cannot go unchecked, but must be balanced against the wider principles of public welfare and safety. Although commercial vested interests would argue against prohibition, the weight of the argument is in favour of it and of protecting the public.

In response to a parliamentary question about firework-related injuries from my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) in July, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry stated:

"We will further target this age group as part of the 2001 firework safety campaign."—[*Official Report*, 20 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 606W.]

Indeed, that was so, and we should give credit for that campaign. It has been appropriately targeted, with a higher profile than any campaign that I have been aware of for many years. However, therein lies our problem. Legislation requires that consumers of fireworks be aged 18. Statistics show, however, that the greatest percentage of fireworks injuries—despite the 1997 regulations, which raised from 16 to 18 the age at which one could buy fireworks—are to those aged 15 and under. Those account for 40 to 50 per cent. of all fireworks injuries in the past five years.

The evidence clearly shows the effectiveness of the legislation. The Secretary of State's answer in July and the targeting of the safety campaign in the media are explicit acknowledgement that the under-15 group is at high risk of fireworks injuries. Simultaneously there is an implicit acknowledgement that current statute, namely the increase in the 1997 regulations of the age for purchasing fireworks from 16 to 18, does not prevent access to fireworks for people under the age limit.

Even aside from the problem that all age certification entails—that of unscrupulous retailers who sell merchandise to those who are under age—firework safety cannot be guaranteed by ensuring that statutes are more vigorously enforced. Age alone does not qualify someone in the responsible and competent handing of what are, essentially, explosives. We could use the analogy of driving licences. Someone who reaches the age at which it is possible legally to hold a driving licence cannot then just get in a car and drive down the road. They must take lessons and pass a test. However, on reaching 18 someone can buy fireworks whether competent to handle them or not. We should bear in mind that fireworks are explosives.

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): I have a 78-year-old constituent who was constantly bombarded, until she was forced to ask the council to move her. Youths as young as 12 have been involved. Should not such cases persuade us that the voluntary code is not working and that fireworks are available to anyone who wants to purchase them?

Joan Ryan: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that most hon. Members could give instances of their constituents being subjected to intolerable fear and persecution as a result of the illegal use of fireworks by youngsters.

Mr. Bob Laxton (Derby, North): The problem is getting worse. I shall tonight present to the House a petition with about 28,000 names, from an organisation that is concerned about, for example, the impact on pets. I have tapes from individuals who need guide dogs. Fireworks can send the animals into complete panic, which restricts the ability of the people concerned to get out and about and lead normal lives at this time. The difficulty is not even restricted to this period of the year; it happens at other times, such as the millennium and Christmas, and at private parties. I believe that it is getting worse.

Joan Ryan: I am sure that some people would respond to a call for prohibition by claiming that there was a civil liberties issue to be considered. However, balance is necessary. One person's freedom is, after all, another person's prison. Human rights legislation also states that people have the right to quiet enjoyment of their property. Many people feel that that right has not been afforded to them. It is an issue of safety and balance, and safety must be paramount.

Legislation, despite its theoretical accuracy, is only as good as its implementation. Some would argue that legislation already exists that makes the misuse of fireworks an offence, which is correct. In reality, however, fireworks cause distress, anxiety and injury to an intolerable number of people as well as considerable criminal damage during every firework season and, more than ever before, throughout the year. We must emphasise that injury is not caused simply through the misuse of fireworks. Both the legal and illegal use of fireworks cause major problems, and that is why a prohibition is necessary.

I quote two examples that have already been quoted in the House and which show how legal and illegal use can cause loss of life. Dale Mitchell, a 10-year-old, died in 1996 after a lit firework was pushed through the letterbox of his family home. That is an example of the illegal use of fireworks. In the case of David Hattersley, however, fireworks were being used with the best of intentions. He was headmaster of Hazlemere primary school, and lost his life in November 1996, when he stumbled forward as he supervised the school's annual firework display.

Last year, 972 people were admitted to hospital as a result of firework injuries, but the actual number of injuries may have been significantly higher. Numerous statistics show the need for reform of the firework legislation. I hope that I, and my hon. Friends who have intervened, have made a case for it. The Government believe that it is required because in 1997 they supported a private Member's Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton, which was unfortunately talked out in 1998. They supported key measures in that Bill to deal with the licensing, training and qualification of those organising public and private firework displays. That is the way forward, along with a prohibition on the sale of fireworks. With those measures, we may all enjoy fireworks safely.

The British Retail Consortium will put to the Home Office later today its ideas for a national scheme to allow retailers to identify genuine proof-of-age cards. That may not solve the problem, but it might be a step in the right direction if we cannot achieve a complete prohibition.

12.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) on securing this debate, which is clearly topical. I am delighted to say a few words on the issue, as I know from my postbag that many people have concerns about it, which my hon. Friend and other hon. Members have raised effectively.

The sale of fireworks, although it is important, forms only a part of the overall firework scene. I stress the fact that fireworks are well regulated in many regards in the United Kingdom. The Firework (Safety) Regulations 1997 were made under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and played a significant role in reducing the number of firework injuries treated in accident and emergency departments around the firework season of 5 November. Through regulations, we have restricted the general retail of certain types of potentially dangerous fireworks to those who are qualified professionals. We have the regulatory powers to deal with the antisocial practice of letting off fireworks in the street, and other such practices—but that is a question not only of regulation but of enforcement.

Millions of fireworks are sold and millions used safely each year in people's back gardens, providing a popular form of family entertainment. Many others enjoy public displays, and I hope that people will continue to enjoy fireworks in such ways. The vast majority of accidents involving fireworks are caused by misuse—partly by people not following the fireworks code and partly by the action of irresponsible individuals and hooligans. My hon. Friend referred to the British Retail Consortium's possible proof-of-age cards. The statistics show that a large number of those injured are quite young and many are under the legal age for being able to acquire fireworks.

My hon. Friend made several important points about the sale of fireworks through retail outlets. Under the 1997 regulations and the other legislation that impinges on the retailing of fireworks, all fireworks have to comply with British standard 7114, which governs their construction, labelling, testing and so on. Any products on sale that do not comply with that standard can be removed by trading standards officers. No fireworks may be sold to anyone under 18 years of age. That rule is also enforced by the trading standards department. Those who break the rules are subject to prosecution. We must examine how effectively that enforcement is being carried out and in what ways people aged under 18 are acquiring fireworks, as many are.

The legislation that controls the storage of fireworks is the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive, but the Act requires shops that keep fireworks to be registered with the local authority, thereby informing it of the premises where fireworks are kept and enabling them to undertake inspections to ensure compliance with the law. Considerable effort has been made under the present regulations to protect consumers from unsafe products and to ensure that the storage and handling of potentially dangerous products is controlled.

My hon. Friend asked about the period during which fireworks are available for sale. I know from my postbag that many people are worried that they are becoming

[Miss Melanie Johnson]

more prevalent throughout the year as consumers choose to celebrate occasions such as parties, weddings and 4 July with fireworks. The Government recognise that. Our regulation-making powers allow us to deal with the intrinsic safety of goods under the Consumer Protection Act 1987, including fireworks, but do not enable the regulation of periods when they can be sold or let off. Wider powers to allow for that could be made available only through further legislation. A voluntary code of practice works for a three-week period around 5 November and for a similar period around the new year. That is beneficial in that it contains the period during which many retailers—especially those on the high street such as local newsagents and post offices—sell fireworks. The voluntary agreement is not perfect, but it has generally worked well. Those in the industry and in trading standards have been reinforcing the agreement during this fireworks season by sending out reminders and circulars about retailer's responsibilities.

Several hon. Members have urged that we should not allow the retail sale of fireworks to the public. Every year my Department receives a number of requests for a total ban on fireworks for private use. I do not believe that that is the way forward. Millions of people still enjoy fireworks. In 1996, the Department reviewed and considered a total ban. There were several reasons for rejecting it, including the fear that it would lead to the development of an illegal market for fireworks and to more illegal imports, which would involve quality control problems. Nevertheless, the Government were prompt in trying to restrict the type and sale of fireworks through the 1997 regulations, which prohibit the sale to the public of dangerous fireworks such as bangers, mini rockets, those of erratic flight and some of the larger and more powerful fireworks, and bans all category 4 and some category 3 fireworks.

My hon. Friend discussed injuries, which we all take very seriously, and the thrust of the effectiveness of this year's campaign in getting the messages out. I recognise that she would like more to be done overall, but messages about firework safety are being sent out. Over the years, the number of people requiring treatment in hospital casualty departments has been cut by about a third from 1,530 in 1995 to 972 in 2000. We hope that that trend will continue. My hon. Friend quoted some figures that showed a rise between 1997-98 and 1999. We suspect that that was due to the millennium period, which caused more fireworks to be used.

Statistics show reductions in certain categories of injury. Gains are being achieved because of steps that we have taken that have played a valuable role in keeping the number of accidents down. The annual firework statistics enable us to design the focus for the following year's campaign. This year, we have targeted people under 16 years old because they were particularly subject to injury during the 2000 firework period.

On the letting off of fireworks in the street, which we have all experienced, points have been raised about controls. To put it simply, it is illegal to let off a firework in the street: it is an offence under section 80 of the Explosives Act 1875. The police enforce that section and anyone found guilty is liable for a fine of up to £5,000. I recognise that enforcement is tricky, but legislation deals with the issue effectively.

Legislation also deals with distress to any domestic or captive animal, under the Protection of Animals Act 1911. Prosecution can be undertaken by the police or by trading standards authorities, and in some cases the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals can instigate prosecution. Again, the fine is £5000, up to six months' imprisonment or both. There is a legal underpinning for effective action where such problems arise and, on noise nuisance, we encourage all those who use fireworks to consider neighbours and inform them—particularly old people—of what is planned.

We recognise the concerns raised by my hon. Friend, other hon. Members and the public, but we have introduced a comprehensive package of legislation in the UK to cover the supply of safe fireworks. The effective enforcement of various regulations is crucial. It must not be an idle threat. Prosecutions must take place and I am sure that that will happen more often in future. I appreciate that resources are extremely pressed in some areas, but the police and local authorities will follow up complaints about the sale or misuse of fireworks.

I assure my hon. Friend that her arguments and those of other hon. Members have been well made in this worthwhile debate. I have listened carefully to what they have said about arising difficulties. We will continue to keep firework safety and usage under review, particularly in light of this year's experience.

Kent and Canterbury Hospital

12.58 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to hold an Adjournment debate on the future of Kent and Canterbury hospital and on wider acute services in east Kent. I welcome the Minister to her place.

Immediately after the 1997 election, the East Kent health authority brought forward plans to run down Kent and Canterbury hospital so that it would become a nurse-led minor injuries unit, supplemented by a few beds for slow-stream recovery geriatric wards. EKHA, as the authority is normally abbreviated, argued that there was insufficient critical mass for doctor training on the three major sites in its area. It had submitted similar plans under the previous Conservative Government, with children's services as the first area to be considered. The plans were firmly rejected by the then Secretary of State, who insisted that critical mass training requirements for doctors should be met in a different way by a new concept of rotating training across all three sites.

In 1998, after a long and gruelling consultation process, the then Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), ruled on a compromise. It was unsatisfactory, because the most accessible accident and emergency unit in east Kent was lost. Canterbury is the hub of the bus and rail systems of east Kent where 37 per cent. of the population live in villages. To give one small example, the last regular bus service from Whitstable, a town in my constituency, to Margate is about to cease.

The compromise at least guaranteed the future of East Kent's joint cancer centre at the Kent and Canterbury hospital and of a limited cardiac service there, as well as 230 beds. The then Secretary of State wrote to me in December 1998 and September 1999. He asked EKHA to guarantee that on-site consultant anaesthetic, surgical and medical cover would be provided at the Kent and Canterbury hospital during the day, with full on-call cover out of hours, and that consultant medical cover would include cover for the coronary care unit. He announced expenditure of millions of pounds on a new linear accelerator to replace an old one at the cancer centre. That facility is now being installed at the Kent and Canterbury hospital and is a major part of the joint cancer centre shared with Maidstone hospital. That joint centre obtained the country's first cancer charter mark in 1998.

EKHA has continued to argue that, to meet requirements for critical mass, it needs to reconfigure services in Kent. The requirements for reconfiguration were denied in writing from the very beginning by the secretary of the Royal College of Physicians. None the less, the only available route, then and now, has been a private finance initiative programme. That would mean that our local health service would have to bear a heavy and perpetual financial penalty. Due to the sheer scale of the costs involved in the reorganisation, that must affect its ability to deliver capacity. Therefore EKHA logically recognised that a lower bed and nursing capacity would have to be accepted to achieve the reconfiguration of which it dreamed. Since then, for a number of reasons, the position has changed radically and it has become obvious, even to the health authority, that east Kent is suffering from a severe shortage of capacity.

Our local hospitals gained two stars out of three in the recent awards, and I congratulate the hard-working and over-worked clinical and nursing staff who helped to achieve that. None the less, as my postbag continually testifies, waiting times are getting worse despite changes made in the method of recording.

We have just come through summer, which is traditionally less busy than winter, but combined queues in the three accident and emergency units have sometimes totalled as many as 100 people. Behind the appalling statistics are the individual people waiting on trolleys, inevitably, without proper supervision. I could refer to several horrifying individual cases, but time allows me to mention only two.

Earlier this year, Mrs. Connie Jones, a woman of 97, waited two whole nights in casualty before she could be admitted to a proper ward. Much more recently, we had another terrible case. A Whitstable man, Ray Gilson, aged 81, was left in the accident and emergency department while he underwent tests for swelling and pain in his legs. He spent three whole days in the accident and emergency unit, being wheeled backwards and forwards between tests. He was refused a bath, presumably because no one was available to supervise him. His family had to come in and change his pyjamas when they became stained. Sadly, it became clear that he was in the last stages of terminal cancer, but the indignity of his last few days on this earth was so desperate that the family of that seafood shop owner from Whitstable—a much respected figure—scraped together the money to get him out of the Kent and Canterbury and into the private Chaucer hospital where he was able to spend his last few days with some dignity in a proper bed in a proper ward.

Although EKHA, and now the hospital trust, continue to talk the obsessive language of reconfiguration, half the consultants—81 in total—from across the three East Kent acute sites have attended a meeting. They passed a unanimous motion saying that shortage of capacity now threatened clinical standards. Even more amazingly, junior doctors—they have their whole careers ahead of them, so one would not expect them to go public—have almost all signed a letter saying the same thing. In doing so, they have put their careers on the line. In both cases, the concern relates to the shortage of capacity; they were not a call for a reconfiguration.

EKHA's response has been a new public consultation document, suggesting five options. Time precludes me from evaluating each singly, so I will just say that they range from option one, keeping the status quo—which EKHA effectively rubbished in its initial announcement—through to the Secretary of State's plan, which is now called option two. Option five, at the other extreme, is a reversion to the original 1997 plans to close the whole hospital apart from a nurse-led minor injuries unit, out-patient services and a few recuperation beds.

The halfway house on which the previous Secretary of State decided would have been very expensive, costing more than £100 million even by EKHA's estimates—and it seriously underestimated the cost of its last big private finance initiative. One can only imagine the colossal cost of the reorganisation proposed under option five. Yet that appears to be EKHA's favoured choice. It would mean not only the loss of the accident

[Mr. Julian Brazier]

and emergency unit, which proved so vital during the flooding when roads in both directions were blocked, but the loss of the beds and the coronary unit promised us by the Secretary of State. Perhaps most seriously, it would result in abandoning the necessary support for the cancer centre. Some cancer services would, of course, be able to continue, but services for the most dangerous cancers—those requiring more complex chemotherapy and radiotherapy—would be lost to East Kent completely if option five went through.

I believe that all east Kent MPs strongly oppose that option. The hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) has suggested that the loss of those services from east Kent would be unacceptable to him and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) will say something on the subject in a moment. Yet, incredibly, although at least one of the proposed options involves abandoning those services and would result in our walking away from the new linear accelerator that is just being completed, the options have been framed without any mention of cancer at all. Apparently, that is to be dealt with in a separate plan.

I want to give the Minister plenty of time to respond, so I will end by asking three simple questions. First, were the former Secretary of State's pledges to the people of east Kent worth anything to my constituents? Secondly, does the Minister accept that, even if substantial extra sums were made available, the addition of a gigantic financial burden to our current health budget—a PFI on such a scale must result in that—will lead to a lower capacity than could otherwise be afforded? Thirdly, does she accept that any move away from the status quo must mean a loss of access for people in Canterbury, Whitstable and Faversham and for those in villages who make up more than a third of the population of east Kent?

I urge the Minister to tell EKHA that it should reconsider it proposals. It should examine how it can increase the capacity of our already overstretched system, and not get involved in empire building through expensive reconfigurations.

1.9 pm

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I should like to add some brief comments to the excellent speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier).

My concern about the Kent and Canterbury hospital stems from three factors: I was born there; my parents, now retired, live in Canterbury; and the hospital has been the dominant issue in my postbag in the four months since my election. The matter affects approximately 20,000 of my constituents, so the extent of local anger should not be underestimated. There is anger that the hospital is being downgraded at a time when the public perceive that more money is going into the national health service. There is also massive local anger about the decision to row back from the commitments given by a previous Secretary of State. My hon. Friend has also alluded to the capacity concerns that many of us share.

Canterbury is a cathedral city. It has a large and growing student population and it is also an extremely popular retirement venue. In anybody's figures, the population in Canterbury and its surrounding areas can only rise over the next 10 to 15 years. In short, it is the dominant population centre in east Kent, and it needs its own hospital in the current configuration. I therefore support totally my hon. Friend's efforts.

1.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on securing a debate on a matter of great concern to him, to other Members of Parliament and, crucially, to his constituents. For many years, the hon. Gentleman has been a fervent supporter of his local hospitals. He, like the people of Canterbury, is eager to secure the best quality health services that any community expects. At the outset, I assure him that the Government share common ground with him. We are committed to providing a high-quality NHS for everyone, wherever they may live.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the provision of hospital services in east Kent has been the subject of much debate in the House and the local community. I am pleased that this debate gives me an opportunity to outline some of the changes that have taken place since the issue was last debated. I shall also try to outline some future plans for the development of services both specifically at the Kent and Canterbury hospital and generally in east Kent.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the former Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), originally made the decision on changes to the area's hospital services in December 1998. He also set out the conditions on which the changes should be based. The reasons why he made that decision have previously been debated by the hon. Gentleman, and I do not propose to go into them now. The chosen option for reconfiguring acute services, which was endorsed by my right hon. Friend, was right at the time that it was taken. However, we are three years on and we have seen the introduction of a whole agenda for clinical governance. We must therefore reconsider whether that configuration would still be able to meet present-day needs. I shall speak about the detailed options later.

As well as the need to meet the clinical governance agenda, I am well aware that the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members have raised concerns about the increasing pressure placed on the capacity of the local health economy as the demands for hospital services grow in that area. I should like to outline the progress that has been made since the original decision was taken. There has been significant extra investment at the Kent and Canterbury hospital. We have expanded renal in-patient beds at the hospital and the surgical ward block, and we have refurbished a day-surgery area. A purpose-built unit for the health care of older people has also been completed. It includes two rehabilitation wards, a stroke unit, a therapy centre and a day hospital. Elderly care services have been transferred from Nunnery Field hospital to a new elderly care facility, and a new day-care recovery unit has been opened. There also plans to open a new cataract centre at Canterbury in the next few months. Despite all that investment, I acknowledge that

the local health economy is still under pressure and that local people are concerned about the future of their hospital.

A key plank in the development of services is the major capital investment—the hon. Gentleman referred to this—in the Queen Elizabeth Queen Mother hospital, the William Harvey hospital and the Kent and Canterbury hospital. To achieve that aim, the East Kent Hospitals NHS trust submitted a strategic outline case for investment, which was approved in February. However, in the next stage of developing that business case, it became clear that were other ways in which to try to achieve the overall objective of providing first-class health services for the people of Kent and that those options should be reassessed. A rigorous reappraisal of the original endorsed option has taken into account the standards for current clinical work and the requirements for developing new hospital facilities.

However, I should like to take this opportunity to tell local people that there is no question mark over the future of Kent and Canterbury hospital. There are no proposals to abolish it or to prevent it from functioning; instead, we are reappraising the balance and mix of services that ought to be provided throughout the health community in trying to ensure that people have access to high-quality care. None the less, I acknowledge that physical and geographical access is an issue. It is always very difficult to decide on such matters, and to balance local people's need for access with the need for quality, accreditation and sufficient throughput of work to maintain clinical standards.

In reappraising the options, we have tried to ensure the involvement of front-line staff. Indeed, clinicians' support for some of the options has been an issue for many years. As the hon. Gentleman said, there are four options, all of which are based on the principle that there will be two main centres at Margate and Ashford, but a mix of services at Canterbury. Option one is the former Secretary of State's endorsed option; option two is to have an elective service at Canterbury; option three is to develop Canterbury as a community hospital; option four—perhaps the most substantial of those currently proposed—is for Canterbury to have an acute medical unit, a critical care unit, elective orthopaedics and a day surgery.

Mr. Brazier: Have the Government and the East Kent health authority abandoned the status quo—which was option one—in the past few days? As I understand it, such an option is a legal requirement in any private finance initiative submission.

Ms Blears: As far as I am aware, the options that are being developed are those that I have outlined. Of course, we have yet to begin a formal consultation process. If a further option emerges, I shall inform the hon. Gentleman. However, according to my information, the four options to which I referred are being developed.

I want to make it clear that none of the proposed options means that the Kent and Canterbury hospital will lose its ability to deal with emergency cases—an issue that I know has been of great local concern. There will be a full accident and emergency service on the Kent and Canterbury site until the William Harvey hospital and the Queen Elizabeth Queen Mother hospital are able fully to accommodate patients from Canterbury. Under each of the four options that I outlined, a unit would remain on the Kent and Canterbury site. I understand that it will continue to treat between 70 and 80 per cent. of the patients that it sees. The impression has been given that a minor injuries unit will see only a minority of the cases that must currently be dealt with, but the reverse is true: it will deal with the majority of such cases.

As I understand it, there will be a three-month period of public consultation, so I cannot comment further on any of the options. However, I am sure that they will be the subject of intense debate in the local community.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of how the proposals will interact with cancer services. That is an extremely important point, and I can reassure him that proposals for public consultation on the options for the future of services in Canterbury will not be published until it is clear how they will relate to cancer services. I agree with him that we do not want consultation on one set of services to proceed in isolation. In developing services, we must fully take into account their clinical implications for the cancer services that are available at the Kent and Canterbury hospital. We have responsibilities in accordance with the national cancer plan to ensure that people in Canterbury have access to good, high-quality cancer services, but we must ensure that the proposals are not seen in isolation, and do not have a detrimental effect on developing cancer services for local people.

Mr. Brazier: That does not quite answer my question. Will there be consultation on the implications for cancer services, or will they simply be listed? At least one of the options, certainly the minimum option, means losing the cancer centre in Canterbury and probably in east Kent. It would be extraordinary if the Government consulted on that issue at the same time as the rest of the package.

Ms Blears: The proposals for the consultation will not be published until it is clear how they relate to cancer services. I cannot confirm that there will be a joint consultation on the services, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point about the minimum option. I make it clear to people in east Kent that I will urge the health authority to ensure that, if the proposals have implications for cancer services, it will not simply be a matter of including them and ticking a box. No decisions will be taken that could have a knock-on effect on cancer services from which it would be impossible to recover. We need to get the balance right.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned capacity, which is an underlying issue in the area. In April 1999, there were 1,627 acute beds in east Kent, and the number has increased slightly to 1,633 in 2000 and to 1,642 at present. I accept that the increase in the number of acute beds is slow, but it is going up. I acknowledge that services are under pressure, so it is crucial that the beds inquiry continues to monitor the number of beds available in the east Kent area. I am pleased that a new service, the east Kent bed bureau, is monitoring bed occupancy in the area, and that will result in a more efficient and effective use of the existing capacity. I do not say that it is an entire solution but, in many cases,

[Ms Blears]

bed usage is not maximised because people do not have up-to-date, online information on the beds that are available in each hospital at a particular time. We are gradually developing more sophisticated systems to monitor bed occupancy in the NHS to ensure that the maximum use is made of the beds in the system.

Every hospital now has a medical acute assessment unit, and community assessment and rehabilitation teams, day hospitals and crisis outreach teams help to reduce the pressure on accident and emergency departments by supporting people, especially elderly people, in their own homes, thus avoiding emergency admissions when possible. A key plank of our strategy for hospitals is to support people at home and another is to tackle the important matter of delayed discharges, which is essential if we are to maximise hospitals' capacity.

I am pleased that the announcement of extra money to deal with delayed discharges will affect capacity in east Kent, not just this winter and for the next 12 months but for the next few years. We will put in £100 million this year and £200 million in the following two years and that money will have a real impact. Kent county council has been allocated an extra £2.1 million from the extra funds to try to ensure that people do not linger in hospital when they no longer need to be there. If people stay in hospital when they do not need to, other people cannot be treated, and it is bad for their health. Once people no longer need acute medical care, they should be either in intermediate care or supported by domiciliary care packages in their own homes so that they can maintain their independence. Putting all the measures in place will be essential in ensuring, as far as possible, that we relieve the pressure on the health economy in east Kent.

I acknowledge that staff in all the area's hospitals work incredibly hard and do their best to ensure that patients get the highest quality care and that we do not see repeats of the terrible incidents of the past. I am pleased to say that the trust has not reported any cancelled urgent operations in the past three months, and that is a tribute to its management and working systems. As the hon. Member for Canterbury said, the trust was awarded two stars, and it is delivering on its targets on many of the indicators that we monitor. It is important to say that, because I do not want to create the impression that there is an on-going crisis in the hospitals. They are doing a fine job in providing a high standard of care to local people.

I am concerned about the length of time that it has taken to reach a resolution on many issues in east Kent. Uncertainty for staff and the public can affect morale and recruitment, and does not ensure that people perceive their health services to be prospering and growing in the local community. Whichever option is decided on after consultation, the overriding concern must be that patients are treated in a safe environment and in facilities that are fit for the 21st century.

Mr. Brazier: Given that the decision may mean the abandonment of the former Secretary of State's pledges, is the Minister willing to commit the Government, rather than EKHA, to making it? Will she assure me that, if EKHA were to choose an option that involved abandoning even the minimal pledges made by the then Secretary of State three years ago, EKHA alone would not be allowed to make the decision and that it would require the new Secretary of State's approval?

Ms Blears: As I have said to the hon. Gentleman, the decision made then was the right one at the right time for the circumstances. Time has moved on and we have a new clinical Government agenda. It is right that further options are considered. He will know that there is a process through which every option must go, and that involves it being drawn up, public consultation involving the whole of the local community and, if there is not agreement, submission to Ministers for consideration. That is why it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on those options. If there is no local resolution, a central decision will be taken.

The modernisation of services in the area will go ahead. I acknowledge that there have been some problems and that they are a sign of the need to invest in new, modernised services for local people. That is exactly what we intend to do. I accept that there have been problems in the transition, but we have not simply stood still and not made progress. I have set out today the investments that have been made in Kent and Canterbury hospital for new surgery units and rehabilitation facilities. People in Canterbury and all east Kent have a right to expect to be able to rely on the best national health service facilities for themselves and their community. Consultation on the options will undoubtedly take place in the next few months, and hon. Members will have the opportunity to make further representations. I know that they will do their utmost to represent the views of local people and to ensure that we are thoroughly informed when we come to deciding on the crucial issue of the future of health care in the area.

Transport to School

1.29 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate transport to school.

The debate about home-to-school transport has been controversial, and many issues have been considered: the age and condition of contract buses, the provision of seat belts, the qualifications and competence of drivers, as well as three-for-two seating arrangements. During my time as the Member of Parliament for Monmouth, I have made representations to Ministers about school transport. One of my former constituents, Mrs. Pat Harris, formed the organisation "Belt Up School Kids"—BUSK—which has campaigned vigorously and with much success for the compulsory use of seat belts on contract buses and those used on school visits.

The safety of pupils on scheduled bus services and the problem of overcrowding in particular have caused me to request this debate on the transportation of pupils to Monmouthshire comprehensive school from the village of Llandogo in the Wye valley, the beautiful area of outstanding natural beauty in my constituency. People believe that it must be one of the most beautiful and tranquil routes to school that pupils could have. It is a journey of about six miles and meanders along the valley against a backdrop of fields and forests. The bus passes under a beautiful canopy of trees and crosses from the Welsh side of the Wye into the English side and back into Wales over the historic Wye bridge in Monmouth.

However, the 69 route from Llandogo to Monmouth on weekday mornings in term time has been described as "the nightmare journey". It has caused considerable anxiety to pupils and parents alike. In recent years, the village of Llandogo has grown and, on average, 60 to 70 pupils aged from 11 to 18 attend Monmouth comprehensive school. In rural areas, most pupils living in excess of three miles from Monmouth comprehensive school and other comprehensive schools are transported to school in designated school transport buses. In Monmouthshire, there is an extensive network of coaches, contracted to take pupils to school from communities where public transport is limited or non-existent. They are run generally by private, local bus operators.

In recent years, the regulations affecting the buses have changed to require them to have seats that are fitted with seat belts. Only one pupil is permitted to occupy a seat and no pupils are allowed to stand. Hence, no bus that is contracted for conveying pupils from home to school can legally accommodate more passengers than the number of seats on the vehicle. Llandogo lies on the scheduled bus route from Chepstow to Monmouth, which is operated by Stagecoach plc. Pupils are therefore expected to catch the scheduled service, and the costs are covered by the county council, which negotiates season tickets with Stagecoach. That arrangement makes sense in most cases, except for Llandogo. It avoids unnecessary bus journeys, it is good for the environment, it avoids a duplication of services and it keeps costs down.

The situation is different in Llandogo. The arrangement has caused parents and pupils several worries, which were aired at a public meeting in the spring convened by local parents, Avril Seabury and Gail Reynolds. The main concern was overcrowding. The morning and evening buses are full to capacity, with some children sitting three to a double seat. Several pupils are required to stand for the entire half-hour journey, which has resulted in injury when they have been thrown around. Buses are often late arriving at Llandogo and, generally, pupils have been late for school. Recently, the bus was an hour late. As for reliability, the buses have broken down occasionally, a problem that has caused parents concern when it has happened in fairly remote country areas between Llandogo and Monmouth.

A few weeks ago I decided to experience the situation myself. I travelled on the bus with the pupils from Llandogo. It was a wet Wednesday morning. The No. 69 arrived about 10 minutes late. It was a 53-seater bus and, by the time it left the village, it was overcrowded with pupils. Some were sitting three to a seat. About 10 pupils were standing with me. Other passengers on the route boarded the bus although it was clearly overcrowded. Throughout the journey, the bus was carrying between 60 and 65 passengers. The bus was driven competently and within the speed limit, although some of the standing passengers lost their balance on several occasions as the bus drove through the Wye valley or stopped in traffic in Monmouth. When we arrived at Monmouth comprehensive school, the pupils said, "This is a good day. We're only five minutes late."

I wrote to Stagecoach and Monmouthshire county council about the problem, and suggested that the pupils from Llandogo should have the use of a designated school transport bus. That seems an obvious solution. It would get the pupils to school on time in more comfort and safety, and in a mode that is similar to that used by most pupils who travel to school from the villages of Monmouthshire. It would also ensure that other passengers were not faced with a service that is overwhelmed by school pupils. The pupils of Llandogo are an exceptional case and should be provided with a designated contract bus as part of the school transport network.

A second solution to the problem is for Stagecoach to provide a duplicate bus to deal with excess passengers. Surely it feels a duty to provide an adequate service for not only the pupils, but other fare-paying passengers? Stagecoach has apparently refused to do that unless Monmouthshire county council funds it.

Both solutions have been resisted. At a recent meeting, which I requested, Stagecoach, the Gwent passenger transport unit and Monmouthshire county council decided that both of the solutions are unacceptable because they are too expensive and require breaching, or re-tendering, of the existing contracts.

The season ticket contract between Stagecoach and Monmouthshire county council for the Llandogo pupils is worth £22,000 per annum. If Stagecoach loses that revenue, the company cannot give assurances that the No. 69 service will be viable and it may be withdrawn. The contract for the No. 69 route also covers a further nine routes in Monmouthshire and applies for a further three to four years. Therefore, all of those routes may be in jeopardy. The pupils of Llandogo hold the key to the entire bus network in Monmouthshire. Stagecoach has driven a hard bargain and is abusing its monopoly. Not for the first time, it is holding the county council to ransom.

[Mr. Huw Edwards]

The proposed solution is to provide a larger bus—a double decker. However, double-decker buses cannot run in the Wye valley because of the overhanging trees, which are one of the route's attractive features. The quest is now on to cut the overhanging trees and to solve the problem of the overcrowded bus. Monmouthshire county council has admitted that the solution sounds complicated, but once it is achieved pruning from time to time would be relatively simple. However, it must co-operate with all the people who own land containing the affected trees and it must liase with Gloucestershire county council, which is the authority that controls the English part of the route.

Parents consider the solution to be laughable. Decisions to run larger buses were previously proposed and were not always adhered to. If the double-decker solution was so good, why was it not introduced before? Parents have little confidence that the use of double-decker buses will be an adequate solution. It appears that the safety of pupils from Llandogo who attend school in Monmouth will be dependent on a gang of tree surgeons—perhaps a company called "The Tree Fellas" could be employed to carry out the task.

Two main issues arise from the Llandogo case. The first is the abuse of Stagecoach's monopoly and the second is the legalised overcrowding of which it, and other scheduled bus service providers, may take advantage. In Monmouthshire, Stagecoach has used its monopoly by giving notice to withdraw virtually its entire bus network to lay claim to the increased public funding for rural bus services, which was introduced by the present Government. In effect, it has held the local authority to ransom. In the case of the No. 69 route between Chepstow and Monmouth, Stagecoach receives a public subsidy between £10,000 and £20,000 under the local transport services grant, which is given by the National Assembly for Wales and ring-fenced for procuring and enhancing existing services. Stagecoach also receives a guaranteed income of £22,000 from season ticket sales on the No. 69 route. In effect, it receives a double subsidy. However, it is not prepared to provide an additional bus to resolve overcrowding unless the county council funds it. To concede would mean that Stagecoach would receive a triple subsidy on the route. Surely that cannot be in the public interest or in accordance with best value practice.

Private bus operators on scheduled services can take advantage of legalised overcrowding. The issue raises serious public safety questions. Under the Education Act 1944, it is permissible for three pupils under the age of 14 to occupy two seats. However, new seat belt regulations have altered that ruling for contract buses such that if a safety belt is fitted there may be only one pupil per seat. However, that rule does not apply to scheduled bus services, which are exempt from the regulations governing the fitting of safety belts. Hence, bus operators can take advantage of that rule, which relates to legislation passed 65 years ago. Provided that the passengers are under 14, it is possible to seat 50 per cent. more passengers than the number of seats on the vehicle. What may have been acceptable in 1944 is clearly not acceptable in the 21st century, as the size of children has increased and other school pupils are likely to be carrying bags and other items for school, including musical instruments.

A further worry is the permitted number of standing passengers. On the 53-seater bus on the No. 69 route—Chepstow to Monmouth—it is permissible to have 12 passengers standing. Theoretically, if every passenger were under the age of 14 and sitting three to a seat, it would be possible for such a bus to carry 90 passengers. On a 48-seater bus, it is possible and permissible to have 20 passengers standing. Therefore, again, if all the pupils were under 14, there could be 72 pupils in seats and 20 standing, and it would be within the law to carry 92 passengers.

Concern would be widespread if it were generally known that in 2001 it is possible under the law for a 48-seater bus to carry 92 children and young people, none of whom is required to wear seat belts on journeys to and from school. That reminds me of the case involving a school in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane), in which a contract double-decker bus was involved in an accident in which several children were injured. If there is another serious incident, will parents not ask why such overcrowding is lawful?

Why has the law relating to transport on school buses and scheduled bus services not been amended in 65 years? What assessment has the Health and Safety Executive made of the issue? I understand that the Northern Ireland Assembly is considering abolishing the three-for-two rule. If that can be done in Northern Ireland without primary legislation, why can it not be done in Wales? The law needs to be reviewed and amended. I propose that my hon. Friend the Minister should examine the matter with colleagues in the Departments for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and for Education and Skills, and the National Assembly for Wales.

In recent years, the Government have introduced and supported some welcome initiatives on home-to-school safety. The safe to school initiative is welcome, although I understand that it is confined to walking and cycling and does not apply to school transport routes. The piloting in this country of American-style yellow buses is also welcome. Such buses are used only for the provision of school transport, and important safety regulations apply to such buses that do not generally apply in this country. The RAC should be commended for its work with local authorities and other agencies to improve home-to-school transport.

The pupils of Monmouth comprehensive who live in the village of Llandogo will this morning have travelled on the overcrowded No. 69 bus and will face similar overcrowding on their return home this afternoon. Their experience raises serious questions about the operation of the law in respect of bus safety and the monopoly position of private bus operators such as Stagecoach.

I ask my hon. Friend to liaise with the National Assembly for Wales and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to examine the impact of the monopoly position of private operators and to consider both the recommendations of the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and

Regional Affairs, which examined the tendering of bus services in 1999, and the law relating to the Transport Act 1985 which was chiefly responsible for the deregulation of the bus network.

I also propose that the Government use the forthcoming education Bill to amend the Education Act 1944 in relation to overcrowding and to abolish the three-for-two rule that applies to children and young people on scheduled bus services. Such a change would be inexpensive, achieve greater parity with the situation for contract buses and make a significant contribution to public safety.

I hope that the experience and discomfort of the pupils of Llandogo will lead to improvements in transport to school and will benefit all pupils.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) on securing the debate. I have seen the news coverage of his campaign for many months and I commend him for his efforts on behalf of his constituents who, he feels, are at risk, given the way in which the service operates. As a Member of Parliament, I am acutely aware of the problems of home-to-school transport, and there are also difficulties in my borough and constituency.

Monmouthshire county council serves my hon. Friend's constituency. It is the local education authority and has a statutory duty to decide how best to meet its obligations in the matter of home-to-school transport. LEAs are obliged to provide free transport to the nearest school for pupils under eight years old who live more than two miles from the school, and for pupils above the age of eight who live more than three miles from the school.

As I learned during my time as a county councillor, LEAs can be more generous with that provision, and Monmouthshire county council already operates a more generous home-to-school transport policy. The relevant distances in Monmouthshire are one and a half miles for pupils under eight years of age and two miles for pupils aged eight years and over.

The LEA also operates a concessionary seat scheme under which pupils who would not normally qualify for free school transport may be allowed, for a charge, to occupy spare seats on buses. Obviously, that does not apply in the case of the bus that comes from Llandogo. The LEA also provides free school transport for pupils aged 16 to 19, whereas LEAs are statutorily obliged to provide free school transport only for children of compulsory school age up to the age of 16.

It is therefore reasonable for us to expect the LEA to ensure that pupils travel to and from school in safety and in reasonable comfort. The courts have stated that LEAs are obliged to provide non-stressful transport so that a child can travel to and from school without undue stress, strain or difficulty that would prevent him or her from benefiting from the education that the school has to offer. The transport provided should be appropriate to ensure that pupils travel in safety and comfort. It is therefore reasonable to expect LEAs, in their contracts with bus drivers, to ensure that transport that is provided for children is of a standard that would encourage them to use it and to use it safely.

Of course, the bus service to which my hon. Friend referred is not a dedicated bus service but a scheduled bus service. As the LEA is using that scheduled service as the provider of school transport for children from Llandogo to Monmouth comprehensive school, the same requirements apply.

Mr. Edwards: I thank my hon. Friend for clarifying the legal position. Does he agree that everyone who is making decisions in that matter—at Stagecoach and at Monmouthshire county council—should experience what I have experienced? They should go on that bus and assess whether it is stressful and causes the pupils strain or difficulty.

Mr. Touhig: I take my hon. Friend's point. He might care to invite the chair of education in Monmouthshire to travel on the bus with him and to see what he thinks of the difficulties of coming from Llandogo to Monmouth. On public service vehicles such as the one used on that route, the Public Service Vehicle (Carrying Capacity) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 permit three seated children under the age of 14 to count as two passengers. My hon. Friend made that point powerfully. That is a concession, and if bus operators such as Stagecoach wish to take advantage of it, they must ensure that it is possible to seat children in the manner prescribed by the regulations.

The concession applies only to children under 14, but my hon. Friend says that pupils attending Monmouth comprehensive school are aged between 11 and 18 years. I cannot see how the county council and the bus operator can ensure that the concession is not abused. To comply, they would need to check the age of every child and ensure that, where three pupils occupy two seats, they are under the age of 14. My hon. Friend may like to take the issue up with the county council and the bus operator, Stagecoach.

From 1 October, schools may be offered rear-facing seats with seat belts in new minibuses and coaches that comply with the European directive, but children must continue to be provided with forward-facing seats with seat belts in older vehicles that are used exclusively to provide home-to-school transport. Until recently, legislation required that seatbelts be fitted only in coaches and minibuses that carry children to and from school and on organised trips.

The regulations signal the beginning of the end of the concession that allows three children under the age of 14 to travel in two seats. My hon. Friend has painted a serious picture of what could happen if a bus of the capacity that he mentions has an accident. The county council and the bus operator must take account of that possibility. From what I have heard today, it seems that the arrangements for transporting pupils from Llandogo to Monmouth comprehensive school may be unsatisfactory. The county council and the bus operator may be failing in their responsibilities.

I cannot tell my hon. Friend that the Government will provide measures in the forthcoming education Bill that would answer his queries on the Education Act 1944, but we have made secondary legislation to implement new safety standards for seat belts. Additionally, Sue Essex, the Welsh Minister for the Environment, who has responsibility for transport, issued a consultation paper

[Mr. Touhig]

in September called "Safe Roads, Safe Communities." She would welcome suggestions on road safety, including any that my hon. Friend or his constituents might make on school transport. The consultation period ends on 30 November, so there is ample time to make a contribution.

I am so concerned about what I have read in the newspapers, and more so by what my hon. Friend has said on the subject of the bus route, that I intend to ask the Welsh Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, Jane Davidson, to contact Monmouthshire county council as soon as possible, to see how the problem can be overcome. It is unsatisfactory for the situation to continue as my hon. Friend describes it and I will do all that I can to assist him and my colleague the Welsh Minister to bring that to a satisfactory conclusion.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Two o'clock.

MR. SPEAKER'S RULING (WRITTEN QUESTIONS)

The following Private Ruling given by Mr. Speaker is published in accordance with Mr. Speaker's statement of 5 November 1981—[Official Report, c. 113.]

With effect from 2 November, Departments may answer written questions put down for answer on Fridays from 9.35 am, rather than 12 noon as previously.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 31 October 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

London Magistrates Courts

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): A colleague once accused me of asking for debates on obscure matters, because I led consecutive debates on inflation indices, hedonic pricing, volunteering and time banks. My colleague was spot on, if the lack of prior outside representation on those subjects was anything to go by. That charge cannot be made today, because the debate has sparked an almost alarming number of representations from external bodies. I thank them, and everyone who has provided me with helpful briefings; I do not think that I can do justice to them all.

I asked for the debate because many of my constituents are concerned about Kingston magistrates court. As the Liberal Democrat spokesman on London, I am aware that the issue is London wide, and I am not surprised that Members from all parties are here today to raise concerns about their constituencies, and the impact that the issues may have on the capital. The representations that I have received show the urgent need for debate on the future of London magistrates courts. Ministers must heed the representations because a political storm is brewing that may soon wash up on the shores of Whitehall.

The combination of recent Government policy initiatives and proposals could produce drastic changes in the bedrock of London's legal system, the magistracy. In a few years' time we could wake up to realise that we had undermined something precious because we did not realise its true value. I shall give a flavour of the changes that London magistrates courts face with three examples of recent initiatives and proposals. First, last April, the administration of London's 22 former magistrates courts was centralised under the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority. That was a major administrative change.

Secondly, GLMCA has introduced a wide-ranging consultation on London's 40 magistrates courthouses, which covers everything from which courthouses are to close, to whether the post of justices' clerk should be widely maintained. Thirdly, a recent review of the criminal courts of England and Wales by Lord Justice Auld proposed a unified criminal court system, including a new district division consisting of a district judge and two experienced magistrates. There are many other proposals that would have an impact on London's magistrates courts.

The GLMCA consultation is not yet complete, and the Auld review is not yet published, but if all such changes were combined, their extent would be huge. The changes exercise the minds of court staff, magistrates, lawyers and many others. Many worry about how the changes add up; they worry not just for themselves, but for the nature and quality of London's justice system, the prime task of which is to serve the people of London, our constituents. The democratic arm of government should focus on the scale of what could happen to the legislative arm of London. We must question such changes and demand explanations from the Government.

I ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), to take careful stock of the changes, and proceed with considerable caution. Many of the changes should be prevented or altered before the political die is cast.

The GLMCA has been something of a success story. That may surprise hon. Members and those who read the report of the debate. Some people see the GLMCA as the cause of all their woes. However, some of what it has been doing is quite good and the administrative change has yielded dividends.

Hon. Members may have examples of the new authority's teething problems, but since its creation earlier this year, the GLMCA has done at least two things that bode well for the future. The authority provides a better focus for much-needed co-ordination of London's criminal justice system, bringing together the top management of the different arms of London's criminal justice system. The chief executive of the GLMCA now regularly meets senior managers from the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the probation service and others throughout London, and that is producing some good results. It has reduced delays in dealing with persistent young offenders, and has breathed new life into London's criminal justice board.

A range of cross-agency initiatives is under way to crack some of the perennial problems affecting London's criminal justice system. There are, for example, ideas for improving the enforcement and collection of fines, extending court hours, and, beyond that, for improving the co-ordination of spreading best practice. We should welcome those initiatives.

The GLMCA is already making better use of its capital assets before the conclusion of the widespread consultation on its document. Individual magistrates courts committees had squirreled away courts' assets in case they might need them. By taking a more strategic view, the GLMCA can decide not to buy a car park or a building that it does not need and that is not fundamental to the operation of the court, and to recycle the money instead.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Is it not the case that the people best placed to decide how a car park should be used are in the local courts, and not in a body that is a long way away and is insensitive to the local requirements?

Mr. Davey: It is possible that local people should have a role in such decisions, although I understand that the GLMCA is at least consulted. The hon. Gentleman would surely agree that sometimes court committees and local authorities have held on to capital assets unnecessarily. I stress that the assets in question are not fundamental to the operation of the magistrates courts and are not core to the function of the justice system. There is a case for better use of assets, and the GLMCA is making that case well.

[Mr. Davey]

I do not want to wax too lyrical about such achievements—these are early days—but they show that there are huge potential benefits from the relatively minor reform of establishing the GLMCA. Ministers should focus on that success and on the potential from that reform without proceeding too rapidly with some of the other ideas that are being proposed, about which I will be more critical.

The tome "Delivery of summary justice in Greater London: the GLMCA's strategy" was launched last June. It has provoked much sound and fury throughout the capital, which does not surprise me. I was taken aback when I read the executive summary—a thinner volume—as were the local magistrates in Kingston, mainly because some of the options included either a partial or even a full-scale massacre of the capital's courtrooms. The options would imply the total demolition of the idea of local justice in London. Local justice is important, and not for sentimental reasons, nor because that is the way we have always done it. Local justice means justice that is as accessible to low-income citizens as it is to the better off, and where local magistrates understand the local area.

The document's more extreme proposals, which attack the very notion of local justice, seem unlikely to go much further. Indeed, it seemed that at the time of publication—and certainly on reflection—some of those proposals were included as Aunt Sallies, intended to draw fire and tease out the arguments. My research has reinforced that impression. In debating the future of London's magistrates courts, we should not focus on that document. The situation has moved on significantly and most courthouses in the capital are likely to survive the exercise. That might be welcome news for some hon. Members.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department may be able to enlighten the House about the current state of play, although I expect that he is waiting until the GLMCA advances its conclusions later this year. The GLMCA is listening to many representations, and closures may prove to be more limited than some expect.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on securing the debate. He has obviously researched the subject carefully. Has he come to any preliminary conclusion about the number of courts that will remain in London when the reform process is over? Currently, there are 40 and, as I understand it, 29 may be closed, although it may be fewer. Does the hon. Gentleman have a figure in mind?

Mr. Davey: Unfortunately, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a figure. The GLMCA will meet on 21 November for consultation in the light of Lord Justice Auld's report, so it has not yet reached a final decision. Therefore, it would be wrong for me to suggest a figure because no one knows of such a figure. It is certainly my view that the number of closures will be small.

The need for this debate follows on from what the hon. Gentleman said. We cannot be sure that my research is correct. It is possible that more courts may be closed than has been suggested to me, which is why I wanted to have the debate. The democratic arm of government should make it clear to the GLMCA and the Minister that we will strongly oppose a major closure programme. When the GLMCA makes its recommendations, I hope that it will take this debate into account. I hope that the GLMCA executive will ensure that all authority members receive a copy of the debate so that they can read what we, as elected representatives, have to say about London's justice system.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the uncertainty that he describes about the number of courts in London is not a good example of joined-up government? There are at least three initiatives: the Auld committee, the GLMCA and the proposals for fewer courts. That is exactly what we do not want in the provision of justice for London.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the combination of all those initiatives and proposals is causing huge uncertainty and great anxiety.

We must consider some of the details in the strategic consultation document. The argument for larger closure programmes is predicated on the idea that there is massive overcapacity in London's courtrooms. That is the basis of the policy consultation and many aspects of policy in the Lord Chancellor's Department. We must challenge the proposition that there is huge overcapacity. Currently, it is believed that there is 30 per cent. too much courtroom space in London, which is also a national average figure. The Lord Chancellor's Department is demanding that authorities such as the GLMCA cut that overcapacity by one third by the end of next year, which means selling off 10 per cent. of the estate by the end of 2002. That is worrying as we cannot be sure about that overcapacity, especially if one third is to be removed in one year. Let us remember that London performs well in not leaving courtrooms empty. In the capital, we use our courtrooms well, especially compared with other areas and the Crown courts. For example, in the last quarter, London was almost 16 per cent. above the national average in courtroom utilisation, and only three percentage points lower than the very best.

We must factor in the need for spare capacity. Sometimes courts are busier than at other times, and we need to ensure that peaks can be dealt with. We must also factor into the analysis that capacity should not be measured simply by courtrooms. What about interview rooms, custody suites and witness rooms, for example? They should be part of a capacity analysis.

We need to remember that we want to improve the quality of justice. We have initiatives such as the London magistrates court witness service, which is promoted by, among others, Victim Support for London and the Government. In trying to secure better courtroom facilities for witnesses, that new service is already absorbing some spare capacity, even before new training facilities and more refreshment facilities, for example, are considered. Some of that space could be absorbed in other ways.

We should also remember that a courtroom sometimes stands empty for reasons entirely outside the court's control. Perhaps the failure of the CPS is

involved, perhaps a witness fails to turn up, or perhaps London's chronic shortage of probation officers means that proceedings cannot continue. Whatever the reason, the courtroom will be empty due to reasons beyond the court's control. Does that count as overcapacity? When consultants talk of overcapacity, I am reminded of what happened more than a decade ago in the national health service, when consultants' calculations told us that there were too many expensive beds throughout the NHS in London, and bed numbers were slashed. We have still not recovered from that.

I urge members of the GLMCA and the Minister to examine closely the figures for overcapacity. The Lord Chancellor's Department and those at Marylebone road should question the figures and data sources, ask for definitions and cross-check the findings. Those who take major decisions based on those figures should ensure that they analyse them properly.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman intended to move on to this point. If spare capacity exists, could it not be used by other agencies? The court in my constituency lets out space to the Inland Revenue—I do not know for what purpose. It might be used for tribunals, for example.

Mr. Davey: I had not considered that. The hon. Lady makes a valid point. What she and I are saying boils down to the fact that the GLMCA should not be rushed into a massive closure programme and the Minister should give it directions to that effect.

There is another major reason why the GLMCA should be ultra cautious about proceeding with rationalisation. The Minister may want to provide some assurance on this, but as far as I know, the Government have given no public assurance that the GLMCA will be able to retain the financial savings derived from closing courtrooms. That is surprising, as surely only one sensible argument could support the sale of a courthouse given the inevitable negative effect on local justice in the area—the possibility that the funds could be recycled, freed up and ploughed back into other magistrates courts, to refurbish them and pay for a modernisation programme that raised the overall quality of justice for London. However, if we do not know that the GLMCA can keep the capital receipts, that argument does not get off the ground. Let us make no mistake: usual Treasury practice is to claw back such money in some way or other. Unless Ministers can guarantee publicly, preferably today, that the Treasury is not about to mount a smash-and-grab raid on London's public legal system, the GLMCA should not be conned.

I know that the Minister is widely regarded as helpful and accommodating on the matter, so I do not mean to slight his intentions. In many ways, my arguments focus on another Department. However, I hope that he understands the crucial point that, without a promise that 100 per cent. of realised capital can be retained for reinvestment, with no hidden penalties or grant regime, the GLMCA would, on financial grounds, be foolish to undertake more than a limited estate rationalisation. It would hardly be outrageous of the GLMCA to request that. This year, its budget represented a cash freeze, so it is hardly imposing extra costs on the Government. Frankly, it would be reasonable for the GLMCA to ask not only for such a guarantee, but for an above-inflation settlement in the new comprehensive spending review, at least for the early years, because it is often important to invest up-front in order to make savings down the line. I will listen closely to the Minister's remarks on that particular point, and I hope that he will reassure us.

I return to the details of the GLMCA's consultation document and, for a moment, I will be parochial and argue the case for Kingston's magistrates court. In the document, Kingston is one of 18 courthouses included for closure in option D, and is mentioned in option C as a possible additional closure within the so-called "moderate rationalisation" option.

The closure of Kingston's magistrates court would be a serious mistake. It would affect not only Kingston, but the wider London magistrates network. Kingston may have a relatively small court, but it is a good, efficient performer. I pay special tribute to the justices' clerk, Andrew Vickers, and his dedicated staff for their hard work over the years, which has been central to that excellent performance. I also mention the work of the chairman of the bench, Dr. Alan Vincent, and his fellow magistrates who have contributed to the performance.

Small can be beautiful, and can help to make justice more accessible. I have attended open days at the Kingston courts when schoolchildren are shown how the courts work and are shown mock trials. That may seem a minor example, but it is just one instance of how a locally minded bench can be proactive in its work with the local community. It can promote active citizenship and, in a roundabout way, contribute to crime prevention.

Kingston's case, however, is based on much more than efficiency. The court's location is in the centre of town, next to the police station. That is a real advantage. It is extremely easy for local people to access, and professionals are on hand, whether they are the police or the Crown Prosecution Service. Moreover, south-west London's probation service is just across the bridge. Therefore, the courtroom is more convenient than others.

Kingston's court is a unique case. Its closure would not yield capital receipt because the local council owns the courtrooms and the administration headquarters is leased. Yes, there would be savings on staff costs, but they would be small because the court is relatively small. Therefore, there is a weak financial case for closing Kingston's court. Moreover, there is room for expansion because the council has already designated a site immediately adjacent to the court's entrance. Building there could modernise the overall facilities and reduce total leasing costs.

Finally, the GLMCA must think of its public duty. The courts are in a grade 2 listed building, within the Kingston old town conservation area. They are in the basement of the Kingston guildhall, which is a neo-Georgian building that was built in 1954 and designed by Maurice Webb. The courts are in good condition and retain their original layout and fixtures. Our court building is of significant historical and architectural value. As the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) will recall from his days with English Heritage, that means that if the GLMCA closes the court, it will be

[Mr. Davey]

extremely difficult for consent to be granted for the existing courtroom fittings to be stripped out, or even significantly altered. However, there is a much greater chance that permission would be granted for enhancements to the building that develop its historical usage.

Kingston council would be left with a costly white elephant that could, at best, serve as an expensive storeroom, and would require assistance from the Minister's colleagues in local government. Alternatively, and more cost-effectively, the GLMCA could include the historical courtrooms in its strategic plans. I urge the Minister and the GLMCA to examine Kingston's case, which is strong even before general points about local justice are considered.

Of course, there is a factor that could change all the calculations—for Kingston, London and throughout England and Wales. That is the Auld review. This is not the time for a full-scale analysis of Lord Justice Auld's review, not least because it goes far wider than London's magistracy. However, it is germane as there can be no doubt that some of its key recommendations would impact on the future of London's courts in a very big way.

The GLMCA has delayed final recommendation on its strategic consultation document pending the extraordinary meeting in November, to which I referred, for consideration of the impact of Auld. I know that the Minister has already told the authority that it should not wait for the Government's response to Auld before finalising and implementing a strategy. However, I am sure that he would agree that it would be imprudent for the authority not to be mindful of Auld, at the very least, in the timetabling of strategy implementation. It is well known that Auld's key recommendations of a unified criminal court with a Crown division, a magistrates division and a new district division could have major implications for the management structure of the courts and the courtroom needs of the criminal justice system.

Equally, if Auld and the Government get their way and abolish the automatic right to a jury trial, the whole work load of the lower two divisions could be significantly increased, with longer trials and more of them. That is not a change at the margin; it is a revolution at the core. The GLMCA and the Minister might wish to press on regardless, but it is a prudent and sensible body and the Minister is rightly well regarded, so Auld must be a consideration. It would be irresponsible madness to sell off any more than a tiny number of courtrooms given that reality. What is the Minister's public guidance, not just to the GLMCA, but to other court authorities? Would he advise them to go ahead with rationalisation utterly regardless, as if Auld did not exist? If not, what recognition of Auld should they build in to their strategies?

Before I conclude, I want to make a few final points about the magistracy in general. The Government's views on the matter are important for the capital. What are the Government's long-term plans for the lay magistracy? That might seem an odd question—the Government might think that it is a trick question—but it has been put to me by many justices of the peace. Magistrates are worried, and the more suspicious ones think that the Government want to get rid of them totally. I do not say that in jest: magistrates regard Auld's proposals for a district division as a stalking horse. They regard the proposal that lay magistrates should not be involved in decisions on matters of sentencing as deeply corrosive. If the district division proposal is implemented, and the district judge sits as the chair, the incentive for magistrates of chairing a bench and being authoritative in reaching conclusions will be taken away and the role of some of our senior magistrates will be reduced. Undermining the purpose and incentive to do the magistrate's job might undermine the whole magistracy.

Worse still, the more suspicious magistrates fear that the unified criminal court, and the Court Service that will manage it—although we know that those proposals are not finalised—will mean that the administrative side of the magistrates courts will disappear into the Court Service, and will therefore be accountable to the Lord Chancellor's Department. They fear what could be regarded as a wholesale takeover of the magistracy by the Crown courts. I am afraid to say that such fears were not calmed by the recent and pre-emptive decision by the Lord Chancellor's Department to transfer the head office magistrates courts service staff to the Court Service. That seemed like a lightning raid to take away the magistrates courts civil servants, and, before any decision had been taken, put them into the Crown court. That decision, which was almost presented as a fait accompli, annoyed a lot of people throughout the wider judiciary. As the Minister will know, it led to the granting of a judicial review application. I am told that, in the short term, the matter may be sorted out before that judicial review is heard. I welcome that, and I hope that the Minister will confirm it. I refer to that because magistrates have many reasons to be rather jittery, and I am not surprised that they are nervous.

Even those who are prepared to give the Government the benefit of the doubt are nervous because they do not see them worrying about recruitment to the magistracy. Why is that? The Government should want to recruit more people, but magistrates do not see them making a big deal of telling employers, "Give your employees time off to serve as magistrates." The Government do not seem to understand that the magistracy is made up of volunteers who undertake 95 per cent. of the administration of justice and without whom the whole edifice would crumble. The Minister might accuse me of exaggerating those fears, but that is what people are telling me.

I want to end with a plea. The Government should put the brakes on and think. Do they really want to press ahead with their combined reforms and end up with a highly centralised, professional, lawyer-based legal system or do they want a system in which ordinary people are involved in the administration of justice as jurors and magistrates? I want to live in a society that makes it possible for citizens to get involved and to serve their communities. I want to encourage active citizens and healthy communities and, in respect of their other policies, the Government say that they do too. However, when it comes to their policy on magistrates, they do not seem to value the work of volunteers and do not encourage active citizens.

The Liberal Democrats believe that individuals can deal with responsibilities in the justice system and should be encouraged to do so for the good of their

neighbours and communities. It is better that they should be involved in the magistracy. That is not a plea for the status quo—far from it. We can get better value for money, improve the service that we get from the courts and introduce a wider spread of lay person into the magistracy. However, let us make those changes by building on the strength of our existing institutions, not by undermining them.

10.1 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I apologise that I will not be around for the Minister's winding-up speech, but I have a constituency arrangement. However, I want to say a few words as a London Member of Parliament.

I took on board the comments of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), in particular the concerns that he expressed at the end of his speech about a centralised, lawyer-based legal system. I come from the legal fraternity and spent four years as a solicitor, although the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), is a more distinguished lawyer. None the less, volunteers play an active and important role in the legal system, particularly in the magistracy. There is also the role of justice of the peace, which goes back to the 13th century. I agree with the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton that people have serious concerns about the proposed changes, and several constituents have expressed them to me.

Above all, I am concerned about the fact that the rationalisation takes no account of several local factors. One must be careful to bear it in mind that any rationalisation will involve much special pleading. That is particularly true for the City of London, which has had its own magistrates court for as long as there have been justices of the peace. It will now be one of the 22 areas to be swallowed up into the single, Londonwide court, although I appreciate the fact that Westminster has been part of an inner-London bench for some time.

We should also consider the redundancies that are involved in the rationalisation. Everything seems to be up in the air in that regard. We are still at an early stage and have had only a small summary of a very large document, but I hope that we shall hear more detail today and in the coming period. Uncertainty about many of the changes is causing great concern.

It is somewhat curious that we are considering rationalisation at this juncture. As has been said, that is partly because of Auld's wholesale recommendations. Furthermore, in 1997 the Labour party promised to crack down on persistent young offenders. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 set out the fast-track provisions, which had been much heralded. I wonder whether some of the proposals, particularly for central London, will fly in the face of the Government's aim of securing a fast-track procedure, notwithstanding all the purported overcapacity in London as a whole.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton was right to say that a political storm is brewing over the matter in question, and that the drastic changes proposed will upset the bedrock of the magistracy. Local justice is important. There is always a tendency to look on London as one large amorphous entity, but London Members know that it was, and is, a series of villages. In the Cities of London and Westminster, even a five-minute walk takes a person from one village to another: from Soho to Covent Garden, for example. That applies equally to the suburbs. For example, Kingston has a guildhall, which is part of its history. The hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) will know that there are several old London villages in her area.

Locality is of key importance. Dealing with London as a large, amorphous mass will remove some of the local links that are, and should be, the bedrock of the justice system.

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend has touched on an important point. He will notice how many hon. Members are present whose constituencies cover parts of outer London such as Croydon, Barnet, Kingston and Surbiton, and Ilford. That is important. Bromley has a very new court, in contrast to that in my hon. Friend's constituency. It is five years old and was purpose-built at a cost of £10 million. That will be closed under the proposal.

Mr. Field: I take that point on board. I am sorry that I do not know all the facts and figures about the London borough of Bromley; my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) will recall that Orpington was previously a district council in its own right, as part and parcel of Kent. Those loyalties and ties remain strong and, as far as possible, they should be encouraged.

I doubt whether the proposals will achieve the goal of improving the performance and consistency of court services. They seem to be in part an asset-stripping operation. According to the documents there is a 32 per cent. overcapacity across Greater London, yet we all know that the much-vaunted fast-track arrangements have not really become established. I am thinking particularly about youth justice. Much of the relevant activity in the City of London concerns the youth justice bench. I am well aware of concern about the current arrangements and the sense that there is massive overcapacity that could be rationalised. I am concerned that that will do less to help justice than it will to provide a one-off capital gain, and that the magistracy and legal system in London may never recover.

I ask for a complete rethink of the entire package. Above all, we know as politicians that all politics is local. We must realise that issues of locality are of keen importance in the dispensation of justice, even in what might seem to be a faceless capital city.

10.8 am

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on securing the debate. I declare an interest at the outset, in that I have been a justice of the peace since 1990 and served as a magistrate in my area until I was selected as a parliamentary candidate. The Redbridge courthouse is in my constituency.

I appreciate the wide-ranging consultation process in which the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority is engaged. I understand and support its priorities, which I paraphrase from the strategic consultation document as follows: to ensure consistency across the criminal justice system in London; to deliver

[Linda Perham]

improved services to all court users in London with efficiency and effectiveness by joint working with other agencies; to fund investment and reinvestment opportunities and provide value for money; to respond to national policy priorities; to be a good employer providing job opportunities, training, development and flexibility, and to support magistrates in their work.

I also recognise the GLMCA's concerns about the costs of administering justice in London. However, by focusing on the courthouse in my own constituency, I hope to demonstrate that closing down many courthouses throughout the capital will not necessarily save money or achieve the strategic aims.

I pay tribute to the Justice for Redbridge campaign. Thanks to the efforts of the present chairman of the bench, Councillor Richard Hoskins, and the immediate past chairman, Ron Jeffries, a formidable case against closure has been presented. The campaign enlisted the support of all four local Members of Parliament, all the political groups on Redbridge council and the GLA member for Havering and Redbridge, the Metropolitan police, Victim Support, the secretary of the Legal Aid Board and local solicitors, the youth offending team, the citizens advice bureaux, the North East London mental health trust, the Redbridge Pensioners Action Association, the Redbridge trade union council, local school students who signed petitions, and readers of local newspapers, including 880 people who returned cut-out forms printed in the *Ilford Recorder*.

All those groups stressed the importance of local accessibility, which the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton also mentioned. That comes through time and again in the representations that I have received about rationalising the courthouse estate. They all concentrate on the potential loss of access to local justice for all court users.

I wrote to the chief executive of the GLMCA, Ashley Truluck, in September saying:

"I am particularly concerned at the threat to the delivery of local justice with the closure of a large number of court houses; accessibility for all court users will be seriously compromised and I believe will lead to more cases being delayed or adjourned because of travelling difficulties, including longer and more costly journeys for victims, witnesses, defendants, magistrates, advocates, court staff, police and other agencies. The clustering of court services at out-of-borough locations will severely damage local links with safer community partnerships, victim support and other groups and will affect police/probation liaison".

The Metropolitan police borough commander wrote to me:

"The Metropolitan Police service would seek to ensure that court hearings and services are accessible and the closure of local courts would involve additional travelling/time costs for both the MPS and private witnesses, which is not desirable. Additionally, the waiting time for police officers and witnesses could increase and this could impact on the availability and attendance rates of witnesses and possibly on witnesses' willingness to come forward in the first place. Therefore, I would seek to ensure that local accessibility remains a key consideration when the GLMCA makes its final decision."

The chairman of the youth court also makes points about the difficulties of transferring the youth court from our area into London. She mentions the fact that the youth offending team can produce the specific case worker within 10 to 15 minutes to the Barkingside courthouse. She states:

"Redbridge youth magistrates are concerned not to put further pressure on vulnerable victims, witnesses, defendants and their families. The thought of elderly victims who are already traumatized by the very need to attend court gives very real cause for concern. Increasingly, youth crime is directed at the elderly and vulnerable residents of this Borough. The thought of an 80-year-old lady who has had her handbag snatched in Ilford Town Centre and having to make the long journey by public transport into London to give evidence appals me. We cannot allow this to happen at the behest of so-called efficiency."

The question whether fewer courthouses would save money was addressed in the remarks of a long-serving local solicitor, David Diamond:

"So any savings they make on the use of one court full time will be off-set on paying solicitors and lawyers millions of pounds for waiting around. It is also going to cost more travelling—there are lots of hidden expenses and I don't think the government has taken account of this."

In a letter to me, a constituent who works for the Lord Chancellor's Department said succinctly:

"I hope the court will not close. It's not as if there are not enough local criminals to fill it."

My other main point concerns local contacts and networks, which the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton mentioned. A locally based courthouse with magistrates living in the area can build and maintain a range of links with the community that it serves. The courthouse in Redbridge is no exception. Indeed, it has taken a proactive role in spearheading local initiatives in some sectors.

The clerk to the justices is one of 12 members at chief executive level of the Redbridge safer communities partnership. He also chairs the steering group on racist crime. The court was proactive in setting up the Redbridge domestic violence forum, the town centre steering group—it tackled violence in clubs and pubs—and a group to deal with violence on buses, which worked with the route operators. Under the mentally disordered offenders diversion scheme, representatives of the mental health trust, social services, police, probation and the court monitor the work of the on-call court-designated community psychiatric nurse.

There is also the Redbridge court drug initiative. Following the Government's launch of borough-based drug action teams and drug reference groups, there is magistrate representation on both Redbridge bodies. With funding from the Government Office for London via the probation service, the court was one of the first to appoint a full-time court-based drug referral worker.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton mentioned open days for community groups and schools. My local court had a drug awareness day, which I was pleased to attend. Local courthouses build up many networks, which would be a great loss if they were closed.

On efficiency, Redbridge magistrates court performs far better than average compared with Greater London and nationally. Cases are heard at Redbridge 11 days faster than the Greater London average and 16 days faster than the national average. In fact, according to the latest performance indicators, which were released in the first week of October by the GLMCA, the court is so efficient that it is already meeting next year's targets. That places it second in the list of the 29 courts in London. It completes all types of cases, from first listing to sentencing or acquittal, in 17 days, against a Government target of 29 days.

The court is also well ahead on fines paid. Courtroom usage is 10 per cent. better than the national average, and user satisfaction is 14 per cent. higher than the Greater London average.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) speak about his local courthouse. We have had a modernisation programme in Redbridge. In recent years, well over £1 million in capital costs has been spent on projects to enhance facilities for victims, witnesses, legal representatives, criminal justice agencies, disabled court users and at-risk offenders. One project involved the installation of a lift for disabled magistrates.

It is important to bear in mind the Auld report, which has been mentioned. I am pleased that the chief executive of the GLMCA says in a letter to those who responded to the strategic consultation document that

"the original options have been redefined considerably".

That gives me some hope. It is important that the Government bear in mind the proposals in the Auld report when they consider the rationalisation of courthouses. Using the example of my local courthouse, I hope that I have shown that there is a case for not proceeding with the draconian rationalisation of the courthouse estate, as is set out in several of the options in the strategic consultation document. Once again I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton on securing this timely debate, and I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. I hope that the importance of these issues is borne in mind by those who take the decisions.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): We are hoping to start the wind-ups from the Front Benches shortly after 10.30 am. I therefore ask hon. Members to be as concise as they can.

10.20 am

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Thank you for that advice, Mr. Cook. I can considerably shorten my contribution because many of the points have already been made by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and I congratulate him on the timely manner in which he has raised the issue.

The Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority was set up in April this year. It replaces 22 magistrates courts. That authority is now the largest in England and Wales. It has a budget of £75 million, 1,800 staff, over 3,000 magistrates and 40 courthouses. That is centralisation of some magnitude. In their White Paper of December 1998 the Government rightly said that magistrates courts should provide local justice dispensed by local people. I would add "locally", and I find it significant that that word was left out.

We start from the basis of section 83 of the Access to Justice Act 1999, which set up the GLMCA. I am worried about the strategy that that new authority recently published. It examines estate options ranging from no change and minimal rationalisation, to significant rationalisation and, at the far extreme, a central courthouse or courthouses. I make no apologies if this seems a parochial point, but even under the moderate rationalisation option, Barnet and Hendon courts would close and their caseload would move to Brent. Under the significant rationalisation option, 18 courts would close, including Harrow and Highgate, the next nearest to my constituents. Under the clustering system 29 would close and Brent court would effectively serve the whole of the north of outer London. I would find that quite unacceptable.

I should be grateful if the Minister could also deal with the effect that the Human Rights Act 1998, which gives effect to European Court of Human Rights decisions, will have on the design and costs of local courts, whether there are 40 or only 11. I take this opportunity to praise the work of lay magistrates. It has been an integral part of our justice system for hundreds of years. They give a considerable amount of their time and they are not paid. As the hon. Gentleman said, they deal with 95 per cent. of all court cases. Quite simply, if we are not to maintain the two existing courts in Barnet we must have at least one court in the borough even if that means closing those two courts after building a new one more centrally.

Finally, and I know the Minister will appreciate this, the public transport routes, and indeed the road networks, in London radiate out from the centre. It is difficult for those above the north circular road to get across London. That would be a particular problem for my constituents if they had to go to Brent court. That is a vital consideration.

Local accessibility is vital in the administration of justice and even more vital in the administration of local justice.

10.24 am

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on securing the debate. I have sparred with him over many years on London matters and Treasury matters, and have worked with him on the issue, and it is a pleasure to meet him in debate again. I take his word for it that the absent ranks of Liberal Democrats support him on the issue. As a solicitor, I declare an interest: my wife is a magistrate and many of the points that we have heard today are often forcefully made to me over the breakfast table.

Magistrates make a huge contribution to the community. I hope that the Minister will take away from the debate the fact that the magistracy is a locally and community-based activity. If we are to support the community, which is the glue of society, the magistracy must remain local and we must have a local structure to support it. The proposals threaten and jeopardise that local structure. Justice must be dispensed locally. We cannot have the Croydon courts shut down, for example. Croydon is the largest borough in London and the Sutton courts could not cope if Croydon courts were shut down. There would be a gap between Kingston on the one hand and Bromley on the other—entire swathes of south London would have no courts. The thought of witnesses and magistrates having to travel 10 or 15 miles across London is terrible; it would destroy the local dispensation of justice. In rural areas, 10 or 15 miles is not much, but in London it is a huge distance. Magistrates, witnesses, police and all the officials would be in alien territory.

My second point is important and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) will also make it. Justice cannot be finance-led. The hon.

[Richard Ottaway]

Member for Kingston and Surbiton rightly said that he was addressing a different Department on the issue. All Departments have to face the Treasury. Every hon. Member would like to scrum down behind the Minister in his battle for funding from the Treasury, but he has right on his side. The Treasury cannot decide how justice will be dispensed in this country. Justice, the jury and the magistracy are the cornerstones of our local democracy and of everything that we believe in. One cannot require that justice be tailor-made to fit a budget.

My next point is on the overcapacity of London courts. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton dealt with the point well by pointing out that London is outperforming the average. However, the magistracy is not responsible for empty courts. I am reliably informed that it is often the inability of the Crown Prosecution Service to have cases ready that is to blame. The magistrates are waiting, ready and willing, as is everyone else, but problems in the CPS mean that cases are not ready, so everyone sits around twiddling their thumbs. Such cases are entered on the records as vacant courts and overcapacity. It is not overcapacity. There is a tremendous backlog; some cases take six, seven or eight months to appear. Magistrates are ready and willing to dispense justice.

Mr. Horam: This is precisely the point that was made to me and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) when we recently visited Bromley magistrates court. The fact that courts are empty is a reflection of the competence not of the magistrates, but of the Crown Prosecution Service.

Richard Ottaway: It is interesting that the experience of courts in my constituency is reflected elsewhere. Indeed, it is probably reflected by courts around London—the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) is nodding.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) said earlier, we are suffering from initiative fatigue and uncertainty about the magistrates courts. For better or worse, we have the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority, and I am less keen on it than the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton. Schools and hospitals take devolved decisions about the maintenance of buildings; they get their priorities right and run things properly. To remove the management of the logistics of the magistrates courts to a London wide authority is anti-devolutionary; it takes away the responsibility that should properly be devolved down to the clerks and to people locally.

I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton that there may be improvements in co-ordinating the collection of fines, which I welcome, but the use of assets has not been a great success, although it is early days and there may be teething problems. I ask the Minister to consider devolving management of the assets as far down as possible, which would be widely welcomed locally.

This is not the moment to debate the Auld report, but I hope that the Minister will persuade the Whips Office to allow a full debate on that important subject on the Floor of the House. The thrust of the report is welcome, although we will obviously find some nit-picking points when we read it more closely. The magistrates welcome it, and it provides for an enhanced role for them—I am pleased to see the Minister nodding in agreement—and enhanced powers when two magistrates are sitting with a judge, although I do not know what type of judge. Will it be a stipendiary? The magistrates welcome the recognition of the importance of their role. However, the question about the long-term future of the magistracy remains. If the Minister cannot spell out what it is today, we hope that he will do so in the future, as it is so important to the community.

10.32 am

Mr. William Cash (Stone): We have had an extremely interesting debate, and we await the Minister's reply with interest. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on securing the debate.

I declare my interest as a solicitor. When I was appointed, one newspaper asked, "Is this man a lawyer?" The answer is yes, and he has been for a long time—since 1967. Hon. Members from every part of London and from all parties have made a powerful case, although it would have been desirable if even more hon. Members had been present.

The central theme of the debate has been the impact on the system of justice, especially in the London area, if the proposals go ahead. The present state of affairs could fairly be described as transitional, or a watershed. The GLMCA report stated that the authority was considering options, and had a problem because the Auld committee was about to report. It therefore put forward its views with some uncertainty, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) said, does not help in situations relating to justice.

We now have the Auld committee report, which deals with extremely important matters that will need to be considered. The debate is useful as a pointer to the future; it shows the necessity for a major review of the ideas generated by the GLMCA and the Auld report. Chapter 4 of the Auld report begins:

"No country in the world relies on lay magistrates as we do, sitting usually in panels of three, to administer the bulk of criminal justice ... magistrates courts deal with 95% of all prosecuted crime. Lay magistrates—about 30,400 of them—handle 91% of that work."

That gives us a good idea of how important the system is.

Another issue mentioned in speech after speech was that of locality of justice. On that question, the observations—I would not call them recommendations—in the Auld report do not tend to point in a happy direction. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind. For example, Auld quotes from a report by Messrs Seago, Walker and Wall that he states was seminal in compiling his compendious report. The quote is on page 108:

"And most controversial of all, in the absence of any practical need for, as opposed to abstract ideology of, localism, why is there a need for lay justices to reflect local connections?"

In paragraphs 36 and 37, Auld says:

"'Locality' of justice also has its downside in the wide inconsistencies to which it leads between MCC areas and between individual benches in their patterns of decision-making, particularly as to bail and sentencing.

Another disadvantage of 'locality' of justice, whether in the form of magistrates or a District Judge, is that the tribunal may, on occasion, know too much about accused persons, whose guilt or sentence they should determine only on the material put before them in court."

A consistent theme of the debate is that we want locality of justice. I believe in it profoundly and support hon. Members from all parties who have made that point. I hope that the Minister will consider some of the concerns that have now emerged.

Mr. Edward Davey: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that too much emphasis can be placed on consistency? One understands why the Government are concerned about it—rightly so. However, if one places too much stress on it and looks for solutions through centralisation alone, big mistakes will be made. Many centralised bodies in the public sector do not deliver consistency across their agencies. Furthermore, consistency can be achieved by many routes other than the centralised, professional approach that Auld proposed and towards which the Government seem to be inclined.

Mr. Cash: I am strongly in favour of the volunteer ethos that lies behind the magistracy. I would be deeply concerned if we ended up with an overly centralised and professional system, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton, particularly in light of the statistics that I gave, the strong endorsement in some of the reports on which Auld relies as to the efficacy of the system and the lack of significant criticism about the quality of justice that comes out of his report. I think that that is another point to bear in mind.

I am slightly puzzled by some of the statistics about the weighted case loads in different areas as compared to annual budgets. This is directly relevant to what the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton said about whether the Government will seek to centralise and/or try to contain and/or reduce costs. For example, in the west midlands, to which my constituency of Stone is fairly near, the weighted case load is 703,000 with 89 courtrooms and an annual budget of £16 million. According to the Auld report, the GLMCA has a weighted case load of 1.58 million with 193 courtrooms and an annual budget of £77 million. The actual amount allocated to the Lord Chancellor's Department is £75 million, which I find curious because that is slightly less than the amount of money that was predicated in the consultation paper.

The significance of the example is that the west midlands has about half the case load but is nearly five times less expensive. That must be taken into account, but it worries me that it should be used to bolster the argument against locality of justice. Somehow the Government have got to find a means of maintaining the locality of justice and saving the courtrooms where they are at present, for the most part, while at the same time reducing costs.

There is another problem with regard to greater London, which has not been mentioned so far. An interesting article by Joshua Rosenberg on the question of unpaid fines, which appeared in the *The Daily Telegraph* in May points out:

"In greater London alone the figure for uncollected fines now stands at £116 million. Fines totalling £92 million were imposed in London last year; less than £42 million was collected."

According to Judge Fabyan Evans, chairman of the London criminal justice strategy committee, little more than one third of the fines imposed in inner London were paid last year. On the enforcement of fines, Joshua Rosenberg says:

"The situation is particularly bad in London. Until the end of March, fines and other penalties were enforced by civilians employed by the Metropolitan police. The police did not want this responsibility and began running down staffing levels".

The GLMCA's new authority has been given only £3.37 million for the enforcement of fines. The authority has told the Government that it needs another £1.23 million. According to a spokesman, it is considerably understaffed. These figures make it clear that the authority needs only an extra £1 million or so, added to the total budget for the London magistrates courts of £75 million, to deal with this problem.

The Government are attempting to centralise the courts, which—unless we hear to the contrary from the Minister—will deprive people of the local justice to which they are entitled, but they are not dealing with the problem at the hard end: collecting the fines. We are in considerable difficulty. I urge the Minister to have regard to the powerful arguments that have been made by Members from all parties and all parts of London and to put justice and locality of justice ahead of ideology and centralisation.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on securing this important debate. I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in what I hope we will all agree has been an informative and useful exchange on these matters.

Let there be no doubt about the fact that the Government attach as much importance to the lay magistracy as anyone else. It is significant that Sir Robin Auld also arrived at the view that the lay magistracy was centrally important to our system of justice. His independent report took a radical and far-reaching look at the criminal justice system—those who have read it will be aware of how independently minded he is. We have often made our views clear in the Chamber. I want again to stress the importance that we attach to the lay magistracy, for all the reasons that have been adduced today.

This is an important time for the criminal justice system. Over the past four years, there have been significant achievements; much is still to be done and we intend to do it. Sir Robin Auld's report is part of that process. The work of the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority also forms an important element. Before I deal with more general issues, I shall address some specific points. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton raised the matter of the judicial review proceedings; I am happy to tell him that they have now been withdrawn. He also asked about the relationship of the GLMCA to any funds that it realises by disposing of any part of its estate. The GLMCA owns its estate; any assets that it acquires through disposal of its estate are for it to use at it sees fit according to its remit.

Mr. Edward Davey: The Minister's words will be partly reassuring to the GLMCA—he is right to say that

[Mr. Edward Davey]

the legal position is that the authority will be able to keep all its proceeds. However, before he moves away from the financial issue, will he give an assurance that there will be no change to the grant from the Lord Chancellor's Department as a result of capital realisation?

Mr. Wills: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the allocation of grants is subject to a variety of factors that we negotiate with the Treasury. I can give no guarantee of what factors will be taken into account, but the straightforward position is that the estate is owned by the GLMCA, which can dispose of it and realise its assets. I will mention later how, over the past four years, we have secured increased funding for magistrates courts to improve the facilities that are offered to those who use them. We intend to ensure that funding continues. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also recognise the increased funding have secured for the coming years.

I shall briefly deal with the point about the Human Rights Act 1998—a matter raised by the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman). With respect to him, and others who have raised the matter in the past, I must say that there is much misunderstanding about the impact of that Act. The Act leads to court closures only in exceptional circumstances, such as if the court were to rule that it was unacceptable for a court to be used at all, according to article 6 of the convention. For example, having no interview rooms would be a clear breach of article 6. We think that that is highly unlikely. The driving forces behind the process are modernisation and the aim of delivering an acceptable service to those who use courtrooms. I will return to that point shortly, although I am conscious of the time.

Several hon. Members have asked us to rethink and reconsider—something that I am always happy to do—but before one does that, a considered view must be reached. We are undergoing extensive consultation on the Auld report. The GLMCA is still consulting on its strategic plan, so it is a little premature to ask us to reconsider before we have reached a considered view.

Let me clarify another matter. Magistrates courts are managed by locally based magistrates courts committees as set out in the Justices of the Peace Act 1997. Each committee is solely responsible for the efficient and effective administration of the magistrates courts in its area, which means that in the case of the Greater London area we are talking about the GLMCA.

I recognise that we are undergoing a programme of considerable change, about which hon. Members will clearly have concerns. I hope that everybody here today recognises that these concerns, many of which are legitimate, are not an argument for doing nothing. I was delighted to hear the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton pay graphic tribute to the achievements of both the GLMCA and his local courts. When I have visited courts I have noted the excellent work done by magistrates, and that has also been the experience of other hon. Members. I do not want there to be any doubt about that, but it is not an argument for doing nothing. We must make progress and ensure that everybody gets the service that they have a right to expect from their courts.

I do not intend to spend a great deal of time discussing the consultation document. There has already been a long discussion, which produced a strategic consultation on three management options and six estate options. It is a complex and wide-ranging plan that went out to consultation with all interested parties. The GLMCA is considering the responses that it has received, and it anticipates publishing its plan in December 2001.

The relationship between the plan and the Auld report, which is a matter for the GLMCA to decide, was raised by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton. The Auld report is under consultation, and its proposals may require further consideration after the consultation period, or legislation. While that process is going on, the authority remains responsible for providing an efficient and effective service across London, and it is expected to take the necessary action to achieve that.

Mr. Cash: The Minister mentioned the Auld report. I hope that he will discuss the Government's attitude to the remarks in the report regarding locality of justice.

Mr. Wills: I am happy to address that issue immediately. We shall of course make our views known on the Auld report, but only after we have completed the consultation process, which will continue until January next year. It is important that we hear the views of everybody concerned with this radical and wide-ranging report, which we have welcomed. Lord Justice Auld has done a remarkable job, but we must hear the views of everyone involved, and we shall do that before we make our views known. Furthermore, I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall make our views known in the House.

Richard Ottaway: There is a point that does not need review, consultation or consideration. Does the Minister support the principle of locality of justice?

Mr. Wills: The hon. Gentleman deftly anticipates my next point, which concerns the central question of local justice. There are many other matters on which I should like to touch, but we are running out of time.

Local justice is something that we can all happily sign up to because it is fundamentally important, but we must be clear about what we mean, because it will mean different things to different people. We must keep in mind that local justice is not only about providing justice through a particular courtroom in a particular locality and maintaining the status quo, come what may. That is not what we mean by local justice. It is about making sure that there is an effective and efficient service for all those who use it. Everything that I have heard today about the importance of local justice goes to that central point. How we achieve local justice will obviously vary from locality to locality. Greater London's needs will be completely different from, for example, the needs of Stone and Stafford or of rural areas in Shropshire and Cornwall. We must take account of those differences.

A criminal justice system must be effective at preventing offending and re-offending, efficient in the way in which it deals with cases, responsive to the needs of victims and the law-abiding community and

accountable for its decisions; these are fundamental propositions. The locality of justice is, of course, an important element, but we must never lose sight of those core objectives. The criminal justice system must deliver justice for all, and it is not only local magistrates courts but all the criminal justice system agencies that are involved in delivering such justice. I pay tribute to the great amount of work that those two agencies have done to join up their work so that they function much more effectively as a single, coherent system. That was one of the reasons for establishing the GLMCA in the first place. If we are to have a system whereby all magistrates courts users get an efficient service delivered in well equipped and secure buildings, without the delays to which hon. Members have referred, we must consider—sometimes radically, sometimes in a way that inevitably involves local opposition—the system that we have inherited.

Most of the magistrates courts that have been closed were those that magistrates courts committees no longer felt able to justify keeping open because they lacked necessary facilities such as secure accommodation, separate waiting areas for victims and witnesses away from defendants, and access for disabled people. If courtrooms cannot manage to provide those basic standards of accommodation, which all court users expect from a modern 21st-century service, there must because for closure.

Any such improvements must be balanced against other factors such as local transport difficulties, which vary in different parts of the country. We must ensure that courtrooms are best suited to enable cases to be listed so as to achieve our aim of reducing delay in the criminal justice system. All users want their case to be heard on the day that it is listed, and it is in no one's interests—certainly not in the interests of local justice—for that not to happen. Transferring cases to better equipped centres is one way of modernising and improving the overall service provided by the GLMCA. It will have the local knowledge and be best placed to make judgments on how best to make use of all its resources, whether they be finance, buildings or staff. The Lord Chancellor becomes involved only if a decision is challenged by the paying authority.

Mr. Edward Davey: I offer the Minister a practical example of the need to get right the balance between local justice and travelling to justice. It is important to enable witnesses and victims to be separated from defendants, but if they all have to travel to the courtroom—which may some distance away—by public transport, they may all end up queuing at the same bus stop or sitting in the same tube carriage. Making justice more remote may jeopardise an objective that has been achieved in the courthouse. The Minister must consider the practicalities of ensuring that the Government's policy hangs together coherently.

Mr. Wills: Of course I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, which was well made. However, I ask him again to think about the matter in the round. The various factors must be balanced to provide an effective and efficient service. It is not in the interests of local justice for any part of it to be ineffective or inefficient or for cases to be delayed.

I shall use my last two minutes to talk briefly about funding. As I said, magistrates courts committees make the initial decisions, but central Government have a responsibility to ensure adequate funding. We are spending nearly £20 million in 2001-02 on improvements to magistrates courts, in addition to the on-going court-building programme procured under the private finance initiative. The amount that we spend on such improvements will more than double over the next two years.

Let me give some detail on the improvements that are under way in London. Since 1999-2000, the Department has provided capital funding amounting to just over £2.75 million to carry out more than 100 projects. Security has been improved in the custody areas at Richmond and Redbridge; other improvements include the introduction of archway metal detectors and hand-held wands at the guildhall in Kingston and the Merton and Bexley courthouses. Works to improve disabled facilities have been approved in Kingston, Haringey, Barnet and Harrow.

I hope that I have made it clear that we are determined to continue our programme of modernisation, putting the interests of local justice at the forefront. We are engaged in an extensive programme of consultation on the Auld review, and I hope that hon. Members will be reassured by our commitment to funding the improvements that are necessary.

Regional Air Services

11 am

Mr. David Stewart (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): I welcome this opportunity to speak on the very important subject of regional air services. I also thank the many hon. Members present for the interest that they have shown in today's debate.

I want to touch on a number of issues. I want to define regional air services, to look at current issues and problems, to consider the debate held by the former Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, to analyse the role of Government not just here, but in the United States and in France, and in particular to examine the prospects for Government intervention. In my conclusion, I shall call for the ring fencing of vulnerable routes.

What are regional air services? They could be defined as routes from London in its broadest sense—Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton, London City and Stansted—to domestic UK airports such as Inverness, Aberdeen, Newquay, Belfast, Plymouth, Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh and those on the Channel Islands. Of course, the two primary hubs in London are Gatwick and Heathrow. Journeys tend to be of two types: point-to-point or "interlined", by which I mean domestic flights that continue to international destinations. Heathrow is undoubtedly top of the interlining league, Gatwick is mid-table, and unfortunately, Stansted and City, to continue the football analogy, are very much in the relegation zone.

What current trends and problems are evident in UK regional services? Mr. Laurie Price, from Aviation and Travel Consultancy Ltd., analysed daily services from Heathrow to regional airports between 1986 and 2001. In 1986, 19 regional UK airports had direct flights to Heathrow, with an average of 106 flights daily. However, in the summer of this year only eight regional airports had direct flights to Heathrow, and the daily average of flights had fallen to 88. In 1986, 15 airports had direct flights to Gatwick and by 2001 that figure had fallen to 11. To be fair, Gatwick's daily flight average is now slightly higher, in part because of the transfer of domestic flights from Heathrow, including my own route. In 1997, we in Inverness lost our direct service to Heathrow.

Which airports have lost out? Heathrow services were slashed from Inverness and from Plymouth—which includes the constituency of my hon. Friend the Minister—in 1997, from Dundee and Carlisle in 1987, from Liverpool and East Midlands in 1992, from Birmingham in 1993, and from Norwich in 1990.

Why do such cuts occur? Air services in the UK are a free market, and in simplistic terms the profit per mile per passenger is better for intermediate and long-haul flights than for domestic UK routes. In effect, commercially viable daytime slots—take-off and landing times that are advertised by carriers and published in their schedules—at Heathrow and Gatwick are full. For example, this summer there was a 20 per cent. excess demand for slots at Gatwick. On a typical summer's day in August, demand exceeded capacity by as much as 22 per cent. every minute between 6 am and 8 pm. That, of course, is reflected at Heathrow as well.

Aviation has been badly affected by the tragic events of 11 September in Washington and New York. Airline costs have risen, there has been reduced growth and traffic has been down by 15 per cent. However, that traffic will return, and the Minister's Department predicts a 4.25 per cent. growth in passenger numbers every year. In London, there is no new capacity to take that growth. The last substantial runway built in the United Kingdom was in Manchester in the previous decade. In the competition for slots, therefore, regional air services will always lose out to their older and bigger brothers: international and transatlantic flights.

In 1998, the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs undertook an inquiry into regional air services because of a reduction in direct flights from regional airports to London, including the loss of my direct route from Inverness to Heathrow in 1997. The Committee made several recommendations to the Government. It argued for different categories of slots—domestic, intermediate and long-haul—so that swapping of slots could be controlled, as in the United States. It also suggested that, in the allocation of slots at domestic airports, priority be given to airlines bidding to operate domestic regional services. That would be similar to the US essential air service programme. The Committee recommended an end to airlines' own companies allocating slots at airports, as they do at Heathrow and Gatwick. It also argued for the development of public service obligations PSOs—at Heathrow for a specified minimum level of air services.

The current European slot allocation rules—European regulation EC 95/93—have been due for revision for some time, but we will not have a complete revision before 2002. They must be adapted to allow greater protection for vulnerable regional air routes. Otherwise, we will continue to see trade-offs between domestic routes and more lucrative international routes.

What role can the Government play? What examples of best practice can we see throughout the world? Under European regulation EC 95/93, member states can preserve slots in two situations: first, on a route to an airport serving a peripheral or development region, if that route is considered vital for the economic development of that region; secondly, on routes where the Government have imposed PSOs to maintain a service that would not otherwise exist.

There are demanding conditions for the first option. The slots concerned must have been used on that route when the regulations came into force in 1993. Only one carrier must operate the route, and the route must be unable to be covered substantially by any other mode of transport. The reservation ceases once a second carrier covers the service with the same frequency.

Only in France has the first option been used, at Paris, Orly airport. It is now using the second option of imposing PSOs, and I believe that some 30 per cent. of services at Orly airport have PSOs at the moment. I am not aware of any PSOs operating from London, but they have a long track record in Scotland, especially in island services—in areas such as the Western Isles. By and large, those are subsidy PSOs. I am not calling for subsidy PSOs today; they are not needed where routes are commercially viable.

In the United States, the essential air service programme has operated since deregulation in 1978, and was the price that Congress demanded for passing

deregulation. Congress now spends $50 million per year on that very important programme, which services 75 cities. Most are in remote areas such as Alaska. At very congested airports, the United States Department of Transportation can demand that EAS status be given to certain routes. The Government have a strong power of intervention, in a country that is arguably the most unregulated in the industrial world. We should examine that closely, and perhaps copy it.

What are the prospects for Government intervention here? The bulk of the witnesses before the Select Committee inquiry to which I have referred argued that there was a case for public sector intervention to protect key vulnerable regional air services.

In my constituency, Highland council, the enterprise agency, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, the Inverness chamber of commerce and 90 per cent. of local businesses that I have surveyed during the past few weeks all argue strongly for a public service obligation on the Inverness to Gatwick route, which I use. The Minister may want to comment on the letter that his Department received from Sarah Boyack, Minister for Transport and the Environment in the Scottish Parliament, who proposed a draft PSO for his Department's consideration.

The Minister's Department stated in paragraph 93 of the evidence to the Select Committee that the United Kingdom would have a chance during revision of the European slot regulations to suggest amendments:

"Particularly if the Commission does seek to restrict the ability to ring-fence slots, one possibility might be to propose balancing that by giving greater priority to regional services in the...allocation of available slots."

British Midland criticised the new entrant rule in slot allocation and used the example of Heathrow, which has had 53 new entrants since 1991. There have been too many low-frequency long-haul services, which have frustrated prospects for domestic air services.

It is often said that politics is the art of the possible, but it is the art of the practical within a range of competing priorities. A simple solution to the problem is to build more runway capacity at Gatwick and Heathrow. However, that is not a suggestion that will win me much favour with my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent London seats. The lead-in time for planning, if Manchester airport is anything to judge by, would be at least 10 years because of the large number of likely objections.

There are technical solutions. The Cranford agreement covering Heathrow could be varied. It governs the speed and direction of take-off and landing times, and they could be varied to create more slots for regional air services. There are also creative solutions. Laurie Price, the aviation consultant to whom I referred earlier, argues that as 70 per cent. of aircraft using Heathrow and Gatwick use an 1,800 m runway, RAF Northolt, which has an 1,800 m runway, could be adapted as an overflow airport for Heathrow, and perhaps Redhill aerodrome, which is not too far from Gatwick, could be adapted for the same purpose.

The basic issue is to decide whether we want a regional policy. Transport is crucial for development of the regions, social inclusion, the economy, tourism and inward investment. The Government, Europe, the airlines, economic agencies, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly all have a role to play. We need to protect vulnerable peripheral routes by ring-fencing slots and routes. We need a published route development plan for Gatwick and Heathrow that takes account of the need for regional air travel and national priorities for airports. We need to create more London hub capacity, build more runways, adapt peripheral airports for increasing demand and approve terminal 5 at Heathrow, which has been long in the waiting.

We must encourage airlines that want to run domestic links to bid for more local services. We need to divide slots into domestic, intermediate and long-haul to stop the trading-off of Belfast with Bonn, Aberdeen with Athens and Plymouth with Paris. We need to create a regional policy for aviation that recognises the legitimate need of domestic airports such as Inverness to have access to at least one of the two primary hubs in London.

I call on the Minister to support a public service obligation on my own route. Regional services are not just for a day out in London. They play a crucial role in the development of peripheral areas. They are a lifeline for tourism, business and inward investment. I remember an old Lochaber crofter in my constituency who quoted from the Old Testament at every public meeting he attended. He used to say:

"old men shall dream dreams, and ... young men shall see visions".

I look to the Minister to have the vision to transform aviation, to protect regional air services and, perhaps, bring a smile to the face of the old Lochaber crofter.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been creditably brief when introducing his topic. I thank him for that. I am concerned because I can spot six hon. Members who wish to catch my eye. It is conventional to commence the concluding Front-Bench speeches 30 minutes before the termination of time. Therefore, hon. Members will understand why I appeal for brief and concise speeches that are clear and to the point.

11.15 am

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I heard what you said, Mr. Cook, and I will try to be as succinct as possible.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on securing the debate. The matter is as crucial in his part of Scotland as it is in my area of Newcastle and the north-east. Both regions suffer from being peripheral, and air services, rail services and all transport links are essential for developing our economies. I agree with his comment that Heathrow airport's congestion problems are central to the matter.

Capacity lies at the heart of the argument. We require extra capacity at Heathrow airport no matter how that is brokered. In Newcastle, British Airways predominantly provides our routes to London, although I am glad that the cut-price airline Go has recently started services to London. That is welcome.

Sixty per cent. of passengers who fly from Newcastle to London will travel on to other international destinations, so the hubs—Gatwick and Heathrow—

[Mr. Peter Atkinson]

are crucial. People who, like me, fly regularly from Newcastle to London know the awful frustrations that are caused by delays at the terminals. If one has an onward plane to catch and suffers a delay of an hour or half an hour, that can cause chaos in travel plans. Air traffic control congestion and congestion on the ground at Heathrow airport cause that problem.

The solution to the problem is terminal 5. I am told that we can expect the announcement about terminal 5 in two or three weeks. If I were a betting man—which I am—I would say that it is bound to be approved. Terminal 5 was always going to be approved. It is a scandal of the planning process that such an important infrastructure project takes so long to plan. Even now, it will take years to complete. Without the terminal, congestion on the ground will get worse and passengers will experience more severe delays.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a further runway for Heathrow airport. Today is a good day to start a campaign for the third runway. Everyone has been quiet about that because we want terminal 5. However, in reality, a third runway is essential.

The most important factor for the UK is to have a successful and major airline. That airline will, inevitably, be British Airways. In future years, there will be a substantial move by world airlines into larger groups. We must ensure that British Airways can prosper. If it has its base at Heathrow and the airport becomes less efficient, it will be damaged when competing against global airlines and global airline alliances that have already been formed.

In Newcastle, there has been a substantial and rapid growth in the number of passengers who travel directly from the city to Amsterdam or Paris for onward connections. That is a welcome alternative for many people, but one sees the problem faced by British Airways. Charles de Gaulle airport appears to have unlimited expansion potential, as does Amsterdam. Frankfurt airport has had a third runway since the United States air force moved away. Gatwick has one runway and Heathrow has two. We must bite the bullet and campaign for a third runway in the area. I hope that if that happens we shall not experience the same protracted planning applications as we experienced with Manchester. In our fast moving world, to which transport is the key, we cannot have a planning infrastructure system that plods at the rate that it did for terminal 5.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Is my hon. Friend aware that an extra runway has recently been added at Schipol and that Charles de Gaulle is constructing another runway? Does that not add to his point that if we do not increase capacity in the United Kingdom we shall lose international air traffic to those centres?

Mr. Atkinson: My hon. Friend has a detailed knowledge of the matter, and he is right. In the competitive world of international airlines, Air France, KLM and other airlines will all benefit from having a much more efficient hub than British Airways has with Heathrow.

Bearing in mind your strictures to be brief, Mr. Cook, I thank the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber for introducing the debate, reiterate the vital importance of regional air services to his constituents and mine, and urge that the debate about extra capacity at Heathrow begin soon and in earnest.

11.20 am

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on introducing the debate. I have enormous sympathy with his points about the need for his area to be able to access properly both the national airline service and, through that, international airlines, and his point that air traffic in the modern world is not simply a mode of transport but relates to how communities develop and connect with the outside world, and to regional economic viability. The debate is central to the sort of nation that we aspire to be. The role of Manchester airport has been fundamental in the city's economic success in recent years.

I gently suggest to the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) that his preoccupation with one airline and one regional set of airports is not healthy for the development of air transport throughout the country. I hope to persuade him that there are alternatives to the preoccupation with Heathrow and, to a lesser extent, Gatwick.

In a country of more than 50 million people, the development of alternative hubs to the London airport system can be envisaged. I do not wish to sound excessively parochial. Of course Heathrow is the dominant airport in the United Kingdom and will be indefinitely, and Gatwick is the second. However, Manchester is already a regional hub in its own right. Some 100 airlines fly in and out of Manchester to and from 175 destinations around the world. It makes sense economically and environmentally for services from places such as Inverness to use an airport such as Manchester. I would not want to persuade my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber that Manchester is the only choice that Inverness should have. I entirely agree with him that the concept of public service should determine slots at Heathrow, and the Minister should respond to that point this morning.

I make a plea to wean ourselves off the view that all Governments have had in the past that only Heathrow and only British Airways matter. That is simply not so. My constituents and people from the north-west, the north of England and a wider area are in some cases better served through Schipol, Frankfurt or Paris. That will always be so. Some services simply do not allow people from the north of England to access the London airport system easily . I therefore insist that we take a broader view of the development of air transport, which is about not the protection of airlines or, airports but the development of communities and the economy, which is a broader issue. In the European context, we must examine the role of national carriers, on some of which enormous pressure is already being placed. In the European framework, rationalisation may be necessary.

As a result of events following 11 September, air transport faces greater uncertainty than at any time in the recent past. Many of us assumed almost blithely that the industry would grow for ever. However, there will almost certainly be a period of retrenchment and contraction. Airlines such as British Airways, Virgin and British Midland are cutting jobs and services, which will have an impact on an airport such as Manchester. I recognise that the international carrier that goes first into Heathrow or Gatwick and then Manchester will withdraw the Manchester service before the Heathrow service. That is inevitable in economic terms. If the Government are tempted to look at support for the airline industry, whether in terms of security costs or, more generally, airport duty, I hope that they will recognise that the regional distribution of air services is vital. Support for airlines may be legitimate, but support for airports and the communities that depend on those airports is also important.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of slots. Under the present system, slots are determined by negotiation between the airlines and the slot controller, which allows carriers to dominate. The public interest goes beyond that of the airlines, and a slot allocation system must be developed that recognises the wider economic and social interest. We must at least recognise the role of airports for the wider community. In an airport such as Manchester, slots are available 24 hours, but some slots are much more commercially desirable. Under the present slot allocation process, enormous power is given to the new carrier to drive in, at the expense of services that may be more socially and economically desirable.

The Civil Aviation Authority will report on the regulatory framework for airports this week. Will the Minister make sure that the charges imposed on regulated airports are consistent with the increased demand for security in air transport? We cannot be locked into the economic bubble of decision making that applied before 11 September—the world has changed since then, at least in that aspect. I also urge the Minister to look carefully and sympathetically at the powers of local authority airports, which is an important issue for Manchester and other airports. I know that his Department has made sympathetic noises about that recently, and I urge him to consider carefully what direction to take.

Air transport is far too important to be seen as an issue for a particular industry. It matters enormously to communities, in social and economic terms. We should not be preoccupied with London; we should look across the board at the needs of the nation as a whole. Different parts of the nation will be served by different policies on open skies, liberalisation and regulation. If the Minister will reflect on that, and develop an airports and airlines policy that genuinely serves communities and regions, he will have moved this country a long way forward.

11.29 am

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on having secured the debate. I shall concentrate my remarks on one of the issues that he introduced—the public service obligation for the Inverness to Gatwick link.

The constituencies of the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber, myself and my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) cover about 11,000 square miles. That area of the highlands is served principally by Inverness, but also by Wick airport. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the application that the Scottish Executive have made to the Minister through Sarah Boyack for a public service obligation, and I urge him to support it as much as possible.

Transport is vital to successful commerce in any area, but particularly in peripheral areas like the highlands that are far from the centre. For many years, the highland economy was in a steady, slow decline, with depopulation and job losses. Over the past decade, that trend has been successfully reversed. In the past three years, 4,000 new jobs have come to the highlands. Transport links—in particular, the air transport link—have contributed greatly to the steady increase in jobs and prosperity. If we consider my constituency, especially the northern part, we find that inward investment has flowed steadily into Thurso and Wick. People who want to invest in the area have studied infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, but, first and foremost, they have considered the ability to travel to and from the area. Without transport links, we would have no investment and no development in the region, but the reverse—a return to steady decline.

We currently have an air service from Inverness, which British Airways provides through a subsidiary. BA has given assurances of its commitment to the route. However, when there is pressure for slots in the south, it is all too easy for operators to give away a slot for what is perceived to be a less lucrative route so that it can be used for more lucrative international destinations. Conditions will inevitably change back, that pressure will return and the Inverness slot will once again be vulnerable to cancellation or change. There is no such pressure now, and it is the right time to ensure that a public service obligation is placed on the route so that we can secure a vital transport link without which the highlands would not be a net contributor to the United Kingdom economy.

11.32 am

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) for raising this issue. On the face of it, the interests of the north midlands and the north of Scotland in such a debate do not appear to be the same, but they are.

The case has been clearly made as regards the congestion and capacity problems at London airports, and I will not repeat what has been said. The case on growth in demand has been made less succinctly. I am not one of those who believe that the current dip in demand will be permanent. There is an unseemly haste among many in the aircraft and airline industries to cut jobs as they chase tomorrow's share prices, rather than take a more rational view of the coming years. There has been a blip in capacity requirements this year, but I confidently expect the year-on-year growth that we have seen in the industry to continue from next year. The rationale for Government decision making should take account of demand and capacity needs.

We in the north midlands understand the economic case that has been made for Inverness and, indeed, for all of Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

[John Mann]

We have, or should have, one United Kingdom economy, not two or three. In examining the business case for a new airport, which is what we are doing through the current public inquiry on Finningley airport, the question of the balance between regional and international air services is fundamental to consideration of future demand.

The constant opposition to expansion in London—the fifth terminal and any proposed third runway—creates a peculiar impression, when the second largest runway in Britain is readily available to take some of the excess capacity and create more landing slots in London. We can take both long-haul and freight away from London and our airport is ready and waiting, subject to the public inquiry. I look forward to support from the Government after the inquiry, so that we can continue a development of regional airports, as part of the development of the overall United Kingdom economy. That is a fundamental issue.

On Finningley, I think that I shall break my embargo with respect to my local newspaper, the *Worksop Guardian*, for Friday, and mention that my opinion poll of people living immediately around the airport, in the direct flight path, was concluded today. I have surveyed everyone and have a response rate equivalent to general election voting rates, with 95 per cent. in favour and only 5 per cent. against. That shows demand, not just support, from people who are saying, to use a phrase I employed once before in the House, "Yes, in my backyard; we would like a regional airport as a contribution to growth."

I shall listen with interest to the Minister's response on how the Government intervene, but the principle is absolute. We need expansion of the regional airport network. We need expanded and strengthened regional airports as part of the long-term growth of this country.

11.36 am

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I want to contribute to the debate on regional aviation because it is crucial to the area that I represent. Aviation and airports in the United Kingdom face two contrasting sets of circumstances. In the more populous areas, especially south-east England, strong growth and excess demand are causing capacity problems and raising environmental issues. Yet at the periphery of the United Kingdom, in parts of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and the west country, the problem is the opposite. Their economies are handicapped by limited communications and for most of those regions, rail transport is not an option for business travel. They depend on air travel to provide day-return business travel to the main business centres of the UK, particularly London.

In the context of the overheated economy of south-east England, the Government need competitive economies throughout the regions of the UK to take development pressure away from the south-east. However, business location decisions are taken by executives who will not knowingly locate in regions that they perceive to be isolated. Thus, it is a fundamental requirement for a competitive regional economy to have direct access to a popular London airport at credible times, for day-return business travel.

Many regional economies can sustain viable air services, albeit often using modest-sized regional airliners. However, issues arise about the way in which services in peripheral areas of Britain, and elsewhere in Europe, are penalised by taxes and charges that were created to deal with congestion that occurs only in southern Britain and in the European core.

The biggest problems for aviation in the peripheral parts of the United Kingdom relate first to access to London, and secondly to the supply of regional airlines. The supply of runway capacity in the London area is seriously inadequate for growing demand from all parts of the world. As a result, services in small aircraft coming from the peripheral parts of the United Kingdom turn out to be competing for slots against the demands of major carriers operating much larger aircraft over longer distances. The bigger carriers almost always possess the ability to outbid any small regional carrier if airport slots and landing charges are subject to market pricing. The consequence is that the smaller regional services have been completely excluded from the main London airports and are even struggling to maintain peak period slots at the smaller London airports such as London City.

Dundee, which is more than six hours by train from London, has an air service to London City airport, with four flights a day. That service has done well, but its full potential has been suppressed by not having access to London City airport in morning or evening peak periods. To get a business-oriented morning flight, the first flight is obliged to leave Dundee at 6.15 am and arrive in London by 7.30 am. There appears to be no prospect of a slot becoming available between then and mid-morning. In the evening, northward departure slots are equally hard to obtain.

Such is the need for the service that it succeeds despite those timing penalties. However, it is equally evident that it would do a much better job for the economies of Dundee, Tayside and north Fife and be more financially robust if it was able to serve the capital at the frequencies and timings that business travellers would like. I am sure that that experience is mirrored by other regional services into London.

As the London airports have become private sector companies, their duty to their shareholders is to maximise profit. They will always take the high income available from the major airlines rather than the more modest income available from the small regional air services. Air travel from the periphery of the UK is essential for the integrity of the nation. All parts of the UK should have a right to easy and good access to the nation's capital. That is not happening, and the situation is bound to worsen if things are not done.

The Government must act to increase runway capacity in the south-east. The peripheral regions would probably welcome the creation of small airports in the south-east, based on the London City model, but perhaps not with quite such severe operating constraints as apply to that airport. City airports have the advantage of not being on a large site and of being more environmentally friendly than larger airports. Another advantage from the viewpoint of protecting air access from the periphery of the UK is that city airports are fair less vulnerable to predatory slot bidding by major airlines. City airports can be created on independent

sites, but the Government should also consider adding short regional runways to the existing major London airports, restricted to regional air traffic.

If a substantial increase in runway capacity is not to be provided in the London area—and provided sooner rather than later—the Government must act to guarantee the quality and price of dedicated slots in London for the smaller, regional operators. If that is not done, the economies of the regions will be seriously damaged.

The second main problem for the development of air services in peripheral areas is the ever decreasing availability of airlines serving the regional sector. That has largely been due to the major airlines acquiring the regional carriers with a view to configuring them as feeder carriers for their global networks. It will not come as a surprise that servicing the remoter parts of the UK in modest-sized aircraft does not come within the strategic priorities of major airlines. The supply of "footloose" airlines has fallen sharply at the smaller end of the regional sector.

The Government should examine the ownership and control of regional airlines and the possibility of creating more favourable financial circumstances for airlines serving peripheral Britain. Financial encouragement for such service providers would greatly assist regional economies. Indeed, in some cases it might have the effect of reducing the need for public sector obligation payments for essential services to remote areas.

In summary, the viability of the peripheral parts of the UK must be sustained in the face of a limited supply of regional airlines, a serious dearth of airport capacity in London and the overwhelming commercial pressure to drive domestic regional aviation out of London. Those issues must be tackled to ensure that regional aviation has a viable future.

11.44 am

Angus Robertson (Moray): I commend the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) for initiating this morning's valuable discussions. They build on his work, on that of my predecessor Margaret Ewing, and of other hon. Members from neighbouring seats in the north of Scotland who have shown a great interest, particularly in the Inverness air route. I echo much that has been said by them, and also agree with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) about demand. Demand affects not only the north of Scotland but many other parts of the United Kingdom. Similarly, the Inverness air link is a pressing issue not only for my constituents but the rest of the UK.

The reasons for a change in regional airline services are clear, particularly the threat of a world economic downturn, and the downturn in tourism, which was described by a prominent Moray hotelier as being worse than at the height of the foot and mouth crisis. In my constituency and other parts of northern Scotland, that must be balanced with the fact that Inverness has city status, a growing population and some of the finest tourism potential in Europe. We have many leading industries; some 50 per cent. of Scotland's whisky distilleries are in Moray. They depend on first-class air services to bring in buyers and distributors to promote that vital industry. Such services are also of supreme importance to the many thousands of Royal Air Force personnel who are based at RAF Kinross and RAF Lossiemouth—two of the largest RAF bases in the UK—many of whom come from the south of England and have to travel back and forth regularly.

There seems to be a lack of vision and ambition. It is unfortunate that we need even to discuss maintaining and securing slots for Inverness. I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber and I thank him and other hon. Members for signing my early-day motion, which called for a public service obligation order on the route between Inverness and Gatwick. I read the *Hansard* report of a 1997 Adjournment debate, and we seem to be going over ground that has been covered already. It is unfortunate that there has been so little progress to date. The level of global competition makes that situation particularly pressing. That applies especially to tourism. It is ironic that the north of Scotland is such an attractive tourist location yet has such an inadequate service. That must be seen in the context of competition, particularly from our closest neighbour, Ireland.

Ireland has made great strides in tourism with Bord Failte, and low-cost carriers have opened much of that country. In the past few days, a study outlined the growth in low-cost carriers in Ireland and the extent to which that had affected positively the tourism sector and flights in Ireland. That was compared and contrasted with the situation in Scotland. The study was compiled for the shadow tourism Minister in the Scottish Parliament, Kenny MacAskill, and I commend it to the Minister and would be happy to forward it to him.

In comparison with Inverness, low-cost carriers have flown into Prestwick, and it has seen a 550 per cent. increase in visitor numbers arriving by air. During the same period in Inverness, the increase was only 29 per cent. Efforts must be made to make it possible for low-cost carriers to improve services to Inverness. We should have more ambition and vision for Inverness airport, rather than seeing it as purely a regional airport. It should be a hub, a national airport for the north of Scotland, because it serves so many important and peripheral areas, and will continue to do so owing to the growth of the city.

Aviation policy is by and large a reserved matter. Therefore, much of my case impinges on the Government in Westminster. I have a query about a Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions study, which is a review of the access to regional airports. I have not seen it, and I do not know whether there is an intention to publish any of the review material. It is blindingly obvious when the train passes that there is no stop at Inverness airport. It is almost impossible to catch a bus from Inverness airport to the town. It is almost impossible to catch a bus from Inverness airport to the town. If there were more low-cost carriers, people would spend more on taxi fares to town than on their flight ticket to Inverness.

I echo the calls for a PSO to guarantee the slots, but even if that were granted, it would secure only the higher-cost airline routes, and that is not enough. Gatwick's future is uncertain in some repects, and we must have the ambition to increase flights to many

[Angus Robertson]

airports. I appeal to the Westminster Government, the Scottish Executive and the European Commission to do all that they can to improve the situation.

11.50 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the opportunity to debate this matter, which the events of 11 September have made topical. The hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) and my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) have clearly and eloquently explained why a PSO—public services obligation—would be appropriate. I do not intend to rehearse those arguments since both hon. Gentlemen are probably better informed than I am on the route from Inverness to London, but we must widen the debate to include more than that route.

I contacted, at random, Plymouth airport and spoke to its director, John Humphrey, to give him an opportunity to set out the concerns of regional air services and airports. I thank him for his input. Access to Heathrow airport is a major concern; Plymouth airport used to have access to Heathrow, but has been switched to Gatwick. That causes Plymouth anxiety, because many United States and Japanese companies are based in Plymouth and use the service, but they want connections from Plymouth airport to London and on to other destinations, such as the far east.

The switch to Gatwick is of serious concern because 70 per cent. of Plymouth airport's passengers board another flight from London. The problem will be further exacerbated if, as has been suggested, British Airways downsizes long-haul operations from Gatwick. What discussions has the Minister had with British Airways on the subject? Is BA considering downsizing, and has he opposed such proposals? Can the Minister confirm the likely time scale for the consideration of the PSO for Inverness? Could we use article 87(2) of the European Union treaty to supplement the PSO, and if so, in what way?

The director of Plymouth airport thinks that the way to secure regional air services is to provide guaranteed or ring-fenced slots. BAA plc should charge a suitable landing fee; the director of Plymouth airport was worried that landing fees might be inflated because smaller aircraft do not make as much money for BAA. We must also find an airline prepared to run regional services, although the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber did not think that that was an issue.

A final factor is the police cover that is being provided. Plymouth airport has police cover 24 hours a day, and there is concern that those costs might, at some point, be passed on to it and other regional airports in a way that would significantly affect their operation. Costs could also be passed on to airlines and would have a significant impact. Will the Minister say whether those policing arrangements will continue without charge for the foreseeable future, or whether, at some point, regional airports or airlines will have to pick up the cost?

I had a discussion with representatives of one of the major regional airlines and, again, the lack of access to Heathrow airport is a major irritant. At this difficult time, can the Minister reassure regional airlines that access to Heathrow will be improved? Alternatively, will he reassure them—as the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs recommended in 1997-98—that better access can be provided by improving significantly the links between Gatwick and Heathrow? The Select Committee's report included options such as a helicopter service or other transport measures. If Heathrow is to have no more slots for regional airports, a good, fast and reliable transport link between Gatwick and Heathrow could provide the relevant connections and ensure that efficient interlining from Gatwick is possible.

The regional airline representatives raised the issue of insurance. The Government made the welcome announcement that they would underwrite—or provide for—third-party insurance for war and terrorism for a 30-day period that began on 22 September, or thereabouts. The Select Committee's report said that the Government were at the point of charging commercial rates for that service. There are some blank looks from the Minister and his advisers. Will the Minister confirm that the process has moved on? If it has not moved on, and the Government are now charging commercial rates for the service, what feedback has the Minister received about those rates? Can he confirm that, although the rates that are being charged are commercial, the intention behind them is not to seek to profit from—or to exploit—what happened on 11 September?

I am sure that the Minister is aware of a newsletter that was leaked by the Association of Lloyd's Members, which said that the 11 September attacks were:

"an historic opportunity to make money".

That newsletter was circulated to Lloyd's names—the individuals who pledge their wealth to back insurance risks—and said that premiums:

"had shot up to a level where very large profits are possible".

Mr. Peter Atkinson: The hon. Gentleman is probably wrong about that, as most Lloyd's names have had demands for huge sums of money since 11 September. That event has not been welcomed at all.

Tom Brake: All I can say is that if I am wrong, the BBC news is wrong. I am sure that that is not the case, so I stand by my information. However, I will give the Minister an opportunity to confirm that the arrangements are working, and that the airlines consider them to be commercial but financially acceptable.

The final issue raised by the regional airline was decent, inter-modal access to Heathrow. Regional airlines are willing to see short-haul flights replaced by rail links, if those links are decent. If the travelling times by rail are three hours or less, it makes more sense from an environmental point of view for those journeys to be completed by rail. That would free up slots for flights coming from places further afield, such as Scotland and Northern Ireland. When does the Minister expect all major conurbations within 300 miles of Heathrow or Gatwick to have rail journey times of three hours or less to those airports, which would make rail a viable option and thereby greatly reduce the demand for internal short-haul flights?

A discussion of regional air services cannot take place without touching on the subject of terminal 5, which many hon. Members have already mentioned. Will the

Minister confirm that we can expect a statement in the House on that subject? What assessment has been made of the impact of terminal 5, should it proceed, on regional air services? Would it improve or harm the prospects for regional air services? Terminal 5 is almost a self-fulfilling prophecy: one builds terminal 5; one attracts more international flights into that airport; all the airlines want to fly into there; nobody wants to fly into Gatwick; nobody wants to fly into other regional airports. What thought has gone into ensuring that that self-fulfilling prophecy does not come about? The current South East and East of England Regional Air Services study is dependent on the terminal 5 announcement. When does the Minister expect it to be published?

My comments have been brief because the Minister complained about the length at which I spoke yesterday, and in anticipation that he will be able to use the time that is left to respond to hon. Members' questions before launching into his prepared speech. I look forward to his response.

12.1 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on securing this timely and topical debate. There were some commendably brief speeches this morning, which allowed many hon. Members to contribute. That is an eminently sensible example of how this Chamber might operate.

I was particularly interested to hear the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), but there were interesting speeches from the hon. Members for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), for Bassetlaw (John Mann), for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) and for Moray (Angus Robertson). They all made the sensible point, in which they are right, that business development depends on the efficiency of regional airports. They all said that we must use the total capacity of the London airports to better effect, an issue to which I shall return later in my speech.

The UK aviation industry is one of Britain's great success stories. It is one of the most competitive and deregulated industries in the world. Today, Britain, as an aviation nation, is second only to the USA, and is pre-eminent in Europe. Aviation is also an industry with an unrivalled safety record. There is a great deal of potential, but if growth is to continue, the Government must resolve some key issues. This morning, many hon. Members have mentioned terminal 5. We are, of course, awaiting an announcement, which we expect shortly. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham made clear, however, it will take several years before it is built.

It may be worth examining the figures. In 1998, 160 million passengers travelled on aircraft. That figure is set to double in the next 10 to 12 years, and may, on some predictions, reach 500 million by 2030. That is a huge number of passengers, and we welcome that increase as part of the nation's development. As I made clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham, that figure is related to international competition. Unless we maintain efficient and well run airports in London and elsewhere, we shall start to lose capacity to other centres such as Charles de Gaulle and Schipol. It is disturbing that in Milan, for example, Alitalia is still given slot preference to other airlines, which have been told to use an airport 40 miles away.

We need a general increase in liberalisation throughout Europe. What does the Minister propose to do about the EU policy relating to slot ownership and distribution? The Government seem determined to allow the European Community to negotiate a policy, rather than to maintain a national one. I would also be interested to know what he proposes to do about international bilateral agreements, in which the EU seems to take an increasing interest. Is it true that the French have, in the past few days, concluded a bilateral agreement with the United States? For many years, we have tried for a bilateral agreement with the United States—even the Prime Minister intervened on the matter—and yet the parties have not been able to arrange one.

Before you call me to order, Mr. Winterton, to tell me that I am talking about international air policy, may I explain that that and slot capacity at Heathrow are integrally linked with the issues under debate? Every time an aircraft flies into Heathrow or Gatwick, it takes a slot that could be used by an international airline.

I want to return to the relationship between the London and regional airports. As it happens, I travelled a lot by air this summer—for example, I travelled to the airport in the constituency of the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber. I have been travelling to Scotland for many years and recently the intervention of airlines such as Go and easyJet has transformed the situation. The price of £55 for a ticket from Inverness to Luton has enabled air travel to reach people in many hon. Members' constituencies where air travel would never have been conceived previously.

We need to think about how air travel from regional airports impacts on London. As has been said many times this morning, Heathrow and Gatwick are effectively full for daily commercial flights. However, other airports in London, such as Luton and Stansted, need to be considered. Bearing in mind the environmental constraints, and the need to maintain everybody's way of life, we should examine how all London airports can be used to better effect.

Hon. Members have already mentioned Northolt and Redhill. Given the environmental constraints on those airports, it would be interesting to know what the proposals are for increasing their capacity and effectiveness. There seems to be a vacuum in Government thinking. We are still awaiting a White Paper on the matter—I would like to know when and if it will be published. As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) said, we need to consider the transport infrastructure between all the main airports in London.

It would be more acceptable to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham to fly from Newcastle to Luton, if Luton had a better infrastructure connecting it to the centre of London—the Thameslink train, which I used from Blackfriars to Luton, is pretty slow, unclean and inefficient. There should be a better link between Luton and the centre of London, and Luton and other major London airports. To get from Luton to Heathrow is

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

virtually impossible: one has to use the Thameslink train or a bus into central London to get back out again to Heathrow. That makes no sense in a modern economy.

Mr. Lloyd: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about the need to improve interlinking between the different parts of the south-east airport system. However, environmental and economic issues also exist. Developing other potential hub airports—Manchester is already a hub, but other places can develop them—would be in the interests of the travelling public and the environment, and would do something about the excessive congestion in the south-east.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said, and I shall return to it when I have finished my point.

The Government must seriously consider the transport infrastructure between London's main airports. It might then be easier for people to use regional airports such as Luton and Stansted, to the greater satisfaction of those who want to take international flights out of Heathrow and Gatwick. That involves the issue of motorway capacity, including bus lanes on the M25.

When I took my family on holiday to Spain this year, I flew out of Birmingham airport, which was very efficient. Travel operators must be encouraged to think increasingly about using the regional hubs for holidays, both for tourists leaving the country and for those coming in. In 1998, the Government allowed airports that were trading successfully to increase their borrowing. How effective has that relaxation been, and how has it affected the regional hubs? It is important to develop the role of local authorities and private companies that own the regional hubs.

Mr. Lloyd: This is not a matter of parochial pride, although that comes into it. We should not think of airports such as Manchester and the bigger Scottish airports simply as places where holiday carriers can fly from. Manchester already has a huge range of regular international services, which are fundamental to the development of the regional economy. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will wean himself off the idea that they are merely a bolt-on for when we wear our holiday hats and go off to Spain. They are about travelling for all manner of reasons all around the world.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Of course the hon. Gentleman is right, but he is picking holes in my argument. My example was intended to show how we can use the regional hubs to better effect, thereby reducing the number of flights out of Heathrow and Gatwick. We must use every method at our disposal. The Government should develop a holistic policy for the whole air travel sector that considers how to use the regional hubs, the London airports and the smaller local airports to better effect, thus benefiting both the travelling public and the development of the country's infrastructure.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall, although the hon. Lady has not been present and we are short of time.

Caroline Flint: I apologise for arriving late. I gave notice that I was interested in the debate, but I have been speaking at a conference.

The hon. Gentleman is asking the Minister to produce a holistic plan. Is he suggesting that the development of regional airports should not continue as it is? For example, Finningley in my constituency, from which four out of five people in Yorkshire fly, could provide international long-haul services that are not currently provided anywhere in the county.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am delighted to welcome the hon. Lady to the debate, even at this late hour—I accept that she had to be somewhere else. She is picking holes in what I said. I made it clear that the purpose of a holistic policy is to determine how we can make better use not only of London's airports, but of regional hubs and small local airports.

I was interested to hear what the hon. Member for Bassetlaw said about his public survey of attitudes to an extra regional airport at Finningley. The fact that 90 per cent. of people were in favour is contrary to what one might expect. One of the problems in developing an airport strategy for London is how to take account of environmental issues, especially airport noise at anti-social times of the morning. When the Minister makes his decision about terminal 5, one of the matters that he will have to grapple with is the times at which to limit aircraft flying in and out of Heathrow. When Gatwick's second terminal was built, severe restrictions were imposed on the times of day that aircraft could fly in and out, and they have already been breached. The Minister will have to grapple with such issues if he is to come up with a sensible air policy for the United Kingdom.

I end where I began. We all want to improve the efficiency of airports, be they London, regional or smaller local airports. I have mentioned the need for regional airports to improve links with London through better infrastructure, and we also need better and more efficient checking in and baggage transfer. The speed link from Paddington to Heathrow offers an ideal example, but no such system links central London with, say, Luton. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington rightly alluded to the lack of an efficient transfer system from Gatwick to Heathrow. Those matters can be improved.

If the United Kingdom is to remain at the forefront of world travel, we must address those significant issues. Many hon. Members have called for the public service agreement for Inverness to be invoked to ensure that services are maintained. British Airways has briefed us that such an arrangement can work only if the Government are prepared to subsidise it. We must look at the issue in the round, and ensure that this tiny island's existing air capacity is used in the best way for all concerned. The Minister should tell us how he intends to meet that huge challenge.

12.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on securing this important debate. I congratulate him on arguing the case, not only for Inverness but for Scotland, well and with brevity. He is always persuasive. He has a quiet and compelling manner that makes one listen to him more than to those who speak loudly and boldly, and I assure him that I have indeed listened carefully to his comments. He has articulated a strong case for protecting air services in his region.

My hon. Friend asked me to support the public service obligation. The Minister for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), has written to Sarah Boyack, the Minister for Transport in Scotland. He said that the Department will now consider the request for the PSO against the criteria in European legislation. Officials of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are meeting members of the Scottish Executive tomorrow to discuss that important matter. I hope that that helps my hon. Friend and the other hon. Members present who represent Scottish constituencies.

I should draw the Chamber's attention to today's statement from British Airways:

"British Airways fully intends to continue services between Inverness and Gatwick. It remains a viable route and there are no plans to withdraw flights. We have also no plans to change or reduce services from Gatwick to Plymouth and Newquay."

It is clear from his speech that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) takes a huge interest in Plymouth. I have heard the points that he made before—when I visited Plymouth airport some three or four weeks ago. We will be looking carefully at the British Airways statement, and will keep under review its commitment to those services.

I shall deal with a couple of important points made by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). He complained about EU involvement in slot allocation, but I should remind him that it was his party that agreed to such involvement, in 1993. It is true that France and the United States have signed a bilateral agreement on open skies, but we will sign a bilateral agreement only in the interests of the United Kingdom's airlines, not in the interests of the US aviation industry. That is perhaps another matter on which we differ from Conservative Members.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: No. The hon. Gentleman had long enough and I want to respond to the points that others have made.

I have listened to those points with great care. It has been a good debate, with contributions from many hon. Members of different parties: the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson); my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), who made compelling points in favour of regional airports; the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) who made a brief, sensible contribution, of which the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington should perhaps take note, as it was very valuable; my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), who made a very good contribution; my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), who was watched very carefully by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), who takes enormous interest in such matters; my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), from whom we are always pleased to hear; and the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). I assure hon. Members that, although I may not have time to respond in detail to all points, I have listened to them carefully.

The Government recognise the significance of regional air services and their economic and social spin-offs, something referred to powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central. Good direct flights to the capital and interlining opportunities to international flights attract inward investment and encourage the development of business and tourism in the regions. Therefore, I understand concerns that current air links between regional airports and London should be maintained. That point has been widely made in the debate.

I also appreciate underlying concerns about the future of regional air services, and why those concerns have come to the surface. In recent years, many regional airports have seen Heathrow and Gatwick services reduced or moved. Inevitably, such changes cause concern. I am well aware that certain UK regions are worried that commercial pressures are threatening services between their airports and Heathrow and Gatwick because of pressure on airport slots.

Hon. Members are probably aware that European law—EC regulation 95/93—governs the common rules for the allocation of slots at community airports. That is probably what the Conservative Government signed up to about 10 years ago. The regulation's key provision is for slot allocation at fully co-ordinated airports to be carried out by a slot co-ordinator. In the United Kingdom, the co-ordinator is Airport Co-ordination Ltd. It allocates slots according to specified criteria on a neutral, transparent and non-discriminatory basis. ACL's decisions are binding, and the Government currently have no role in the process. If the hon. Member for Cotswold thinks that that should change, perhaps his party might be interested in coming forward with proposals.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: No.

The regulation is based on the key principle of historic precedence, also known as grandfather rights. That enables an air carrier that uses a slot in one season to have the first claim on it in the next, providing that it uses it for 80 per cent. of the time.

The scarcity of slots at Heathrow and, to a lesser extent, Gatwick encourages airlines to use slots to maximum commercial advantage. Hon. Members can appreciate that demand for slots increases pressure on slots used for less profitable routes. That is the thrust of what my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber said. Some airlines have developed more long-haul services as air travel has expanded. However, I am sure that hon. Members welcome, as I do, the expansion of regional air services to Luton,

[Mr. Jamieson]

Stansted and London City airport provided by low-cost airlines, and the benefits that such competition can provide to customers.

I shall now try to address as fully as I can some of the issues raised in the debate. We must recognise that an airline is going to use slots at a congested airport such as Heathrow or Gatwick in a way that will maximise profits. If an airline thinks that, even taking into account the contributory revenue from connecting passengers, it can make more profit by switching slots from a thin regional service operated by small aircraft to a long-haul service operated by wide-body aircraft, it will do so. Obviously, airlines will not be considering the wider economic benefits of domestic regional air services. I think that this is the nub of the concerns of people in Inverness and Scotland.

We are aware of the difficulties that may arise from the conflict between market forces affecting the use of airport slots and the Government's regional interest. The Government are listening to the argument that wider external benefits should be taken into account in certain circumstances—for example, when one airline is operating on a route and the alternative forms of transport are inadequate. We have heard about six-hour journeys from parts of Scotland and that also applies to parts of Cornwall.

The market is seriously constrained by the infrastructure. The fundamental problem behind the lack of access at Heathrow and Gatwick is lack of adequate infrastructure—Heathrow has only two runways and Gatwick has only one. Demand for take-off and landing slots greatly exceeds the capacity at Heathrow and, to a lesser extent, at Gatwick. Most regions would like Heathrow connections, for obvious reasons, but might settle for assurances of a London link.

Concern has been expressed during the debate and at other times that airlines are free to choose how they use their slots. I have been raising the matter for many years, sometimes with Liberal Democrat Members and others in the south-west, so the subject is not new to me. Airlines must make profits, so many withdraw from marginally profitable services to use slots for more profitable routes. Under European legislation, they are entitled to do that. Slot allocation is not generally route specific. When slots have been allocated to airlines, it is for individual airlines to choose how to use their slots according to their assessment of market conditions. It is definitely not for the Government to interfere with the commercial decisions of airlines.

It is important to our discussion to explain the circumstances in which the Government can intervene and the constraints on that.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: No. I want to respond to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber, because they are important.

There are currently two mechanisms available for the Government to intervene to protect access for regional services. Under the current regulation, the Government's ability to reserve or ring-fence slots for regional services is narrowly defined. They are permitted to reserve slots without a public service obligation provided that the slots were being used for the route before 1993, there is only one carrier on the route and there are no adequate links by alternative modes of transport. The Government have not so far ring-fenced slots without a PSO. They may also reserve slots when a PSO has been imposed on a route. I hope that that clarifies the avenues down which we may go.

Any move towards protecting air services for one region would be met with demands for similar treatment from other regions, and those may include regions that do not currently have London connections. Hon. Members should be aware that protecting all existing service levels would tie up many slots. That would be to the detriment of consumers generally, as well as United Kingdom carriers that would have to continue to operate some marginally profitable services or surrender the slot. If airlines were expected to forego the opportunity to make best use of the slots they hold, there would be a cost to the airline and loss of benefit for consumers. We need to balance the benefits and disbenefits of various options.

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber referred to greater protection for regional air services through the other available mechanism—the public service obligation. The imposition of a public service obligation must be in accordance with EC regulation 2408/92, which is based on the presumption that the supply of air services should be left to a liberalised market to determine. It does, however, provide for the Government to intervene in certain circumstances. The regulation states that a member state may impose a public service obligation on a route to a peripheral or development region when the route is considered vital for the economic development of the region. It may do so to the extent necessary to

"ensure the adequate provision of scheduled air services satisfying fixed standards of continuity, regularity, capacity and pricing, which standard air carriers would not assume if they were solely considering their commercial interests".

The Government have interpreted the regulation very tightly indeed.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to respond to some of the points made by hon. Members. If I have not answered hon. Members' questions to their satisfaction, perhaps they will drop me a note and I shall endeavour to give them a full response.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): We are all grateful to the Minister for concluding within the time allotted for the debate.

Rail Services (East Sussex)

12.30 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): If I seem distracted, it is because last night there was a major explosion at Newhaven in my constituency. I understand that many fire fighters are involved and the town is covered with billowing smoke, which reaches as far as Eastbourne. I want to put on record my gratitude to the fire services, to whom I spoke this morning, for their work in a dangerous situation where there are exploding acetylene cylinders and other hazards. We can all take comfort from the fire service's professionalism.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I hope that there has been no loss of life or serious injury, and that the hon. Gentleman will advise the House on the matter.

Norman Baker: I am advised that there has been no loss of life and no major injuries, but details so far are sketchy.

Let me turn to the subject of the debate, which is of interest to other hon. Members who represent constituencies in East Sussex. I am delighted that the hon. Members for Wealden (Mr. Hendry), for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) are present and I hope they will want to intervene.

There is much constituency correspondence on the subject in East Sussex. The debate is well timed, given the changes to the railway industry as a consequence of Railtrack being taken into administration. If the Minister has managed to recover from the previous debate, it would be useful if he could say something about how the post-Railtrack arrangements will affect the opportunity for investment in rail services in East Sussex, because hon. Members in all parties want better rail services.

The characteristics of rail travel locally are that it is reasonably reliable, notwithstanding the complaints that some of us receive. There is a quickish service to London from East Sussex. It is far better than travelling by car, as those of us who need to can work on the train—trying to work while driving is something that the Minister and others might regard as hazardous.

However, the rail services are expensive, the trains are dirty and the rolling stock is clapped out and dates from the time when the Beatles' "She Loves You" was number one. The peripheral arrangements for travelling by train, such as car parking at stations, are often far from perfect. Much needs to be done if there is to be a renaissance in rail travel, people are to be persuaded out of their cars and on to railways, and businesses are to be persuaded to use rail rather than road freight, which is the Government's policy. That aim is shared by all hon. Members. It has not happened because money spent on roads is called investment whereas money spent on railways is called subsidy. We need to change that mindset, which has plagued our railways for too long. It may well be, for environmental, social and economic reasons, that money put into railways provides a better return for the taxpayer than money spent on roads.

In the past 20 or 30 years, Governments have been good at picking up on road schemes throughout the country and building roads, although not always as many as some people want. They have not shown the same ability to create new railway lines or reopen existing ones, and to reopen stations. However, I am delighted that the Government's excellent initiative, the south-coast multi-modal study, is under way. It is the first time that a transport corridor—road, rail and short-sea shipping—has been considered, and it is the right way of doing things. I hope that the initiative will show that the best way to use the existing infrastructure is not to construct huge new roads costing £100 million-plus, which is what it would cost to have a dual carriageway from Lewes to Polegate; it would be far better to use the existing infrastructure.

We want a package of improvements in East Sussex, most notably the reopening of the Lewes-Uckfield railway line. Its closure was absurd. It was ordered not by Beeching but by the county council in 1969 to facilitate the building of a bridge over the river in Lewes. A look at the railway map demonstrates how ludicrous the situation is, with trains from London going all the way to Uckfield in the constituency of the hon. Member for Wealden—and taking about 10 minutes longer to get there than when the railway line opened around 1840.

There is a seven-mile gap between Lewes and Uckfield where the track has been largely retained. A ridiculously short section of rail is missing and a reinstatement could easily take place. There would be several advantages in that, not least of which is that it would provide an alternative route to London. As the Minister knows, there are huge capacity problems on the Brighton line. I am sure that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion agrees with that. It is inconceivable that we could have another Balcombe tunnel and Balcombe viaduct; that would be too expensive and environmentally damaging. The new train operator, GoVia, is considering an improvement to the line at Littlehampton. A third alternative, which Connex was considering before it lost the franchise, is to reopen the Lewes-Uckfield line. Whatever the faults of Connex—it was far from perfect—it was prepared to look seriously at reopening that line. I very much hope that that opportunity will not be lost now under GoVia.

It would be tragic if the Lewes-Uckfield line were not reopened. We must pull together and find a way of achieving that; 32 years after its closure, there is a huge campaign, which spans all councils and all parties, for the line to be reopened. Whenever I or the hon. Member for Wealden try to achieve that, we are told to go and see the Strategic Rail Authority; the SRA tells us to see GoVia; GoVia tells us to see Railtrack, as it was; Railtrack tells us to see the county council; the county council tells us to see the Government, and the Government tell us to see the SRA. The Government need to produce a route map showing how we can reopen lines that should never have been closed in the first place and where there are obvious economic, environmental and social reasons for doing so. Will the Minister tell us how we can achieve that objective?

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing the debate. Does he agree that the route to Brighton via Littlehampton is much longer than a reopened Wealden line would be? Before that line is reopened, it is essential

[Mr. Charles Hendry]

that the existing line to Uckfield have dual tracking and be electrified. The current service to Uckfield is deeply inadequate.

Norman Baker: I entirely agree. Littlehampton is not a satisfactory diversion route, as I imagine the constituents of the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion would agree—and as those who get shunted there when there are rail works know. The Lewes-Uckfield line would be a reasonable diversion if there were problems on the Brighton line.

Another necessary improvement in infrastructure is the electrification of the Hastings-Ashford line. If one goes from Lewes to Brussels, as I have, it takes longer to go from Lewes to Ashford than from Ashford to Brussels. That is ludicrous. Getting off the super brand-new train that glides through the French countryside at about 100 mph at Ashford, believing that one is in the 21st century, one then has the surreal experience of transferring to a 1954 diesel train, which shunts along like Thomas the Tank Engine at about 10 mph from Ashford to Hastings. Business men and women in my constituency want to go to Ashford by train so that they can get to Brussels and back quickly. They tell me that it is simply impossible to do that because the Hastings-Ashford line is, at best, a Sunday outing; it is not a sensible rail line.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and [illegible]le): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing this important debate. Does he accept that my constituents are appalled not only by the transit time to Ashford but by the service to London? They would recognise the picture that he has painted of the quality of the rolling stock, but not the journey time. In fact, it takes one hour and 45 minutes to travel from Bexhill to London, which puts Bexhill further away from London than York. The journey takes longer now than it did in 1922. That state of affairs is simply unacceptable.

My constituents are also concerned about the impact of Railtrack's collapse on repairs in Bexhill, Cooden Beach and Etchingham. I should be grateful if the Minister would deal with that.

Norman Baker: I agree with the point about journey time. I saw a map with circles that showed how long it took to get from a particular area to London: half an hour, an hour or an hour and a half. The circles were not concentric. The map showed a big blip in the Wealden area and the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Journey times from those areas were excessively long compared with those from, say, Brighton.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I, too, congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he, like me, welcome the fact that electrification of the Hastings-Ashford line is part of the commitment made by GoVia and South Central, now that they have taken over responsibility for that line? Does he agree that all those of us who are concerned with the economic vitality of the south coast need to put pressure on the Strategic Rail Authority to ensure the doubling of track on that line too? Electrification is only one part of what is required.

We in the south-east think of ourselves as living in a European region, particularly with the port at Newhaven—and the west pier, which leaves the English mainland and makes its way towards the continent. There is inconsistency.

Norman Baker: I am happy to agree. The hon. Gentleman has long been a strong advocate of improved rail services in those areas. I hope that the Minister will note the cross-party unity on the need to secure improved services in East Sussex and on the reopening of the Lewes-Uckfield line.

I want to see other infrastructure improvements. Reinstating the loop between Polegate and Pevensey would enable Eastbourne to be bypassed, not by passenger traffic—the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) might object to that—but by freight traffic. That would facilitate the transfer of freight from road to rail.

We also need improvements at Keymer junction, where the Lewes line joins the Brighton line. As anyone who travels from Lewes, Bexhill or wherever knows, the trains inevitably wait there for three or four minutes, which causes a major problem.

We need a new station at Newhaven, because the current three stations are disgraceful and a terrible advert to people who arrive there from Dieppe. Dieppe has received a lot of investment whereas Newhaven stations do not even have a car park—they are that bad. A lot of money is going into Newhaven, where there is an opportunity for a big rail renaissance, with increased freight and passenger movements. The Government are keen on the public-private partnership in Newhaven, which is investing huge amounts of money in the area. Everyone agrees on the need for a single station. All parts of the railway industry say that that makes sense, but none is prepared to lead on the matter. Will the Minister knock some heads together to get things going?

We shall not see a renaissance of rail travel along the south coast—the situation in London is different—unless rail fares are cut. A peak-time return journey between Polegate and Lewes costs £6.50; a return journey from Seaford to Lewes—a distance of nine miles—costs £5. No one in their right mind will pay those fares.

Instead, we have a ludicrous situation in which the A26 and A27 are congested with traffic that does not move in the rush hour, while trains on the parallel railway lines sail gaily by, almost empty. I hope that the south coast multi-modal study will consider that. People in my constituency say that they do not use the trains because of the cost, not because they are dirty. Lower fares on those lines would therefore facilitate the transfer of passenger traffic from road to rail. That would obviate the need for the expensive road improvements being advocated by some. All those stations are in the middle of towns: Eastbourne, Polegate, Seaford, Newhaven and Lewes. There is a huge number of white collar workers in Lewes at the police headquarters, the county council, the district council, the health authority and the ambulance service.

The 12-car trains that GoVia runs from Eastbourne and Polegate to Lewes are substantially empty, but they then pick up huge numbers of people at Lewes and Haywards Heath. Why does not GoVia fill those trains

with people who will get off at Lewes? It would not have to run any extra trains or carriages. There is spare capacity. All it has to do is cut fares. I have written to GoVia, the Minister and the Strategic Rail Authority about this. GoVia's response was very encouraging. It said:

"It may be that on that particular route we can look at creating an experimental fare to see if the idea works. If we did we would have to submit the proposal for the current fares round by no later than 16th November ... If we were able to introduce this experiment we would probably envisage a three month trial period."

GoVia is prepared to cut fares to see whether that gets more people on to the trains, but it will need help. I want the Government to say that they are prepared to invest money to cut fares. Although that may be classed as a subsidy, it would be the best way to deal with the transport problem. I should like an assurance from the Minister that the SRA and the multimodal study will look at cutting fares as part of the solution to the transport problem. I spoke this morning to the district and county councils. They are prepared in principle to help advertise that experimental fare cut. If the train operating company and the county and district councils are prepared to help, will the Government ensure that the SRA also helps?

I am sorry that I have rattled through my speech quickly. I could go on for hours about railways in East Sussex, as I am sure hon. Members will appreciate. It is an important issue for our constituents and it deserves a full and helpful reply from the Minister, which I am sure will be forthcoming.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, may I tell the hon. Gentleman that he has been very generous to allow so many interventions to guarantee that there was an all-party approach?

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I, too, was sorry to hear of the explosion in Lewes today. I hope that there has been no loss of life or serious injury. May I add my thoughts to yours, Mr. Winterton?

There is certainly cross-party interest in these matters. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) has been a doughty fighter for railway and other transport matters. I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing the debate and the clear way that he has presented his case.

At the risk of causing a rift in party unity on these matters, I refer the hon. Gentleman to an interesting debate that took place here yesterday—I seem to spend most of my time here these days. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who speaks on transport for the Liberal Democrats, was asked how much of the tax increase that the Liberal Democrats proposed at the last election would have been spent on improving public transport. He replied:

"I am sure that the hon. Lady is familiar with our tax plans, which were limited. They focused specifically on education."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 30 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 218WH.]

I make that point because the hon. Gentleman has given us the usual Liberal shopping list. Perhaps he will go back to his constituency and tell the people of Lewes that they will benefit from new Labour Government policies rather than from Liberal Democrat policies.

Norman Baker: I am sorry that the Minister has started in that way. We have had cross-party consensus and that was an unnecessarily political point to make. As the Minister knows well, the tax plans were about the 1p on income tax for education. That is not to say that we would not put more into public transport. We would do so by redirecting money that is already in the relevant budget.

Mr. Jamieson: I am grateful for that clarification that the Liberal Democrats would find more funding. When the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington was given the opportunity yesterday to say how much more funding the Liberal Democrats would put into transport he did not come up with any figure. These things are important. We often stand in this Chamber and hear demands for spending in individual constituencies. It is important that we do not just have demands, but we say how we will deliver them. That is probably the difference between us: we have to deliver.

Before I respond to the main points that the hon. Gentleman, quite properly, raised, I wish to address briefly some of the performance problems on the railways in the south-east. Several operators run services in and out of Brighton; however, I shall concentrate on South Central, as East Sussex is served predominantly by it.

The latest statistics published by the Strategic Rail Authority in July do not, alas, make good reading. It is clear that much must be done to improve performance and customer satisfaction. The figures show that between 27 May and 23 June, 82.6 per cent. of Connex South Central's trains arrived on time, with 81.6 per cent. arriving on time during peak periods. Services are deemed punctual if they arrive at their destination within five minutes of the time stated on the timetable. The spring 2001 national passenger survey indicated that only 65 per cent. of Connex South Central passengers were satisfied with the service that they received and only 37 per cent. thought that they were getting value for money.

The performance statistics and national survey results were undertaken before the franchise was transferred from Connex to GoVia on 26 August. The new arrangement is still in its early stages, so it is too early to make judgments about GoVia's performance. However, the incoming franchisee is taking service improvement seriously, and South Central Ltd is investing £5 million in measures to improve the quality and perception of customer services. It is intended that the first of the new vehicles to replace mark 1 slam-door rolling stock will be introduced from next year.

The hon. Member for Lewes referred to the approach to franchising. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked the SRA to concentrate on negotiating improvements for passengers within existing franchises or, by negotiating short two-year extensions, to make early replacement of franchises the exception rather than the rule.

[Mr. Jamieson]

I know that the new South Central franchise is of interest to the hon. Member for Lewes. The SRA signed heads of terms with GoVia as the preferred counter-party for the replacement South Central franchise in October last year. On 26 August, a commercial agreement was reached between Connex Transport (UK) Ltd. and GoVia for the transfer of the remaining period of the current franchise. Negotiations will continue between the SRA and GoVia towards a new 20-year franchise agreement. A series of major enhancements are planned over the period of the franchise to boost capacity and improve service frequency and comfort. Total investment of £1.5 billion is planned to introduce new trains and upgrade track and stations in order to raise standards, improve train service performance and provide additional capacity.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Lewes will welcome such improvements, as will the many passengers who experience overcrowding and the problems of old rolling stock on this intensively used and capacity-constrained commuter network. As I said, new vehicles will start coming on stream next year to replace the slam-door trains that are currently in service.

Another early benefit is the upgrading of infrastructure to provide greater capacity on the Brighton main line and the Arun valley line. Electrification of the lines between Hastings and Ashford will provide through services between Ashford International and the south coast, and electrification between Uckfield and Hurst Green will provide electric trains between London and Uckfield.

The hon. Member for Lewes mentioned the south coast multi-modal study. I believe that he recently secured an early-day motion on rail fares to Lewes and congestion on parallel roads—I took careful note of it—and that he has written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asking for his proposals to be considered as part of the south coast multi-modal study.

The study commenced in March 2001, and a report is expected in spring or summer next year. The overall aim of the study is to investigate congestion, safety and environmental problems on the south coast between Southampton and Ramsgate, and to propose measures aimed at improving access to and between regeneration areas and other areas of economic activity along the south coast. While the south coast study will need to consider the outcomes and recommendations of the Hastings study, it is not intended to review them as part of its work. The Hastings study is concerned with access and regeneration issues, while the south coast study is more strategic. The hon. Member for Lewes will shortly receive a written response from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. It may be helpful, however, if I deal with two of the issues that he raised in his early-day motion and today.

One issue is the proposed reduced peak fares, particularly on the Eastbourne-Polegate-Lewes and Seaford-Newhaven-Lewes lines. The Strategic Rail Authority is reviewing its national fares policy, under which almost 40 per cent. of fare revenue available to train operators comes from regulated fares. The review, which is not expected to be completed until summer 2002, will be wide-ranging and nationwide. The SRA has stated that, before any fare increase can be justified, tangible improvements in performance and service should have come on stream. The hon. Gentleman's comments about the willingness of others to participate in the fare structure in his area will have been listened to carefully. I shall ensure that those points are passed on.

On the second issue, I am aware that several Members of Parliament and local authorities are campaigning for the reinstatement of the Uckfield-Lewes and the Eridge-Tunbridge Wells lines, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that others are opposed to those proposals. As part of its heads of terms, GoVia is procuring a feasibility study to test the reliability, affordability and value for money of reinstating the Uckfield-Lewes line. GoVia will support reinstatement, provided that its viability is demonstrated.

In consultations with the relevant local authorities, GoVia made it clear that it is willing to be convinced that reopening the Uckfield-Lewes line is good value for money. It suggested to local authority officers that developing residential property in the catchment area would strengthen the case for reinstatement. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman and other Members of Parliament in the area support increased residential development there, but that would create an extra market and a critical mass of customers prepared to use the rail services.

The Strategic Rail Authority has a duty to spend taxpayers' money appropriately and, before deciding whether to progress with reinstatement, it needs to be satisfied that the proposals are robust, affordable and represent good value for money. A feasibility study will be undertaken once the new franchise agreement has been concluded and it will be used to inform the SRA's decision.

The hon. Gentleman also proposes electrification of the Ashford-Hastings line and new modern rolling stock, which I have already dealt with. He would also like a new station at Newhaven to allow the development of a strategy for moving freight by rail from the port, and the reinstatement of a direct link between Polegate and Pevensey to facilitate freight movements. Neither of those proposals is in the SRA's strategic plans for freight. It is for operators to come forward with ideas for consideration, but improving performance on the existing network is the first priority.

Several hon. Members mentioned Railtrack administration. If we are to achieve a better quality rail network, we need a successful network operator. Much has been said about the Government's handling of Railtrack. In his statement of 15 October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State went to some lengths to explain the Government's decision not to provide Railtrack with a blank cheque. Our priority now is to ensure that the company that takes over Railtrack plc's network responsibilities can help deliver the improvements that we all want.

I can reassure the House that Railtrack's being placed in administration will not impact on rail travel: passengers and freight trains will continue to run as normal. The administrators are working closely with the Health and Safety Executive to ensure that, while in administration, Railtrack continues to meet the railway inspectorate's safety requirements.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Lewes for raising important matters today. I hope that he is not too worried by my introduction. He will appreciate that I often hear demands for extra services from hon. Members, but those who deliver the services—often those from their own parties—may not have the funding to provide them.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I thank the Minister for that quick gallop round some of our rail networks.

Data Protection Act 1998

1 pm

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): It is a great pleasure to speak on this subject given that the Data Protection Act 1998 came into force only a few days ago, on 24 October. I hope to show in my speech the clear conflict between the 1998 Act and Members' privileges. I thank the information commissioner, Elizabeth France, and her staff, the Library and the House authorities for providing me with some of the information that I am about to use.

I hope to show the need for a change to the law, because it is necessary to ease up on the 1998 Act. Members of Parliament are being placed in a straitjacket that is becoming more frustrating by the day. The Act places Members' privileges in question. More importantly, constituents, who have rights of representation, are being denied their rights. I am increasingly being asked to get constituents to sign waivers. They must be signed before I am able to obtain information, which hampers the representations that I can make on their behalf.

I shall give two examples. First, when I write to my local health board appending a letter from a constituent that states his problem clearly, the board takes it upon itself to write directly to my constituent asking for his approval to research the matter when it is obvious that that approval has been granted. The board might even visit my constituent to seek his approval. A complaint against a particular consultant could lead to a constituent's being called to see that consultant, all of which would be done without my involvement. In many ways, that is a slap in the face because, in the first instance, the constituent either wrote to me or came to see me. That process breaches the privileges of a Member of Parliament because it takes him or her out of the loop.

The second example is more extreme. The Scottish Prison Service has decided that, under the 1998 Act, it also needs a waiver. In this hypothetical case I shall call the constituent Jimmy, which is appropriate. Jimmy telephones me from prison and asks me to get him released for one day so that he can attend his aunt's funeral. I phone the prison governor and say, "Why won't you let Jimmy out?" The governor replies, "I am very sorry, but that is sensitive information. You must get him to fill in a waiver." I say to him, "You get that done." He replies, "No, you must do it."

To do that, I must send a letter. The post in the west of Scotland is not great, so it takes three days for the letter to arrive, three days for it to go through the prison service and another three days for it to get back to me, by which time the dear aunt with whom Jimmy stayed for 25 years has been buried. That frustrates my rights of representation on behalf of that individual, regardless of his position. Bureaucracy is denying my constituents proper representation, which was not the 1998 Act's intention.

The basic integrity of MPs has been challenged. I argue that the 1998 Act discriminates. MPs are all honourable ladies and gentleman, yet we are put in a position where organisations do not believe us. The only way that that will be addressed is by changing the law. On the other side of the equation, the public have rights,

[Mr. Brian H. Donohoe]

but I understood that the Data Protection Act was on the statue book simply to protect rights of access for members of the public. That aim is being frustrated and we are achieving the exact opposite of what was intended in the Act. Both public and private companies and organisations are questioning the authority of Members of Parliament.

My constituents are intelligent people, but they are not all university professors. They need protection, which is why they go to their MP in the first place. That is being denied by virtue of what I have outlined, giving just two examples from a great number of cases. Hon. Members' rights are being compromised at their very kernel, and a change in the law is required to—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I must say to the hon. Gentleman, who is making an extremely good case in which I am sure many people are interested, that an Adjournment debate is not the right forum in which to ask for a change in the law. He can ask for action and consideration of the current situation, but this is not the forum for seeking legislation to change the law.

Mr. Donohoe: I do not want to challenge the Chair, but I cleared the matter with the Clerk and was told that it would be all right.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I must intervene. I accept that the hon. Gentleman has taken that action, but my understanding, from the Clerk sitting next to me, is that the position that I outlined is correct. The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent case, and clearly asking for consideration and action. If he does that, he is entirely in order.

Mr. Donohoe: I shall try to keep to that, Mr. Winterton. One Clerk says one thing and another says something else. Perhaps I should have done more to check the position before I called for the debate.

Other elements demonstrate that Members of Parliament are being discriminated against. Lawyers—I have checked this with several—are exempt from a considerable part of the Act, a fact that is outlined in the Act itself. That is down to what is known as legal professional privilege. I argue that MPs need something along those lines. I hope that, now that I have focused attention on the subject, the Government will consider some form of change.

When researching the problem, I came upon a report by the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege. It states:

"Parliamentary privilege consists of the rights and immunities which the two Houses of Parliament and their members and officers possess to enable them to carry out their parliamentary functions effectively. Without this protection members would be handicapped in performing their parliamentary duties, and the authority of Parliament itself in confronting the executive and as a forum for expressing the anxieties of citizens would be correspondingly diminished."

It goes on to say something even more interesting:

"Another aspect of Parliament's right to regulate its own internal affairs concerns the application of legislation to activities taking place within the Houses of Parliament."

The legislation taken not to apply to Parliament includes the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the Data Protection Acts of 1984 and 1998. All we require, then, is an extension so that when we are outside the premises we remain outwith the law.

The problem for MPs is best explained by quoting two paragraphs from a letter—I believe that a copy has been sent to the Minister—that I received from Elizabeth France, the Information Commissioner, which illustrate the concerns expressed by those involved with the Act. She says:

"I understand why data controllers are being cautious. There was an express provision in the 1984 Act which allowed disclosure where the data user had reasonable grounds for believing that they were disclosing to someone acting on behalf of the data subject concerned. This applied even if the disclosures in question were not foreseen by the data subject. As there is no such specific provision in the 1998 Act many organisations are properly more circumspect."

That demonstrates that the provision should have been included when the House considered the 1998 Act, which came into force on 24 October.

The second paragraph emphasises the point:

"In many cases the consent of a data subject to the disclosure of personal data can reasonably be inferred, for example where a Member of Parliament writes to an organisation and the nature and content of the letter clearly indicates that the data subject involved has asked the Member of Parliament to represent him. However, this will not always be the case, and if a data controller has doubts it is reasonable for him to check with the data subject that consent has been given. Where the personal data are sensitive, or thought to be sensitive, the data controller will require explicit consent before disclosure to a third party. Normally this consent will be written. It is worth noting that the onus is on the data controller to ensure that they have the correct level of consent before disclosure of the personal data."

That is right for the average person in the street, who expects—and gets—protection, but such an approach proves frustrating where a Member of Parliament is trying to make best representations on behalf of a constituent. I am grateful for the chance to quote that letter, because it could not be more helpful in illustrating and reinforcing my argument.

Finally—and with emphasis—I should point out that the Act discriminates. If my reading of it is right, certain Ministers are exempt, and I have already mentioned the section of the Act that excludes lawyers. Although this may be a flippant point, it could be argued that the Act does not cover Scotland. It appears to remain silent on the question of convicting a person who is in breach of the Act on the basis that Scottish courts have been given no instructions in that regard.

I should be interested to hear the Minister's response to those points. In the light of the new era heralded by the Data Protection Act 1998, I want to know how I can best represent my constituents' views.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the Minister to reply, and further to the matter that I raised earlier, I shall quote from page 327 of Erskine May. Sub-paragraph (b) states:

"In general, matters that would entail legislation must not be discussed on a motion for the adjournment; but under SO No. 30 Mr. Speaker may permit such incidental reference to legislative action as he may consider relevant to any matter of administration under debate on a motion for the adjournment when enforcement of the prohibition would, in his opinion, unduly restrict the discussion of the matter."

I hope that that is helpful to the Chamber. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) has raised an important matter and I have used my discretion. I hope that the Minister will now respond to it.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): Thank you, Mr. Winterton. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) on securing an Adjournment debate on this important and, as we have heard, sensitive subject. I pay tribute to his evident hard work and concern for his constituents, which has been demonstrated in what we have heard.

I speak not as a Minister, but as a Member of Parliament I have come across these issues and know that they are extremely important. Fundamentally, all of us are here to serve our constituents. That often requires us to obtain personal information about individuals from third parties. It is right that we should have access to information so that we can carry out inquiries on behalf of our constituents, but I know that my hon. Friend recognises that we must do so in a way that respects society's concerns for the protection of personal information privacy. It affects us all. No matter how private we seek to be, we can be certain that somebody somewhere holds information about us.

With the rapid development of information and communication technology, it is essential that effective arrangements are in place to ensure that personal information is properly protected. That is not to say that impenetrable walls of secrecy must be built around our data. Information is a key commodity and modern society could not function if it could not be shared. However, we need a balanced approach and rules to safeguard our personal information when it is used by others. Equally, those rules must not prevent the legitimate and responsible use of information by those who need to see and hold it, and that includes all Members of the House of Commons. I know that that lies at the heart of my hon. Friend's concerns.

This new legislation has come into full force only in the last few days, so I draw the Chamber's attention to a helpful guide to the Data Protection Act 1998, which was issued by the House authorities in May 2000. It was prepared in consultation with the information commissioner and covers parts of the law that are relevant to constituency case work and House proceedings. It is a clear and reasonable guide to a complex area of law—I speak as someone who took no part in preparing it. As a constituency Member of Parliament I have cause to be grateful for the guidance. The chapter on constituency case work is particularly relevant.

I want to address the points raised by my hon. Friend. I cannot comment on the individual cases of the local health board and prison authorities to which he referred, and he would not expect me to. I hope that it is clearly understood that what I am about to say has no bearing on those cases.

Two points of principle seem to arise from my hon. Friend's comments. The first is the question of explicit consent. If it is clear to the organisation making the disclosure that the constituent has given consent—explicit consent in the case of sensitive data, such as that to do with health, ethnicity, religion—a disclosure can be made. However, he will appreciate that the circumstances have to be evaluated in each case and an element of interpretation will always exist over what is explicit consent. I hope that he is no doubt that that is the position. A disclosure can be made in certain areas if consent is explicit, but a question lies over the term "explicit consent". I hope that he understands that public bodies must be careful; they have an obligation placed on them by statute and it is important that they discharge it properly. I understand his concerns, but we must not do anything that encourages a public body to be too cavalier in its interpretation.

That leads me to my hon. Friend's second point, but I stress that I shall not comment on individual cases because I do not have enough information and it is not for me to do so. What I am about to say has no bearing on the individual case that he cited.

My hon. Friend referred to delay. Let me make it clear that we do not consider that the Data Protection Act 1998 should ever give rise to significant cause for delay by any public body in going about its proper tasks. The Act puts in place procedures for handling data properly and appropriately. It may require a change of culture in the way that organisations manage information and data, and that is for the best, but it should never be used as an excuse for public bodies not to do something that they should otherwise do in relation to their substantive duties, or for delay. I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured. When new legislation is introduced, some organisations need time for bedding down, but the point remains that it should never be a reason for substantive delay. The legislation introduces new procedures and proper protection.

The question of privilege is important. My hon. Friend drew attention to some of the surrounding issues. The use of personal data in the course of parliamentary proceedings is exempt from data protection principles when the exemption is necessary to avoid infringing parliamentary principle. However, there are examples when parliamentary privilege does not apply, as in the case of letters from hon. Members to Ministers or public authorities about constituency matters, in which case the 1998 Act applies.

My hon. Friend said that it is not clear whether the 1998 Act applies to Scotland. In fact, it applies throughout the United Kingdom and the relevant statute is the Scotland Act 1998, which determines whether a matter is reserved or devolved. Schedule 5 of that Act provides that the subject matter of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the 1995 EC data protection directive are reserved matters, so they apply to Scotland.

Mr. Donohoe: Section 60(1) of the Data Protection Act states:

"No proceedings for an offence under this Act shall be instituted-
(a) in England or Wales, except by the Commissioner or by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions;
(b) in Northern Ireland, except by the Commissioner or by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland."

It does not refer to Scotland and the law is silent on that. I would argue that, given that silence, no one in Scotland could be prosecuted.

Mr. Wills: My hon. Friend has the advantage of having the statute in front of him. If I heard him

[Mr. Wills]

correctly, he was referring to the institution of proceedings. I was referring to the application of the Act and it would be for the authorities in Scotland to take proceedings. Under schedule 5 of the Scotland Act, the Data Protection Act applies to Scotland.

Mr. Donohoe: The Minister now has a copy of the Act.

Mr. Wills: I have a copy, which refers to the institution of proceedings. I am delighted that I heard my hon. Friend correctly and I hope that I have covered his point.

I assure my hon. Friend that the purpose of data protection law is not to prevent Members of Parliament from doing their job properly and conscientiously, as he is doing. It does not prevent them from obtaining the information they need to pursue their constituents' concerns. It establishes a set of rules to ensure that there is appropriate protection for the personal information held about constituents and others. Members of Parliament are always acting on behalf of their constituents for the purpose of data protection legislation, but they may fall to be treated as third parties.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): I think that the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) is trying to get across is that when a constituent rings an MP's office wanting him or her to pursue a problem, the MP may have to write to or telephone the constituent to get written consent. Will the Minister confirm that?

Mr. Wills: That is the reality, and it is sometimes necessary. Constituents are not always explicit about what they want Members of Parliament to do on their behalf. Speaking personally, not as a Minister, I have taken up cases where a constituent has asked me to do something, then clarified it later in writing. In some cases, constituents have been unwilling for me to disclose their name to the authority that they want me to approach. They are usually clear and explicit about that from the beginning, but sometimes they do not make it clear until later on in the proceedings. A public body that receives a request for information from a Member of Parliament has statutory obligations to be clear about the basis on which it is handling the information on behalf of the individual to whom it pertains, and to treat it sensitively.

Mr. Cunningham: I accept that that is the case. However, where confusion arises, MPs must use judgment, discretion and interpretation.

Mr. Wills: Of course I accept that sensitive issues are involved. I am trying to explain the need for a balanced approach.

The information commissioner has an important role to play, and I welcome the fact that she has been helpful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South. I understand that she said that it may be necessary to review the range of disclosures that are permitted under schedule 3 and its associated order. It has always been the Government's view that the present arrangements are very much a starting point and that it may be necessary to consider further, in the light of experience of operating the new Act, whether additional processing gateways for sensitive personal data are needed. The directive to which the Act gives effect requires that any such gateways should be in the substantial public interest.

I will study carefully what my hon. Friends have said today to determine whether any amendment to the March 2000 order is necessary in this context. As they will understand, I cannot guarantee that that will produce the outcome that they might wish, but I shall write to them about it in due course. I hope that that gives them some comfort.

It is beyond dispute that Members of Parliament have a legitimate right to make representations on behalf of their constituents.

Mr. Donohoe: Will the Minister explain why lawyers have certain rights that Members of Parliament do not have?

Mr. Wills: They do not have certain privileges that we do not have; they have a certain qualified privilege. As this is a complex issue, I will write to my hon. Friend about it.

This important Act safeguards the rights of individuals in the crucial area of information and privacy. However, we accept that Members of Parliament have a proper interest in the matter, and I shall write to both my hon. Friends with the results of our deliberations on what they have said.

Alcohol Misuse

1.29 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I am pleased to have the chance to raise important issues in relation to alcohol misuse. As both vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on alcohol misuse and vice-president of the specialist alcohol service covering my constituency, the Hertfordshire Alcohol Problems Advisory Service, I am all too aware of the health and social impact that alcohol has on communities. I am also acutely aware of the lack of measures to address alcohol misuse, particularly the absence of a strategic Government response to the issue, despite the large amount of evidence demonstrating the cost to society of alcohol misuse in its many forms.

Only a few months ago, the Royal College of Physicians put a figure on the burden of alcohol problems on the NHS, stating that they cost between 2 and 12 per cent. of NHS spend. Even at the lowest figure of 2 per cent., that amounts to about £500 million a year. Many of us would agree that there is much room for improvement in the waiting times experienced by patients requiring treatment for a range of conditions.

If the Government really want to address waiting times, the impact of alcohol problems cannot be ignored. At a recent meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on alcohol misuse, the reality of the impact of alcohol problems on the whole hospital system was brought to life by Dr. John Kemm, a consultant in public health who was a member of the Royal College of Physicians working party that produced the report "Alcohol—can the NHS afford it?"

In a graphic representation of a ward round in a busy city hospital, Dr. Kemm described patients in beds on the male medical and surgical wards. I have time to give only a flavour of that ward round. First, we had Mr. Smith, who drinks 40 units a week and has acute pancreatitis, more common in heavy drinkers and difficult to treat. Then we had Mr. Taylor, who had had a dense, right-sided stroke, which is unusual in someone so young—but the night before Mr. Taylor had had a binge on alcohol, which is recognised as increasing the risk of stroke. On the surgical ward, Mr. Carr had had a gall bladder operation; while the original problem was not due to his drinking, his slow and difficult recovery is due to the fact that he is a heavy drinker. His wound had become infected and he had to stay in hospital for an extra five days. Next we had Mr. Ponsonby who had fallen from his roof while doing DIY and broken his femur. Forty-eight hours after his operation he suddenly became agitated and disturbed with a case of delirium tremens, which meant that the hospital had to get in a specialist nurse for 24 hours to look after him. The role of alcohol in his fall should have been spotted and his alcohol dependence managed better. And so the ward round went on.

Dr. Kemm also described a Friday night in the casualty department, the type of cases seen—the majority alcohol-related—and the stresses that staff are put under. I was struck by one relating to a patient who had cut his head open. His X-ray showed no obvious problems but unfortunately he was extremely drunk. As the symptoms of being extremely drunk are very like those of a head injury, none of the doctors dared discharge him. Instead, he was kept in all night and had his blood pressure checked and his pupils tested every 15 minutes, taking up a bed and valuable staff time.

The position outlined by Dr. Kemm reflects what is happening in Hertfordshire. While the local primary care trust has recognised the need to address alcohol misuse within the hospital setting, the lack of specific funding and national targets, as well as of robust ways of measuring the role of alcohol, means that alcohol is not dealt with—for example, by screening all patients and having a specialist alcohol worker to take referrals from across the hospital, as recommended by the Royal College of Physicians.

Many of the alcohol-related problems seen in hospitals are preventable—accident and emergency staff see many injuries caused by alcohol-related accidents and alcohol-related violence. Research by the former Health Education Authority showed that one in six people who attended A and E departments for treatment had alcohol-related injuries or problems. That rose to eight in 10 people at peak times on Friday and Saturday evenings—a staggering number, which, not surprisingly, has a significant impact on hospital resources.

Has the Secretary of State for Health considered alcohol misuse within the context of the good practice guidance for A and E departments, which he announced only last week and which is aimed at reducing waiting times for patients? Waiting times for A and E departments and the whole hospital system could be significantly reduced in the long term if the Government made the investment required to implement a comprehensive strategy on alcohol misuse. The Government have been promising such a strategy for a long time—indeed, since the public health Green Paper was published in early 1998. So far, however, there is no sign of a strategy, despite the latest promise in the NHS plan that one would be implemented in 2004. The Government are missing an enormous opportunity to reduce the cost to not only the NHS, but society as a whole.

I stress that the examples that I have given of hospital patients blocking beds are not out of the ordinary. Much of the population has problems with alcohol, ranging from dependency to alcoholism. That impacts on not only people's health, but their relationships, families, finances and ability to hold down a job.

The new figures for alcohol dependence show that 7.4 per cent. of people aged 16 and over are alcohol dependent to varying degrees—mild, moderate and severe. That amounts to about 3 million people. The latest figures on hazardous drinking, which is defined as patterns of drinking with a high risk of damage to future health, show that almost one third of women aged 16 to 24 and more than half of young men drink at hazardous levels.

Deaths directly from alcohol-related causes remained steady in the early 1990s, but have increased by 43 per cent. since 1994. Significantly, the rate of liver sclerosis has shown as huge increase, mostly among men in their thirties. That could be a warning to us all not to ignore the growing problems and, in particular, the effects of starting to drink at an early age and of regular binge drinking.

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

I am not overstating the facts when I say that the problems that I have outlined lead to family break-up, divorce, unemployment and, in some cases, even homelessness. They also increase the burden on the NHS and social services. I am concerned, in particular, for the children of problem drinkers. Almost 1 million children live in homes where the drinking of one or both parents has reached risky levels. That impacts on children's lives, often in distressing ways. Some live in fear of what they will find each day when they return from school or are forgotten at the school gates. Many grow up quickly and must care for their brothers and sisters in the face of parental neglect due to drinking. They must do all that while trying to maintain a veneer of normality for the outside world.

Much good work is being undertaken in Hertfordshire with young carers of alcoholic parents, but it is rare and is not undertaken across the country. A national alcohol strategy could include such work as a target and ensure that good practice is shared.

Like many of my colleagues, I am concerned about the increased drinking that is evident among young people. I mentioned the high levels of hazardous drinking among 16 to 24-year-olds, but there has also been an increase in the frequency of drinking among schoolchildren and in the amount that they drink. The average weekly consumption by pupils who drink has risen from 5.3 units in 1990 to 10.4 units in 2000, which is equivalent to more than five pints of beer a week.

The United Kingdom also seems to hold the dubious honour of having one of the highest rates in Europe of binge drinking by 15 and 16-year-olds, as well as the highest number of members of that age group who have ever been drunk, according to a survey launched earlier this year under the sponsorship of the World Health Organisation. That is an inevitable part of the overall trend in this country, which, unless properly tackled by a Government strategy, will go unchecked.

Alcohol is at last being dealt with as a distinct and important issue in drug education, and I welcome the establishment of a specialist team in the national charity Alcohol Concern, supported by Government funding, to provide schools with guidance on alcohol. That has not yet, however, been translated into resources locally for specialist staff to work with young people.

The established role of drinking in society means that a more holistic approach is needed to change attitudes to drinking generally, rather than simply improving alcohol education for young people, although, of course, that is important. Alcohol is part of our culture, so it is important that adults and children should learn to drink without risk. To achieve that aim a strategy is required that would combine a raft of measures into one linked action plan, including community safety, safe drinking messages, education and support, and treatment for problem drinkers. I am aware that alcohol misuse is not an issue for just one Department, although one would expect the Department of Health to take the lead role.

The Home Office has highlighted the role of alcohol in violence, such as the 13,000 violent incidents reported to the police that take place in and around pubs and clubs every week. The Department of Trade and Industry should be concerned about the impact that employees' alcohol problems have on productivity, and about absenteeism. It should encourage employers to implement alcohol policies. That approach is low in bureaucracy and has a low cost; it is aimed at preventing acute problems from developing and at avoiding the cost of losing valuable staff.

The latest figures on drink driving from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions show an increase in the number of drink-drive deaths and injuries, despite the successes of the drink-drive publicity campaigns in past years. Why is there such an increase?

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has now taken responsibility for licensing and, worryingly, may end up taking decisions about more flexible licensing hours in isolation from Home Office concerns about alcohol-related violence. Any increase in licensing hours must be accompanied by an assessment of the additional measures that will be needed to prevent disorder and to ensure that people with an alcohol problem will be referred for help if they are arrested. I am informed by Hertfordshire Alcohol Problems Advisory Service that the local arrest referral scheme is for drugs only, yet more than half of those referred for help have serious alcohol problems. However, without a Government decision to make alcohol a priority, no funding is available to set up an equivalent alcohol scheme or to deal with those with alcohol problems who are inevitably identified by the drugs scheme.

Those examples highlight the need for a national strategy on alcohol misuse. None of the issues can be considered in isolation from the larger policy picture. The complexity of alcohol misuse and the fact that it occurs in so many different settings demonstrate the need for a rounded strategy with the input and support of all key Departments that have a role in relation to alcohol policies. Despite powerful evidence of the human and financial cost of alcohol problems, I am surprised and concerned that the Treasury has not yet been persuaded of the potential to reduce alcohol-related harm and its related costs through proper funding of a national alcohol strategy made up of preventive and remedial measures.

Lack of a national strategy means that, more often than not, alcohol misuse is not dealt with locally, as other issues are identified as national set priorities, with funding, and those issues are dealt with first. Without a national framework for action, no one has the task of taking the lead. Where localities take the initiative on alcohol issues, the quality of action varies. Experience and good practice is not shared. In addition, there is an unwelcome impact on specialist alcohol services across the country.

The promise of a Government strategy has led to a limbo period. Local commissioners for health and local authorities are waiting for national priorities to be set before deciding which services to fund, and to what level. That inevitably leads to the loss of skilled staff from alcohol services, exacerbating an already worrying situation in which insufficient funding is available to provide an adequate service to meet local needs. Although HAPAS provides a high-quality service, it struggles to meet the demand for counselling and treatment. Because funders are uncertain about what

they ought to be funding, I ask the Minister to give me an assurance that alcohol counselling services, including early intervention, will be at the heart of the strategy.

I urge the Government to ensure that a properly funded alcohol strategy is produced as soon as possible. It must not merely focus on a limited number of non-contentious areas, but must seize the opportunity to bring about real change in our drinking culture by taking a fully rounded approach that tackles all aspects of alcohol misuse in one comprehensive strategy. Substantial action is required to make a real difference, which in the longer term will result in a healthier country and less strain on publicly funded services. It will also make our towns and communities more pleasant places to be.

1.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on securing this debate. It gives us an excellent opportunity to bring the issues up to date. I would like to acknowledge her extensive personal experience on the all-party parliamentary group, which is underpinned by a great deal of local action in her constituency and area. It is particularly valuable for Members to bring to these debates not just a sense of overarching strategy but personal experience of services on the ground. We are all informed as a result.

We must acknowledge that alcohol is an enjoyable part of life for many people in this country. Some 92 per cent. of men and 86 per cent. of women in Great Britain drink alcohol, and the vast majority do so moderately and sensibly without harming themselves or others. However, some misuse alcohol, with potentially devastating consequences for them, their families and communities. The hon. Lady illustrated, in her wide-ranging speech, the breadth of the problems. They are not confined to matters of health, education, crime and disorder or employment. Once a situation of alcohol misuse has arisen in a society, all of those areas give cause for concern. We must bear that in mind when we develop ideas and strategies for tackling the problems.

There are a number of specific health risks in the misuse of alcohol. For example, roughly 30 per cent. of accidents are alcohol-related. I am told that between 25 and 50 per cent. of drownings are connected with alcohol. In 1999, there were 420 deaths from drink-driving and alcohol is a factor in about half of pedestrian deaths on the roads. The number of short-term health risks is huge, and there are long-term health risks as well. Some 3 per cent. of cancers can be attributed to alcohol. Alcohol misuse is the most common cause of liver disease. In 1999, there were 4,700 deaths from liver disease, and 39 per cent. of men and 8 per cent. of women who attempt suicide are chronic problem drinkers. A huge amount of despair is caused not just to the people involved but to their families.

As the hon. Lady outlined, all those problems place immense pressure on the national health service in terms of both hospital treatment and primary care. The hon. Lady also highlighted the pressure that alcohol misuse places on accident and emergency departments. I am conscious of those pressures. I have visited casualty departments on a Saturday evening, when I was involved in "casualty watch" in a previous incarnation, and I have seen for myself, at first hand, the terrible problems that staff face from people who have misused alcohol become violent and, been injured, and who are not susceptible to the most caring and compassionate treatment that is available.

I assure the hon. Lady that, as happens for people with mental health problems, there is no bar to putting workers in accident and emergency departments to try to ensure that people are treated appropriately and directed to other services, especially if the immediate presentation of alcohol may wear off but there is an underlying problem. Many A and E departments are putting such measures in place because they recognise that that reduces stress on staff and, in the long term, helps to stop the recurrence of problems, because the same people with the same problems present almost every weekend. Diverting such people into other services is part of reforming emergency care. That was mentioned in the strategy that we issued last week about streaming patients in A and E departments to give them the right care at the right time and in the right place. Extra funding is attached to that strategy: £118 million is being invested now to ensure that we relieve the pressure on A and E departments. Clearly, that is not all related to alcohol misuse, but a portion addresses the tremendous problems faced by staff in A and E departments, especially at weekends.

The hon. Lady rightly highlighted the Government's commitment to formulate and produce a national alcohol strategy. The original timescale was ambitious, and I acknowledge that the strategy has been slow to emerge. However, we must examine that in the context of the Government's specific clinical priorities for early action relating to coronary heart disease, mental health and cancer. Obviously, those matters compete for Government time and development by the Department of Health, and resources must be available in order to make a real impact. I reassure the hon. Lady that we said in the NHS plan that the alcohol strategy would be implemented by 2004. We are on track to meet that target and we shall develop a national strategy.

The hon. Lady highlighted the key issue of how we can draw in not only the Department of Health, but the Department for Education and Skills, the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that we have a joined-up strategy. It should be focused on health without ignoring the other crucial ways in which we can address the problems. It is all very well to have an excellent treatment centre, but if a person does not receive adequate housing, education or access to employment after being released from the centre, the problems that caused the person to misuse alcohol, because of a lack of social support, could kick back in and we could find ourselves in a similar position in subsequent months. Therefore, there must be a genuinely joined-up strategy—I do not say that in the manner in which those words are currently abused.

I reassure the hon. Lady that the absence of a strategy does not mean that nothing happens. The strategy will focus, target and prioritise, and help to draw together ideas. However, many developments have taken place concerning alcohol and crime. The Government recently produced an action plan to tackle alcohol-related crime. The police have new powers to close

[Ms Hazel Blears]

premises that are the focus of disorderly behaviour. Hotspots are targeted and we have more "pubwatch" schemes. In my area of Greater Manchester, the practical step of persuading public houses to use plastic glasses has dramatically reduced the number of horrific and savage facial injuries caused by people misusing alcohol. We have simplified and strengthened local authorities' powers to control drinking in public places. All hon. Members, as constituency Members of Parliament, know the problems of inappropriate drinking in public places and the intimidation that that causes for ordinary people going about their business. Giving local authorities the powers of arrest and to confiscate alcohol addresses the problem.

Over the past three years, the Department for Education and Skills made £21 million available to support the training of teachers to deliver effective drug, alcohol and tobacco education policies. It is key for us to join up those issues. That funding is set to rise to £47.5 million over the next three years, which shows how seriously the Government take public education on the matter.

We have also issued new guidance and assistance to target young men and women in our action to reduce teenage pregnancy. There is clearly a connection between the misuse of alcohol and teenage pregnancy, and trying to ensure that we provide information and education to support young people in making informed choices about not only alcohol but the rest of their lives is important to us.

We have closed a loophole, through the Licensing (Young Persons) Act 2000, which created a new offence of proxy purchasing alcohol—buying alcohol on behalf of others aged under 18. That is a real step forward.

We have also taken action on housing. Rough sleeping has been reduced by about 62 per cent. over the past three years. Many people with alcohol problems fall into housing difficulties, perhaps not paying their rent, being evicted and finding themselves out on the streets. The rough sleepers programme to try to put people in hostels—off the streets and into supportive, caring environments—has been key to tackling some of the problems involved.

The hon. Lady is right to keep up the pressure on the Government to ensure that we produce a strategy and that, in doing so, we take into account the views of voluntary sector groups, user groups and people with hands-on experience of such services. We already have about 600 treatment services throughout the country. About 180 relate purely to alcohol, but many are combined drug and alcohol services, as the same issues apply in terms of detoxification, support and counselling, which, as she said, should be at the heart of the strategy.

We want to reduce the problems of alcohol misuse rather than simply treating them. We are talking as much about putting money into prevention and ensuring that people do not go down that road in the first place, as about providing high-quality treatment services for people already in difficulty. We need to be creative in examining prevention work and finding out what works. I have found that in health promotion we lack an evidence base on campaigns, whether for safe drinking, drugs education or sexual health education. No robust evidence exists to show us how a campaign affects people's behaviour and whether they stop drinking, drink less or stop taking drugs. We have a long way to go before we get to the heart of the matter, and we are doing an awful lot of work in all those services to ensure that when we spend money, we get value from it. We want to ensure that we do not embark on campaigns that are not robust and effective.

Funding is available in the health service for alcohol services. At the moment it is mainstream funding, and it is for local commissioners to decide what their local communities need in terms of alcohol support services.

The hon. Lady is right: developing a strategy will help give focus and priority to this important field. Ensuring that we in the Department of Health join it up with our work on drugs is important. Perhaps even more important are the issues that the hon. Lady highlighted. We must have a strategy that draws in all our partners in Government Departments, education, housing and employment, and involves local government, which delivers many of the services, the voluntary sector, which has been extremely active in devising innovative and imaginative schemes that work, and users of services, because that is how we shall achieve sustainable change and help reduce alcohol misuse.

As I said earlier, the vast majority of people enjoy alcohol in a safe and moderate way, but ensuring that people who are in difficulty, unable to cope and need support, help, treatment and counselling in order to ensure that they and their families can live with dignity and support is a top priority for us. I thank the hon. Lady for bringing the matter to the attention of the Chambers. It is important to continue to progress as quickly as possible and to ensure that we deliver a strategy that lives up to her expectations and the expectations of those involved in the field.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 1 November 2001

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Debt Relief

[Relevant documents: Third Report from the International Development Committee, Session 1997-98, on Debt Relief, HC 563, and the Government's response thereto, HC 1056; the Fourth Report from the International Development Committee, Session 1998-99, on Debt Relief and the Cologne G8 Summit, HC 470; and Fourth Report from the International Development Committee, Session 1999-2000, on Debt Relief—Further Developments, HC 251, and the Government's response thereto, HC 474.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Ainger.*]

2.30 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): Debt relief and poverty reduction must lie at the heart of our response to the challenges—as well as the opportunities—that globalisation presents to our world. This debate is timely, not least in its link to the debate that is taking place in the House. Undoubtedly, there is a link and we wish to recognise that; tackling poverty in the developing world is not a matter for Governments alone. We have had some success in tackling poverty and we should celebrate that as well as responding to the challenges and recognising the distance that we have to go. That success has often been due to grass-roots organisations in the developing world. That is particularly true of those organisations centred on the needs and contributions of women, who are playing their parts as agents of development in the developing world. Moreover, there has been a contribution from grass-roots organisations and non-governmental organisations with a broad base of membership in the developed world, especially in our country. We should rightly use an occasion such as this to pay tribute to the work of NGOs, which have ensured, day in and day out, that debt relief and poverty reduction do not slip off national and global agendas.

Progress towards debt reduction targets accelerated during the past year. We want to go faster but we are achieving a great deal. The issue is vital, as recent events have demonstrated. Those events have shown how closely interdependent all the nations of the world are, and how closely linked are our destinies. Poverty and crippling debt in one part of the world have implications for the whole world, and it is important to recognise that. We have a duty to spread the benefits of rising prosperity as widely as possible.

The United Kingdom has a good track record in tackling debt. We could do more and are determined to do so, but it should not be forgotten that this country called for and secured a review of the original heavily indebted poor countries initiative. We pressed our G7 and other international colleagues to adopt challenging targets on debt reduction and on the number of countries that receive debt relief, and we have made a commitment to grant 100 per cent. debt relief to every country that qualifies under the HIPC initiative.

Of course, freedom from debt is not an end in itself. The international community has, therefore, set challenging targets for reducing poverty, improving health and fostering education. We desperately need to see progress in those areas in particular. It is right that we should have set those targets, and it is right, if we are to call ourselves a community at all, that we should recognise that, in an effective community, nations share responsibility for the welfare of the whole community.

The subject excites interest on both sides of the House and should not be a matter for acrimonious party political debate. I doubt that we will have acrimonious debate in the Chamber today: indeed, I am sure that there will be much consensus. It would not be right to refer to this country's track record in tackling debt relief without mentioning the role that has been played over the years by successive Chancellors and Prime Ministers, and without recognising the rapid progress that has been made in the past four years. Even our political opponents would be obliged to concede that the rate of progress has been unprecedented, and I have no doubt that they will make such a generous concession in the debate in the light of my opening remarks.

It is important to recognise that if we are unable to work together on those issues, we are less likely to be able to break the vicious cycle of debt, poverty and economic decline that has more and more people in its maw. We must build consensus on the need to devote substantial resources to this issue and to make it the focus of all our nation's energies and commitment. If we do not do so, the scale of the human tragedy will be enormous. Every day this year, 30,000 children will lose their fight for life. It is, literally, a fight for life. Several hon. Members have seen such children in the grip of dysentery and respiratory disease, never mind in the last, fatal stages of starvation that bring with them apathy and lassitude. Many children die from curable diseases such as malaria, which is a major killer in the developing world, but which is by no means the only killer that could be prevented if appropriate action were taken. We could do so much more, and we must redouble our efforts to do so.

By the end of the debate, 3,000 more children will have given up that struggle and will no longer be alive. We know that if there were access to appropriate diagnostic tools and drugs—some of which cost little more than 12 cents—that number could be reduced. HIV-AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis kill 5 million people each year, again mostly in developing countries. Millions of cases of HIV could be prevented through well targeted, low cost prevention and care strategies. Countries such as Uganda, Thailand and Senegal have made the prevention of HIV and AIDS a priority, and have managed to stem the spread of the disease. Uganda took an early decision to confront the pandemic head-on and it has done so with great success.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The Financial Secretary has outlined the Government's actions on health issues and they have taken a lead with the global health fund, which was established to tackle the

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

problems that he has described. Will money for that fund be additional to current international aid spending?

Mr. Boateng: I shall come to the global health fund in due course, and I shall also tackle additionality.

Health is not the only issue; education is key. Some 900 million people aged over 15—one sixth of the world's population—are illiterate. Public expenditure per pupil in the 19 least developed countries is less than $40 or £27, compared with $200 or £136 per pupil in developing countries. Some $5,300 more is spent per pupil in advanced economies. In the United Kingdom, spending per pupil aged 14 to 19 is equivalent to $5,316 or £3,625. That is the disparity; £27 is spent at one end of the scale and £3,625 is spent in our country. That is the background against which we must act to ensure that the talents of further generations are not wasted.

Under the historic agreement secured in Cologne, the HIPC initiative was enhanced to provide more debt relief to more countries. In autumn 2000, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank committed themselves to ensuring that debt relief for 20 countries would be agreed by the end of the year. The target was met and then exceeded when agreements were reached for 22 countries. Some 23 countries have now reached that point, and will receive $54 billion of debt relief in total—$34 billion under the HIPC initiative and $20 billion from traditional methods of debt relief. Mozambique is among those countries: it reached the HIPC completion point on 25 September. Three other countries, including Ghana, are expected to reach a decision this year. President Kufuor of Ghana and his Government must be congratulated for deciding to proceed to the HIPC decision point so early in their Administration. That was brave and showed foresight, and they are to be commended.

Many countries that are engaged in armed conflict have yet to benefit from debt relief. As a result, they have exiled themselves from the support that HIPC and the international community can provide. Due to the HIPC initiative, countries' annual debt service payment will be reduced by a third. That represents an average stock of debt reduction of about 50 per cent. on top of debt relief mechanisms such as the Paris Club rescheduling, which reduces debt stock further to 67 per cent. Those are real gains.

The autumn IMF and World Bank meetings were cancelled in the wake of the terrible events of 11 September at the World Trade Centre. Ironically, as a result, some of the poorest people in the world will, or do, feel the aftershock of the appalling attack on the United States. Nevertheless, and importantly, the business of the fund and the bank continues. The G8 leaders' meeting in Genoa this year reaffirmed our commitment to making globalisation work for all citizens, especially the world's poor. The leaders called on countries engaged in conflict to turn away from violence. That remains the hope and focus of determined efforts by the international community and we do not intend to allow the events of 11 September to deflect us.

At the fund's spring meeting, it was agreed for the first time to offer emergency post-conflict assistance on concessionary terms. That will act as a powerful incentive to ease the discord that comes from conflict and to ensure that peace delivers its dividend to people who have been afflicted by armed internal or external conflict.

Significantly, we are working with our international partners, both governmental and non-governmental, to prevent conflict from occurring in the first place. That is particularly important for sub-Saharan Africa, where spending on conflict resolution has increased by 42 per cent. in real terms. The concerted effort to prevent conflict will be an important test of our capacity to ease a situation that all too many countries and people face.

I shall say a few words about the lead given by the United Kingdom. At the beginning of the new millennium, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the task of combating debt and delivering a real reduction in poverty should be seen as central to what we were doing. At a rally, he said

"because poverty is so great and the need is so urgent, neither you nor I want the richest countries to benefit any more from the debts of...the poorest countries".

The Chancellor made it clear to the audience and all 41 HIPC countries that we as a nation would renounce our right to receive any benefit from the historic debt owed by those countries.

Since that time, we have driven forward the international agenda, making it clear that we are all interdependent and have responsibilities. In recognition of that fact, we have imposed a unilateral ban on export credits for unproductive expenditure. That policy means that Britain's export credits will support only productive enterprise that assists social and economic development. We have worked to build capacity in poor countries and reduce the burdens placed on the recipients of aid. Importantly, we have begun writing off the £100 million owed by HIPCs to the Commonwealth Development Corporation and debts owed to the Export Credits Guarantee Department—100 per cent. of all HIPC bilateral debt. That was and remains an important step, but we must do more with our international partners to refocus the debt relief programme with the central object of reducing poverty and providing more debt relief to more countries more quickly.

At the same time as delivering on the reduction of poverty, the provision of education and the construction of a viable national infrastructure in countries afflicted by global poverty, it must be recognised that we cannot achieve our objectives by sentiment alone. We must move from sentiment to strategy. That is the importance of the poverty reduction strategies upon which debt relief is conditional. It is not a question of dropping money into a bottomless pit to be squandered by a ruling elite on their pet projects, wealth and self-glorification or on the pursuit of conflict. The strategies must be firmly rooted in an evidence base that ensures that they reduce poverty and improve the provision of education and the health of the people.

Country-owned, community-operated poverty reduction strategies are, of course, an innovation, but there must be a buy-in from the country receiving them. They have to feel that they own them. It is not about distant and unaccountable organisations prescribing

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

conditions under which aid will be offered in a new form of neo-colonialism. This is about the countries themselves, working in partnership with the international community.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Would he agree that one of the difficulties is that there is a plethora of plans for each of the countries concerned—from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and others—and that we need a single plan that is accepted by the country concerned to help to lead it out of poverty?

Mr. Boateng: We certainly need to recognise the importance of international financial institutions working together to achieve a clear focus to the strategies that are put in place and we have advocated and promulgated a programme of reform of international financial institutions that is designed to achieve a greater and clearer focus.

The importance of the strategies is that they aim to put the countries concerned in a position in which they can reach the targets set internationally for poverty reduction. Those targets are aimed at reducing the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half by 2015; enrolling all children in primary school by 2015; making progress towards gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005; reducing infant and child mortality rates by two thirds by 2015; reducing maternal mortality rates by three quarters by 2015; providing access for all who need them to reproductive health services by 2015; and implementing national strategies for sustainable development by 2005, so as to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015.

Those targets come from agreements and resolutions of a series of world conferences organised by the United Nations in the first half of the 1990s. Conferences are all very well but what makes a difference is what happens to the people who have to live, day in and day out, with the poverty demonstrated by the figures we have shared so far in the debate. We will be judged by that, rather than by our resolutions or our international or domestic debates.

Progress has been made on some of the targets in some parts of the world. For example, China reduced its number of people in poverty from 360 million to 210 million between 1990 and 1998. However, conflict and the spread of HIV-AIDS threatens the achievement of targets in many other areas. Sustained economic growth, which is vital for long-term reductions in poverty, is proving elusive for many countries, particularly in the current circumstances.

I should like to say a few words about the global health fund because, as hon. Members have already indicated, it is of enormous importance and we need to get it right. In some areas it is clear that we need to redouble our efforts. Health is one of them. Together with our international partners, we established the global health fund to assist. The UK's role was integral at its inception. We wanted to ensure that the fund's structure would allow it to address the major communicable diseases of HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, which hit developing countries hard. The fund will support expanding coverage of critical interventions for prevention and treatment of those diseases by providing developing countries with the resources to purchase key commodities and strengthen systems to procure and deliver them effectively, safely and equitably.

The Department for International Development is working with other donors, developing countries and multilateral agencies to ensure that the fund is operational by 1 January 2002. The technical working group, chaired by Professor Chrispus Kiyonge from Uganda—a former Minister of Health who made a distinguished contribution to the development of health policy in that country—was established in Brussels on 27 August. It will meet three times between now and December to take key decisions on the establishment of the fund. It is intended that the fund be launched and become operational at the third meeting.

On resources, the latest tally for contributions stands at $1,831 million from the United States, and the United Kingdom has pledged $200 million over the next five years, to be disbursed when the appropriate structures are in place. That represents a significant contribution to dealing with the problem. I stress again, however, that it is only the beginning and that a great deal of work remains to be done, not least with pharmaceutical companies to get them to play a proper role and make an appropriate contribution.

Many years ago Kwame Nkrumah, speaking of the need for an independent Ghana at a time when the whole continent of Africa was looking forward to independence and freedom from colonial empires, said:

"The right of a people to decide their own destiny, to make their way in freedom, is not to be measured by the yardstick of colour or degree of social development. It is an inalienable right of people which they are powerless to exercise when forces, stronger than they themselves, by whatever means, for whatever reasons, take this right away from them."

Subsequently the old empires that dominated Africa have ceased to exist. What has followed has not always benefited Africa. Sadly, some African countries are now in a worse position in terms of per capita income, infrastructure, health and education than they were at the time of the twilight of empire. That is part of Africa's great tragedy. It has also become clear in the interim period that the forces of oppression were not all imperial. Some were home grown and some have continued to hold too many people in their thrall. Greed, avarice and corruption, as well as a lack of accountability and transparency, have characterised far too many post-colonial Governments.

The good news is that that trend is now being challenged effectively. There is a real sense in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world that it is important to develop democratic institutions, to ensure transparency and accountability and to stop corrupt oligarchies preying on the people of those countries. In the light of that growing recognition, it would be an appalling shame and a dereliction of our responsibilities in the developed world if we did not ensure that the burden of crippling debt acquired over the years was lifted when at last there was a proper strategy in place to tackle the root causes of inequality and development failures. Our debate today is important because it marks the concern of hon. Members from all parties to ensure that combating poverty and providing debt relief remain high on our national agenda.

3 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I welcome the debate. It is a pleasure to face the Financial Secretary to the Treasury across the Chamber once again.

Debt relief and poverty reduction are crucial issues for the United Kingdom and more directly for the countries whose fate we are debating this afternoon. When considering the raw statistics published by organisations such as the World Bank, one must be careful not to become inured to the tragedy of what is taking place in the world. Tables of figures cannot do justice to the truth that there are still countries in Africa where more than 10 children out of every 100 die in infancy. They are not just statistics: most of those deaths are preventable, and every case reflects the most appalling human suffering and tragedy. The 113 million children of primary school age who do not attend any sort of school are more than mere statistics: the talent and energy of those children, our fellow human beings, are wasted because they lack the opportunities that we take for granted for our families.

On behalf of the Opposition, I am happy to tell the Minister that we shall seek a constructive debate on this subject with the Government and with outside organisations. The right hon. Gentleman was right to pay tribute to the work of non-governmental organisations in the field and in pricking the conscience of politicians and suggesting fresh thinking. My party has recently embarked on a major po[illegible]review, as part of which my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and I are looking forward to a sustained dialogue with NGOs and other bodies involved with debt and international development.

I was grateful for the Minister's acknowledgement of the work done when they were in office by John Major and other senior Conservative politicians to bring Britain's influence to bear in the multilateral institutions in an effort to reduce the burden of debt upon the poorest countries in the world. I return the compliment and give the present Administration credit for their energy and the priority that the Government, and the Chancellor of Exchequer personally, have given to the issue. I do not pledge to abstain always from criticising Government during the time that I am Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, and I certainly will not abstain from questioning them about the impact of their policies. However, it will always be our intention to seek constructive dialogue and debate.

It is important to recognise that neither debt relief in general, nor the HIPC scheme in particular, are panaceas. About 80 per cent. of the world's poor live in countries that are not eligible for the HIPC scheme, and all developing countries will depend for their future development upon several means of assistance, of which loans, although important, will be only one. Obviously, aid will continue to be important: the World Bank estimated that a 10 per cent. cut in overall net aid flows could, if implemented, wipe out overnight the entire benefit of the HIPC debt relief arrangements.

Even more important to the long-term sustainability of poorer nations are an increase in world trade and decisions by the industrialised powers to allow much freer access to markets for goods and services produced by developing countries. In that context, I welcome the commitment announced in February by the European Union to remove tariffs and quotas on all imports from less developed countries. If there is time, I hope that the Minister will bring the House up to date on the progress of that agenda and say whether the forthcoming meeting in Doha is likely to include discussions on how to increase access to the markets of developed countries.

As the Minister said, the leaders of poorer countries have responsibilities. Such countries are not helped if we always caricature their people as helpless victims who will inevitably be permanently dependent upon others. The Minister's comments about encouraging signs in Africa were pertinent. Many African countries have been misgoverned and, in some cases, plundered by their rulers. Stable political institutions and the rule of law, as well as sustainable economic policies, create the conditions that allow poor countries to attract investment and ensure that loans and aid are used to the advantage of the population to relieve poverty, not salted away to benefit only a corrupt elite.

Leaving the HIPC scheme and other issues until later, I will focus first on the impact of the current international crisis on the approach of international agencies and our Government to the countries of south and central Asia. I put on the record that I visited Pakistan just over a year ago; the details of the visit are in the appropriate place in the Register of Members' Interests.

To what extent is the British policy on debt cancellation and rescheduling affected by the international crisis and by the political and strategic need to keep some of the countries of central Asia within the alliance against terrorism? Pakistan and the central Asian republics that once formed part of the Soviet Union are poor countries: average annual income in Pakistan is about $500, which is about £730 on today's exchange rate. Central Asian countries are saddled with both the appalling economic and environmental legacy of communism and the consequences of a severe and lasting drought. In addition, Pakistan and other nations bordering Afghanistan have been affected by the flight of millions of Afghan refugees into their territories. There is a clear case for international help.

I hope that the Government are willing to state openly whether there is truth in media suggestions made in recent weeks that the normal rules that apply to poor countries seeking help with debt rescheduling are to be bypassed so as to cement the position of Pakistan and the central Asian republics in the international alliance. Let me give some examples of those reports. On 30 October, the *Financial Times* reported that Pakistan was seeking a debt rescheduling agreement with the Paris Club that would result in the maturity of its Government debt being extended to up to 40 years and its interest payments reduced. I understand—I believe that the Minister will agree—that those terms are usually reserved for much poorer countries.

Other press reports have suggested that the Spanish Government are asking the next European Council of Finance Ministers meeting to discuss an emergency package for the countries affected by war. Since ECOFIN is due to meet in a matter of days, it would be helpful if the Minister could advise us whether that topic will be on the agenda. The French newspaper *Libération* says that G8 and the international development banks will convene a meeting shortly to consider a package of emergency help for central Asia.

There is a powerful case for making exceptions for political reasons. It could be argued that the current overriding priority should be the campaign to defeat international terrorism. However, if that is the case, I hope that our Government will be candid about what is going on so that everyone clearly understands. I hope too that in any international discussions the Government will be alert to the risks of misuse of concessionary loans. The countries concerned already have high levels of military spending as a proportion of their gross domestic product, and it would be wrong if debt concessions intended to relieve poverty in those central Asian countries were used to subsidise further expenditure on their armed forces.

As the Minister made clear, there has been some progress to report on the HIPC scheme. By the end of June this year, 23 countries—most in Africa—had reached decision point and began to receive debt service relief. According to the World Bank, that relief will over time amount to about £34 billion and will reduce the indebtedness of recipient counties to below the average of all developing nations. The bank states that after HIPC relief those countries will spend about 2 per cent. of GDP on debt service, compared with 7 per cent. on social expenditure, including primary health care and education. I endorse the Minister's comments about the importance of giving priority to expenditure on education and health and to involving civil society, especially women, in a sense of ownership of the poverty reduction strategies that are part of the HIPC package.

I welcome the progress that has been made, but I have several concerns and questions to ask about the British contribution to debt relief and the HIPC scheme generally. Addressing British policy first, the Government should be given credit for their decision to go beyond the HIPC scheme. At the final event of Jubilee 2000, the Chancellor announced that the UK would renounce completely its right to debt repayment from the HIPC states. His announcement was in two parts. He said that immediate 100 per cent. debt relief would be given to those countries that had agreed at the decision point poverty reduction programmes under HIPC. I assume therefore that 100 per cent. relief is being given to the 23 states that have reached the decision point.

However, the Chancellor also said that other HIPC countries for which no poverty reduction programme had yet been agreed would still make debt repayments, but that Britain would hold them in trust, with the idea that moneys would be released to those countries once a poverty reduction strategy was in place. Will the Financial Secretary tell me, at the end of the debate or in writing, how many countries fall into that category, how much is held in trust, what happens to the interest on that money—I hope that it is added to the money, not channelled into the Exchequer bank account—and what happens if, for any reason, a country fails to reach its decision point? As the right hon. Gentleman pointed out, a number of the very poor countries we are discussing are plagued by civil war and desperate internecine conflicts. We understand that Britain, the IMF and the World Bank cannot easily bring about a resolution of such disputes, but are we to insist indefinitely that those countries continue making interest payments?

I wish the HIPC scheme well and hope that it works, but we need to explore some of the criticisms and concerns raised by NGOs and other organisations in recent months. There has been confusion over the total sums of money involved, but the Financial Secretary's remarks explained to a considerable extent how that disparity in figures has come about. The World Bank always talks about £34 billion of debt relief over time, whereas the G7 communiqué after the Genoa summit, and the Chancellor in the House on 19 July this year, referred to debt relief of £53 billion. I understood the Minister to say that the higher figure was made up of the £34 billion from the HIPC scheme, plus £20 billion from what he called "conventional debt relief". I would be grateful for further explanation of whether that £20 billion of conventional debt relief is targeted only on the 23 countries that have reached their decision point, or whether we are talking about the sum in the context of every eligible HIPC country. Is that £20 billion, like the HIPC £34 billion, dependent on the poverty reduction programme and the strategy of the World Bank and HIPC, or is it a concession that is being made in any case to the poorest countries under previously negotiated arrangements?

The fact that the scheme is not progressing as fast as its authors hoped or intended is also of concern. It started in September 1997 when the Mauritius mandate set a target for three quarters of eligible countries to reach decision points by the end of 2000. That target was endorsed by the G7 at the Cologne summit in June 1999, but it appears to have been revised downwards in January 2000. In his Gilbert Murray memorial lecture, the Chancellor said that he hoped that 25 countries would be signed up and at decision point by the end of that year—in other words, 10 months ago. Sadly, by the end of 2001, only 23 countries will have agreed their poverty reduction strategies, reached decision point and begun to receive debt relief under the HIPC scheme. That is just over half of the eligible countries, rather than three quarters as was originally hoped.

I acknowledge that in some cases a civil war or some other conflict has made progress impossible. However, I would have thought that the existence of conflicts in countries such as Congo or Sierra Leone was known when the target of three quarters of eligible countries was first set in 1997. Why has the target to which the international community agreed proved impossible to meet? I accept that Britain is only one of a number of countries involved and that it is not in the gift of the Financial Secretary or the Chancellor to command every creditor nation or the international organisations to jump when the British Government want them to, but some explanation of the failure to reach the target is required.

Doubts also exist about the long-term sustainability of the HIPC scheme. The Minister will have seen the Jubilee Plus report that was published in September. Although it contains some comments with which I disagree, it is an interesting report that asks searching questions about HIPC and provides statistics and other evidence that needs to be examined. It argues that the indicators of sustainability employed by the World Bank and the IMF are flawed. I would be interested to hear the Minister's views.

The report suggests, with evidence to support its conclusions, that even if one applies the criteria established by the World Bank and the IMF, the scheme

[Mr. David Lidington]

will fail some of the very poorest countries. It predicts that the debts of Chad, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Niger will be unsustainable in terms of the World Bank's own criteria after they have received HIPC relief. The total debt of some countries is even projected to be higher after that relief than it would be if the scheme had never existed. The striking case cited in the report was of Gambia, whose debt is projected to fall dramatically at completion point in 2002, but to rise again afterwards. The reason given for that projected rise is that the scheme would not reduce the stock of debt so much as reschedule it over a longer period. The level of debt service would not be adequate to offset the build-up of interest on the existing stock of that country's debt. If the Jubilee Plus critique is correct—if as many as seven countries would still have unsustainable debts according to the World Bank's criteria, and if some countries would have higher debts with HIPC than they would without it—we should seek convincing answers about the flaws of the scheme in practice.

A further cause for concern which has been aggravated by recent international events is whether the assumptions on which the World Bank has made its forecasts are over-optimistic. International institutions that have made projections for the development of the poorest countries have assumed that there will be fairly vigorous economic growth during the next decade, which will ensure that debt service costs fall whether as a proportion of exports, GDP or Government revenues. They have assumed that exports from HIPC countries will grow much faster in the next decade than they did in the 1990s. I am not sure whether we would be wise to place great faith in such assumptions.

Commodity prices have been soft, and the prices of some of the key commodities on which the poorest countries depend, such as coffee, cocoa and tobacco, have fallen—quite sharply in some cases—since the events of 11 September. Oxfam says that the crisis that those terrorist outrages have sparked is creating

"an economic disaster in developing countries".

It cites the problems caused in Uganda by the dramatic drop in coffee prices. Uganda is one of the countries with a good track record under the HIPC scheme, and it would be a tragedy if that progress went into reverse now. The IMF thinks that Niger will take 15 years to reach the International Development Association's $895 GNP per capita threshold, but the private sector is more sceptical: Standard and Poor's assessment is that Niger would take 366 years to reach that standard. Again, that raises questions about whether the HIPC scheme is a sustainable, long-term solution to debt problems.

The Minister will know that Jubilee Plus and others have argued for a different approach to some of the problems that the debt crisis has caused. Jubilee Plus has said that the international community must create an international bankruptcy procedure to allow for an emergency standstill and for international arbitration to re-order a poor country's debts and so enable it to continue to trade without having to damage its social infrastructure. This is my first parliamentary outing as the Opposition spokesman on this subject, and I shall not commit my party to endorsing that proposal, but it is an interesting idea that should be further examined. I certainly want to engage in a dialogue about its advantages and drawbacks with the relevant organisations. I was intrigued to find that Jubilee Plus—which one might assume is on the political left, especially given the authors of some of its publications—is not the sole voice backing the idea: it has also been endorsed by the United Nations Secretary-General and by Professor Jeffrey Sachs, who was regarded as one of the keenest apostles of free markets in Russia and eastern Europe.

The proposal would raise many complicated issues and would have to be enforceable in national courts. There would be implications for the IMF, as well as a risk that an international bankruptcy arrangement would result in the price of borrowing rising for all countries, including those that had acted responsibly, spent their loans well and produced a good return on them. The World Bank has noted that the public debt of low-income countries—not just the HIPC—amounts to $460 billion. Poorer countries will need to borrow to finance development well into the foreseeable future. Against that one must set the difficulties inherent in the current system. A question mark hangs over whether some of the debts of the very poorest countries, however frequently they are rescheduled, will ever be repaid. Are we merely deferring the day when we have to admit that for the world's poorest countries, talk of debt repayment is pretty much a fiction?

I hope that we shall have many opportunities to debate the detail of specific proposals and policies to tackle this important issue. I conclude by saying that my party will remain determined to seek cross-party agreement wherever that is possible. Our policy objective will be to enable our fellow human beings to have the material standard of life and the opportunities for health and education that we all take for granted and to which they are entitled simply by reason of their humanity.

3.31 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Thank you for calling me so early in the debate, Mr. O'Hara. I apologise to my colleagues in advance—I may need to slip out of the debate later to attend some business in the House.

I congratulate the Government on what they have done and on scheduling this debate. It shows a willingness to highlight an issue that is of vital importance to millions throughout the world and of great interest to many individuals, Churches and other organisations in our constituencies. Although much has been done, if one examines the scale of what is needed it becomes clear that we have taken only the first steps to alleviating poverty. We need a sea change in thinking on the issue and, more importantly, a sea change in the lives of people in heavily indebted countries.

The Government led the calls for and signed up to the international objective to halve world poverty by 2015. That is a glorious objective. Kofi Annan, however, has said that without further debt cancellation the target is only a pipe dream—not just difficult or challenging, but a pipe dream. There are problems with the current HIPC process. Although I shall have time to touch on only two of them, I hope that other hon. Members will outline other problems and the available solutions.

I should like to focus on the potential changes in the light of the outrageous attacks in America on 11 September. Although I will not give the terrorists the satisfaction of hearing me say that the world has changed, I do not think that we can possibly ignore what happened. Thousands of innocent people were killed, and thousands of others were injured. It seems that we cannot express enough our sympathy with the families who were affected. However, equal grief and sympathy need to be shared with families in the poorest countries of the world, who have daily to come to terms with the same number of people dying. The fact that it happens every day does not make it more acceptable but less so. The ignorance of many people—who do not know that people's lives would be saved if Governments could afford to spend more on health and education instead of on debt repayments—should not make the situation any more acceptable.

There has been enormous international effort in response to 11 September. However, I cannot help feeling that that sends out the message that we value the lives of those who died in the World Trade Centre more than those of people who die unnecessarily in the poorest countries of the world. I accept that the Prime Minister has taken steps to recognise that difficulty. In his speech to the party conference, which the Minister mentioned, the Prime Minister spoke of building a world in which all individuals have the

"economic and social freedom to develop their potential to the full ... The starving, the wretched, the dispossessed, the ignorant ... they too are our cause."

That cause requires significant debt relief, even more so due to the world economic slowdown that has been predicted since 11 September and will hit the poorest the hardest.

The events of 11 September have led to a huge increase in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. Pakistan, a middle-income country in conflict that has so far been excluded from the HIPC process, is now being considered. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) said that it seemed as though Pakistan would be given help and questioned whether it should because it is seen as a middle-income country, but the help is needed. Militarily, it is a high spending country, but that means that help needs to be tied conditionally. It should not take thousands of lives to be lost in America for Pakistan's need for help to be appreciated and for action to be taken on it. Other countries such as Nigeria, which is also excluded from the HIPC process, deserve support. They should not be ignored simply because they happen not to border a country where there is a crisis to which everyone's eyes are turned.

Whatever we think of the Government of Pakistan, we should consider how the debt originated. Most of it accumulated because foreign Governments made large loans to the previous military ruler, President Zia. Pakistan's debt service repayments make up 47 per cent. of the Government's budgetary expenditure, yet the country has great needs. Adult literacy is at 44 per cent., which is lower than the figures of many countries in the HIPC process. Bolivia's figure, for example, is 84 per cent., and Zambia's is 76 per cent.

The number of people in Pakistan who live without the basic minimum levels of nutrition is shooting up hugely, and was up to 44 million by 1999, more than in many western countries put together. The reality of the problems was conceded by the IMF, which said that the "long-term external outlook" was

"unsustainable, with most debt indicators worse than for many countries supported by the HIPC initiative".

That shows that the HIPC process does not reach far enough to all the countries that need its help.

The Paris Club is now coming forward and it seems that Pakistan will be given help, although only bilateral help. The international institutions—the IMF and the World Bank—are not doing enough to help countries such as Pakistan. There are strong suggestions that the IMF will soon provide Pakistan with an additional $2 billion, but in loans. New loans cannot be the answer for a country that puts nearly half its money into debt service repayments. Pakistan is not the only case. Eleven HIPCs are denied debt relief because they are engaged in conflict. They all need help, albeit conditional help due to their military problems.

There is an undeniable link between poverty and conflict. Debt relief that ploughs money into poverty alleviation programmes would decrease the chances of conflicts breaking out and neuter the appeal of any fundamentalism of the sort behind the 11 September atrocities. People are vulnerable to extreme ideas when they are hungry, poor and desperate, but the conflicts help no one in the long run. As we saw on 11 September, no one is immune from the dangers of fundamentalism. Preventive measures such as conditional debt relief for countries in conflict must be a better way forward than for everyone to deal with the aftermath of conflicts. The 11 HIPCs in conflict must receive help, and so must countries outside the HIPC initiative such as Nigeria.

Nigeria's total debt is becoming worse rather than better; it is three and a half times its level in 1980. Since then, its bilateral debt has grown by a staggering 3,350 per cent., and debt and education spending have reversed their positions. Spending on servicing debt has risen from 2 per cent. to 8 per cent. of GNP, while spending on education has fallen from more than 6 per cent. to just over 1 per cent. Even so, Nigeria pays only about half its scheduled debt service, and for every £1 it receives in aid, £100 flow the other way in servicing debt.

Nigeria was originally classified as a HIPC country but in August 1998 the IMF and World Bank removed it from the list. Debt relief is vital if the new civilian Government are to survive. We should do more to support the new democracy there. Poverty has been at the root of ethnic and religious conflict that has torn the country apart many times. There is also real potential for problems of fundamentalism there. Debt relief is needed to get the people out of poverty, to allow the Government to spend meaningful amounts on public services, health and education, and to consolidate democracy.

We should also remember the ecological debt that the west owes to Nigeria. Companies such as Shell and Mobil have had a huge impact on the Niger delta—they have plundered it—with great ecological costs. Some of the long-term effects of oil pollution on that country are still to be seen. Nigeria is among the countries that need help.

In addition to the millions of people affected by debt, there are millions who say that the issue should be a Government priority. Twenty-four million people

[Ms Julia Drown]

signed the Jubilee 2000 petition that called for more than the $100 billion of debt relief that was achieved. While $100 billion every 20 years is not a bad start—indeed, it is an achievement, amounting to $4,000 for every person who signed the petition, which is good going—much more still needs to be done. We need to improve the HIPC process to give conditional help to countries in conflict. We need to give more bilateral and, particularly, multinational institutional help, through the IMF and the World Bank, to countries that are outside HIPC but which are still desperate. We also have to use our influence to bring other countries that are not yet so firmly on board, such as Japan, into the process. We need to show that it is in Japan's interests to create a more stable and prosperous world.

The Minister said that 11 September must not deflect the work being done on debt. Events since that date show what can be done with political will. Not only should the Government not be deflected, but even more energy and commitment should be expended on stopping the unnecessary loss of thousands of lives every day.

3.42 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I too congratulate the Government on selecting this subject for debate, and on choosing a senior Treasury Minister to deal with it. The two facts suggest that the issue is at the heart of Government thinking.

I apologise for the fact that I am to speak in this debate, rather than the Liberal Democrat spokesman on the issue, who is speaking on the Floor of the House. My credentials for speaking at all on this matter are a little dated. In the mid-1980s I worked with Harold Lever, who later became Lord Lever, on what became the Lever report. That eventually gave birth to a series of initiatives in the Commonwealth, notably the Kingston and Toronto initiatives, laying some of the foundations for the present HIPC initiative. Conservative and, later, Labour Ministers energetically followed up that work, to their credit.

The problem about having spent a long time working on a problem is that one tends to develop a certain world-weary cynicism at seeing the wheel being enthusiastically reinvented. The problem goes back a long way. I think that it was at the 1976 summit of the UN conference on trade and development that the issue of low income, debt and debt relief was first argued through. A quarter of a century later we are still trying to get to grips with it.

My second introductory point is that I have mixed feelings about the way in which the debt problem, or the loan conduct problem, has reached the heart of the debate on development. Although I am humbled by the enormous commitment shown by many British people, Churches and NGOs on the issue—their commitment is inspirational and Members of Parliament should do all that we can to encourage it—the danger is that we shall focus on a small corner of the jigsaw and ignore the rest. Trade and capital flows, which the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) mentioned, are still important and relevant.

I want to focus on the HIPC initiative and the current state of affairs. I do not want to go over the controversies about numbers, I believe that the value of debt relief for the 23 countries that have so far gone through the first stage of the process is about $20 billion, but that figure is largely meaningless because it relates to flows in the distant future. The current value is much smaller.

It is probably more useful to think about annual debt relief. My understanding is that that will be about $74 million—million, not billion—per year over the next five years, and about $65 million per year in the subsequent five years. We are not talking big bucks; these are relatively small sums, and even they are probably inflated because some of the countries were not paying the debt and probably never would. That is therefore a reduction from a hypothetical level. We are talking about modest but valuable assistance.

I should like to expand on some of the criticisms that have already been mentioned. First, the problem of sustainability has been made much worse by the events of the past few months. It now seems almost certain that there will be some form of global recession, affecting the United States, Germany and much of western Europe and east Asia. Recession will inevitably depress commodity prices—it always does—and the definition of sustainability, which I seem to recall entails a move from a 300 per cent. to a 150 per cent. debt to export ratio over the next three years, would be wildly optimistic in an environment in which export yields were decreasing substantially in a world of decreasing commodity prices.

Such a scenario would be much easier to deal with if international institutions existed that could handle fluctuating earnings from developing country exporters. The problem is that the structures are not satisfactory. The IMF has had a compensatory financing facility for many years, but it is highly conditional and very expensive and it is not something that the countries that we have been talking about can use. The European Union has a stabilisation of export earnings facility. That, too, goes back many years, but it is both limited in quantity and rigid in its application. Therefore, neither of those two schemes is likely to rescue such countries.

If there is a significant economic downturn and if it results in a significant depression of commodity prices, the framework within which HIPC concessionality has been devised will have to be rewritten. I hope that the Government are willing to acknowledge that.

My second point relates to the efficiency of the scheme. When I looked through the current progress report what struck me was that 23 countries have gone through the first stage of debt relief, but only three have completed the process. It is a complicated scheme. For a country to take full advantage of it, it has to satisfy such demanding processes as the poverty reduction programme, which entails three years, I think, of proven adjustment. Therefore it has to have stable, highly committed and highly competent government. That is a rather testing set of assumptions, and many countries are not going all the way through the pipeline.

Both the hon. Member for Aylesbury and the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) have made the point about conflict-affected countries such as Sierra

Leone, Congo and Ethiopia that do not simply have economic problems resulting from war, but have fallen into arrears to the IMF, and the IMF will not trigger release of debt relief unless those arrears are cleared. It is unrealistic to consider poverty reduction programmes for such countries, when they are still talking about basic reconstruction and putting simple administration in place. The HIPC framework, which assumes a country at peace, does not fit that model; some degree of flexibility must be introduced to cope with such countries.

There is also the problem of countries falling outside the number of those in the scheme; 23 are in the scheme, but 41 could be in it. Within the 41, Ghana should be the next of the big countries to begin the process. It has taken a lot of difficult decisions in the past two decades and it would be good for that to be recognised by its entrance being accelerated.

The difficult case, as the hon. Member for South Swindon has acknowledged, is Nigeria. I speak with feeling on the subject because, in my job before becoming an MP, I had the fruitless task of trying to persuade General Abacha and his cronies to adopt more sensible policies. However, they have gone. In those days, it would have been stupid to press debt relief on Nigeria because the money would have simply gone into bank accounts here instead of being used for Nigerian development. Fortunately they have gone, and Mr. Obasanjo and his Government are clearly committed to taking a more proactive approach to development. They are doing a lot of sensible and quite courageous things, but they need to be supported. Whether it is done under HIPC or a parallel programme does not matter, provided that they receive help. Nigeria is the biggest country in Africa, and the demonstrative effect of what it does is enormously important. I therefore hope to receive some encouraging signals that Nigeria is on the list and is being actively considered for something substantial.

As for Pakistan, I have rather mixed feelings. I understand that the British initiative so far—perhaps the Minister will confirm this—is to relieve £20 million of its £50 million official debt, which is about 0.01 per cent. of Pakistan's external debt. Pakistan clearly needs help with the cost of refugees, and I would totally support anything that helped it to cope with that problem, but we are in great danger of thinking only of economic sweeteners designed to help a military Government who are doing us political favours. Some dangerous things are happening with Pakistan, such as its textile export quotas being arbitrarily written off, which drive a coach and horses through a sensible trade policy. I hope that what happens with Pakistan is measured and takes account of further developments and the needs of other countries in the region such as Bangladesh and India, which as far as I know are not being given any extra assistance.

I shall say a little about the relationship between HIPC and poverty reduction, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for South Swindon. HIPC can play a useful role in poverty reduction only if that role is substantial. I believe that the debt relief already given amounts to about 2 per cent. to 3 per cent. of the GDP of the countries concerned. That is not a large sum. It is only a small lever, which will make it difficult to move such a large weight. I fully support the principle that debt relief should be linked to poverty reduction. Of course it should: we do not want the money going into corruption or into elite and ostentatious lifestyles. Although the agencies must ensure that that does not happen, we must be realistic about how much poverty reduction can be achieved with programmes that in aggregate offer rather small resources.

I wonder how much new money is contributed by the HIPC initiative and the wider debt reduction programme. What matters ultimately is whether that new money is bringing new flows to developing countries. Analytically there is no distinction between a new aid flow and debt relief except for the fact that debt relief is free foreign exchange. If increased debt relief is offset by reduced aid flows, because people think that the problem is being solved, those countries are no better off. My question to the Treasury is how much of those additional resources are genuinely additional? I know that it is difficult to prove the point, but some conviction on that score would be helpful.

The looming additionality debate is a big issue, because the debt relief that has been agreed under HIPC is about £30 billion, half of which is in the form of debt relief given by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the regional development agencies—the multilaterals. It is right that they should be involved in debt relief; indeed, it would be meaningless to talk about debt relief unless they were involved. However, the funds of the World Bank, and particularly of the International Development Association, have to be replenished. Simply using their reserves or resources to write off debt will not advance long-term development unless those countries are genuinely replenished at a higher level. I hope that the Minister will give us a commitment that the wider context of additional flows is being properly considered, both in general and in relation to the multilaterals.

We are often pessimistic about development. I have been involved in the issue in varying degrees for a long time, and some positive things are happening. If one had listed the countries that would qualify for HIPC 25 years ago, Bangladesh would have headed the list and India would not have been far behind; but those countries are now producing real development and, although they still have vast numbers of very poor people, poverty is visibly and distinctly declining. If one were to ask Indians today if they wanted debt relief, they would be offended because it would affect their international borrowing capacity. Although China and many other countries in east Asia also have shown real progress in many respects, there is a hard core, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where problems are getting worse and a concentrated effort from the international community is required. As the hon. Member for Aylesbury said, that is not a matter only of debt relief, but of aid and trade.

I fully support the European Union's everything but arms initiative and the efforts being made on multilateral trade negotiations that focus on the problems of developing countries and remove access barriers. If we can put all those ingredients in place, we shall have a genuinely comprehensive approach to the development problem of which we can be proud.

3.55 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) is not the official spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats on this area of

[Glenda Jackson]

policy, but he could have fooled me—he made an extremely interesting and well-informed contribution to the debate. I congratulate the Government on affording the Chamber the opportunity to discuss these issues.

Not a single hon. Member could say that such issues do not feature regularly and at great volume in their constituency postbags. I am holding a letter from a constituent, Mr. Keiran Proffer, who was aware of this debate and urged me to ask several questions and to state on his behalf his views on the alleviation of the appalling poverty that leads to almost incomprehensible deaths among children, often from preventable diseases; a total lack of education; and, for many people, the belief that they and their families have no possibility of hope or advancement.

In his letter, Mr. Proffer says:

"The World Bank and International Monetary Fund must take swifter and deeper measures to cancel debt, with refinancing from the G7 nations as necessary."

He is concerned about the limited number of countries that are on the HIPC list. He also argues that there are

"at least 50 countries that are both heavily indebted and poor",

and thinks that the amount of debt relief due to be delivered is totally inadequate. However, he admits that

"there have been successes—debt cancellation works".

I must be honest and say that I am not convinced that, on its own, debt cancellation does work. Although I was a strong supporter of Jubilee 2000, as were many of my constituents, I fear that—almost inevitably, given the size of the problem that we are attempting to deal with, with the best possible motives—we may be deluding ourselves if we believe that there is just one answer to the immensely complex problems that have arisen in the world as a result of aspects of human nature such as greed, violence and intransigence. The problems created by the deprivation of a vast portion of the world of what we, as a developed nation, regard almost as ours by right—although we know that in truth it is not—can seem insurmountable. I am worried that a sizeable proportion of the world may be coming to believe that the only simple solution is debt cancellation.

I agree with the hon. Member for Twickenham about additional aid. However, I disagree strongly with my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown), who said that poverty and deprivation cause people to fight. That is not true. People who are genuinely poor do not have the energy to fight, as is evident to those who have been to third-world countries, as I have been privileged to do. The obvious example that comes to mind is that of Ethiopia, which I visited in 1985 at the behest of Oxfam. The most remarkable aspect of that visit was the equality of poverty. A civil war was going on, but neither of the warring parties prevented aid from getting to the people who needed it. I should say, in the light of the current debate on the Floor of the House, that that is in marked contrast to what is happening in Afghanistan, if we are to believe what we read. The shared experience of poverty and of seeing children or elderly parents die did not provoke in any of the people whom I was privileged to meet the trigger for engaging in violence. During my time there—I questioned the aid agencies closely on this matter—not one sack of grain was stolen, but everybody was starving. Not one area in which the necessary food supplies were stored needed a lock. My point is that people who are truly deprived do not create conflict.

Ms Drown: The point that I wanted to get across, which I clearly failed to do, is that there is a potential link among poverty, lack of education and vulnerability to becoming involved in fundamentalism and conflict. There is a better route: by educating and supporting people we can show them that there is a better world and life for them and their families.

Glenda Jackson: I would not disagree with my hon. Friend's remarks, but when I hear the word "fundamentalism" the next word that comes to my mind is "Christian". Although Christian fundamentalists are, in my experience, extremely well educated and neither poor nor hungry, they will argue, for example, that they are entirely within their rights to blow up abortion clinics and publish on the internet the names of gynaecologists who are prepared to carry out abortions. Fundamentalism is not necessarily the trigger.

I shall return to my point, which I am reluctant to give up: in the main, conflict comes from basic human nature. We all have it, and it is reprehensible, but we shall get nowhere if we do not acknowledge that although human beings can do their best in the scale of things, it is equally possible for them to do their worst. That stems from greed, arrogance and a belief that one, whoever one may be, is superior or that others are inferior. A lack of education and integration, and an inability to tolerate an alternative argument, keep societies, individuals and nations in situations that we, in our privileged position, find unacceptable.

We have a moral duty—the world has this moral duty—to examine consistently what we find unacceptable in this area. We equally have an intellectual and moral duty to argue, not only within our own Chamber but in international chambers and across our country, that there is no simple solution to the problems with which we are attempting to deal. If we pretend that there is such a solution, we are deluding ourselves and cheating those whom we are most committed to helping. A great deal is being done, but more needs to happen. I should like to see greater trumpeting of the world's successes. The process of bringing to the world the benefits that it deserves is, in many instances, made more difficult by the problem seeming insuperable. Nevertheless, the problem can be and is being overcome.

I mentioned my experiences in Ethiopia, which, in 1985, was suffering its second great famine. When we saw the pictures we thought the problem insuperable, but it was dealt with. In Ethiopia, I met two little nurses who had never been out of England in their lives. They were faced by 150,000 starving people in a field. They could not save them all, but they achieved a great deal with the help of people in the area. We can achieve a lot, but we must not delude ourselves about how we can do so. Similarly, we must not delude the people whom we are trying to help about our methods.

I was interested to hear in the speech of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) that the Opposition are re-examining their policy in consultation with agencies and non-governmental organisations,

which is something that the Government also do. I hope that the Opposition will have discussions with the people in the countries that we want to help, and not necessarily with the Governments and the experts that have been there for a long time trying to solve particular problems. If we spoke more often to the people on the ground there could be enormous benefits. We know from experiences in our constituencies and areas of interest that the most interesting idea often comes from an unexpected quarter. Again, we delude ourselves if we believe that we can turn the world around by letting our anxiety result not in giving real help, but in an imposition of our ideas.

4.5 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I welcome debate, and the Government's commitment to take this issue forward. It carries on the work begun by John Major and continued my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) as Chancellor. The commitment of the present Chancellor and his team is evident.

I apologise to the Chamber for the fact that what I will say this afternoon may be a little technical, but this subject is technical in many ways. Today's debate has three reports from the Select Committee on International Development tagged. They were interesting reports, which I commend to the Chamber, and they are an indication of the importance that the Select Committee attached to the subject in the previous Parliament. I am sure that the Select Committee will return to it during this Parliament.

First, the good news: the G8 summit at Cologne for the first time stated explicitly that the central purpose of debt relief was to free resources for investment and to tackle poverty. I agree with the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) that there is no total solution, but the issue remains of importance. The approach of ensuring that resources were freed for investment and to tackle poverty was strongly supported by the UK Government, as stated in their response to the last report on debt relief by the Select Committee. My first technical point derives from a quote from that response:

"The reduction in the export ratio from a range of 200-250 per cent. to a 150 per cent. greatly improves the prospect of countries achieving a sustainable exit from their debt problems."

That should be a move forward that underscores the relationship between debt relief and poverty reduction. That relationship is crucial for half the population of heavily indebted poor countries, who live below the dollar-a-day poverty line in grinding persistent poverty; it is crucial for the one in six children who die before the age of five of poverty-related diseases, and for the 50 million children who are not in school today.

It is self-evident that heavily indebted poor countries urgently need every dollar of the $59 million collectively that, without this initiative, they would be obliged to transfer to their creditors each day. They now have that money to fight disease, recover from conflict and reduce poverty. That is good news for Uganda, Mozambique and Benin which are already benefiting from the HIPC programme.

The bad news begins when we look at the details of the debt relief and poverty link and the outcome in Cologne. It moves beyond relief given by developed countries—in all fairness, the UK is good in this respect, but Japan is poor. The HIPC definitions of sustainability reflect the dominance of G8 creditors, the inclination of those creditors to favour certain client countries and a reluctance to absorb losses that mirror mistakes of past initiatives.

That raises two questions. First, does the G8 approach help debt sustainability? The answer to that is, clearly not. Consider the following comment on the World Bank's criteria for HIPC debt sustainability as

"quite narrow from an overall development perspective. It does not deal with issues of domestic debt, which are important for fiscal sustainability, nor does it measure the adequacy of public resources to address priority development programmes after debt service has been paid."

That is not a comment from Jubilee Plus or a non-governmental organisation; it is the World Bank's own assessment of its initiatives, which was included in a document entitled "The Challenge of Maintaining Long-term Debt Sustainability". Even the World Bank believes that its own criteria are quite narrow from an overall development perspective.

The decision on how much debt to cancel is based on a series of projections about the state of the economies of HIPCs in the next 15 to 20 years. The sustainability of the debt is therefore judged against expected levels of exports, revenues and GDP. If export growth proves lower than projected, it is clear that debt relief is likely to become unsustainable. That is a serious problem, which prompts my second question. Why has the World Bank set such optimistic economic projections for debt payments? In almost all cases, the World Bank has suggested significantly better economic performance by HIPCs in the next decade than they have managed in the previous one.

Moreover, the World Bank has assumed a relatively neutral external environment, and has not taken into account the vulnerability of HIPCs to external shocks. Obviously, the impact of 11 September looms large, but the problem existed even before then. If one compares previous GDP growth for the 23 HIPCs with current World Bank projections, there is a considerable and disconcerting difference. From 1990 to 1999, GDP growth for the 23 HIPCs was 3 per cent. Why, therefore, does the World Bank predict nearly double that average—5.5 per cent.—for the period 2000-10?

Furthermore, in the past decade, all 23 HIPCs undertook IMF reforms and in 1999, all experienced the IMF lending change from the enhanced structural adjustment facility to the poverty reduction and growth facility. However, none experienced any dramatic growth improvement at that time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) pointed out, the forecasters Standard and Poor's predict an average growth of just 2.5 per cent. for those countries in the next 15 years, which is a long way short of 5.5 per cent. Nor are forecasters such as Eurodad particularly optimistic. It is clear that, even with debt relief, the low growth of HIPCs will not suddenly be reversed. The World Bank has set itself a tough and quite possibly elusive mythical gold standard of performance for the HIPCs.

[Tony Baldry]

That brings me back to the G8 announcement on the reduction of export ratio. I apologise for using such shorthand phrases—hopefully, those who take a close interest in these matters understand them. Given the World Bank's 150 per cent. criteria, some countries will not meet the sustainability threshold soon enough. Burkina Faso will have to wait until 2007. This autumn, I and several other hon. Members attended the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in Burkina Faso. All of us took the opportunity to do exactly what the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate advocated: we talked, so far as was possible, to people on the ground, as she put it. Burkina Faso cannot wait until 2007—it, and countries like it, need help now.

Under the terms of the criteria, Rwanda will not receive help until 2008. This morning, the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman)—I hope that he will catch your eye, Mr. O'Hara—and I were fortunate enough to meet the Rwandan Speaker, who made it clear that what is being achieved in Rwanda is very impressive. He also made it clear to us and other members of the Select Committee that for Rwanda the most important thing is poverty reduction. Every single person on the streets in Rwanda wants a reduction in their grinding poverty. He further pointed out the considerable efforts and tough decisions that the Rwandan Government and people had to make simply to get into the HIPC programme. He said that, as far as possible, everyone in the country will be involved in drawing up the poverty reduction strategy, so that there will be public ownership. Rwanda deserves to be rewarded for that effort sooner rather than later. Likewise, other countries such as Tanzania must wait until 2010.

The problem is more immediately compounded by the World Bank's use of debt to export ratio instead of debt to revenue ratio. It is clear that two countries, Chad and Zambia, have debt to revenue ratios above 250 per cent., but because their debt to export ratios are below 150 per cent., they are deemed sustainable. Is that not Mickey Mouse mathematics? There must be an alternative, more accurate measure. Some doubt should be cast on the World Bank's criteria when most of the 23 HIPCs have higher export than revenue levels.

Consider four such countries: Bolivia, Malawi, Rwanda and Burkina Faso. Each has a different economic pattern, because each has a higher debt to revenue ratio than debt to export ratio. Each therefore sees its chances of debt rescheduling decrease. Surely there should now be more tailored policies for specific countries. I will return to that important point.

What is the economic impact of the World Bank's criteria? Countries with higher debt to revenue ratios that are deemed sustainable—Chad and Zambia—are being made to sweat economically just to have a scintilla of sustainability. In those countries, debt servicing will have to come before health and education services. The World Bank will be seen, in principle, to be giving to the people of those countries but, in practice, will be taking. That cannot be right.

So perhaps the good news is not all that good. The difficulties are not confined to Chad and Zambia. They are compounded when we consider the economics of all HIPC countries since 11 September. A recent report by Jubilee Plus noted:

"the greater fragility and vulnerability of their economies has not been considered at all."

There has never been a more relevant time to consider that fragility and vulnerability. As has already been mentioned, commodity prices are falling. Such countries' economies rely on coffee, cotton and tobacco. The prices of those have already fallen by 7.4 per cent. this year, and the World Bank now expects them to fall further.

That will clearly lead to fragility in those countries' debt sustainability. It will exacerbate further the debt payments of Zambia, Tanzania, Senegal, Mauritania and Cameroon, which already exceeded those countries' combined health and education budgets. According to Oxfam UK, the effect will be that a HIPC's debt payment of $2 billion per year will nearly equal the $2.7 billion cost of education and health in those countries. Less money will be spent on, for example, combating HIV/AIDS, although recent reports suggest that, on current trends, a quarter of Africa's population will be vulnerable to that by 2015.

My point, which I am sure that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will take on board, is this: we should examine the mechanisms that are meant to be helping the HIPC countries to see whether they are really doing what we intended. What is happening is, perhaps, not what was intended. Earlier debt relief programmes such as the Baker plan and the Brady plan lacked development sustainability and a focus on developing countries economically and politically.

There is no question but that HIPC is a massive improvement. However, poverty reduction is essential. For example, it strikes me that with better education in HIPC countries, we will see generations with better health and opportunities and that are better placed to build economies, rather than being burdened with debt. In the *Financial Times* recently, Oxfam UK stressed to the G8 countries the importance of more debt relief, more aid and more trade access to the HIPCs after 11 September. The newspaper noted that

"disentangling the direct effects of September 11 from existing weaknesses in the world economy is not easy".

Whatever the problems of disentanglement, 11 September tragically happened to the world—including its poor countries—and all will now have to live with the consequences.

In the week following the attacks, US trade figures showed a dramatic slump, which suggested an economic decline. There followed a collective operation to reduce interest rates in the United States, the United Kingdom and the euro zone. HIPCs and similar countries now need extra help.

Why under the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are vulnerable food producers in HIPCs locked into unequal trade bargains when we remove trade barriers? Why has the EU not honoured its trade commitment to allow HIPCs proper access to northern markets? I could go on. Clearly, trade liberalisation must be considered carefully. In three days, at the World Trade Organisation summit in Doha, the world will

have an opportunity to launch a new trade round and provide reassurance of an optimistic economic future. There is now a chance to tackle poverty through trade liberalisation.

A report from the Centre for Economic Policy Research on trade liberalisation and poverty convincingly asserts that

"trade liberalisation can have a direct impact on poverty ... through its impact on the government's fiscal position."

That is desperately needed and would directly assist HIPCs in dealing with their debt and developing not only sustainability but stability. The report stresses that

"the impact of trade liberalisation is very country-specific"

That means country-specific policies on trade, in a different manner to HIPC debt relief and could mean the plugging of another gap in sustainable debt.

The report further suggests that trade liberalisation would mean that

"some service reforms can aid the poor directly—for example, those in transport, health and education."

That is simply not happening now. Surely, debt and development might be sustainable through the liberalisation of trade.

Is there another approach? Yes, although it would clearly involve the reform of G8 and HIPC status. Jubilee Plus has called for a new, independent and transparent process that would give poor countries the mandate to declare an emergency standstill on debt, when such payments became unsustainable. It calls for the right of such countries to have their debt sustainability determined by an independent and publicly accountable process. That strikes me as a firm and fair approach to debt relief. It is a call that would require broad interpretation of article VIII(2)(b) of the articles of agreement of the IMF and that has recently received the support of the UN Secretary-General.

Would that not be better than widening to HIPC 3? The proposal would mean that more than three countries—Uganda, Mozambique and Benin—would have the chance of sustainable debt in the near future. It is a reality that, under even the present HIPC scheme, seven countries of the 23 will still be living with unsustainable debt for the foreseeable future. The World Bank openly admits that debt relief has failed for those countries. The effect of that failure will be felt by the people of such countries for years to come.

The good news is that there has been some progress on debt relief, and the Governments of rich countries have evinced a willingness to help the people of poorer countries. The bad news is that the methodology of relief makes sustainable development difficult. We need to do much more for millions of poor people to give them the chance of leaving lives of grinding, unremitting poverty. I hope that the Financial Secretary and the Treasury team will continuously review the HIPC mechanisms, to ensure that they work as intended.

4.23 pm

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I join in congratulating the Government on finding time for this extremely important debate. It is timely given the topic of debate in the main Chamber; the two subjects are inextricably linked.

I should like to review the issues that pull us together. The matter has total cross-party support: in the past Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) and I worked closely with the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) on debt issues. We are pleased that we are now building on that success and that many MPs—literally hundreds—are working together to ensure that the issue does not go away. Part of the problem with the Jubilee 2000 campaign was that it had an end date. Unfortunately, the issue has not gone away. In fact, even more may need to be done now than previously, because there is a feeling that we have achieved something whereas we have not.

I have only one rider: debt relief is not a panacea. I have seen some interesting figures, but the basic one is that if every country in the world met its UN debt-relief target of 0.7 per cent. of GDP, debt relief would look like a picnic. Such relief is extremely important for the countries that we are discussing, and we can talk about the countries that are just outside HIPC and others that should be included. However, it is important to remember that debt relief is only part of the overall solution.

I became involved in politics in the first place on the basis of debt relief and third-world debt. I belonged to a Church youth group that used to spend Sunday evenings discussing important issues. Someone from the Campaign Against the Arms Trade spoke to us one week, and someone talked about third-world debt the next. I wrote a letter to my MP, who is now the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), and I am sure that I received a nice reply. However, doing that was not enough for me; I decided to get involved in politics.

At the time, that felt relatively naïve. People may recall the food mountains and wine lakes, yet every day we saw stark images of millions of people dying on our television screens. Those images have not gone away, although the food and butter mountains and wine lakes may have. There is a basic principle that the world has enough food to feed its people, but our system does not put those two things together, and that is what should drive us.

Part of the problem, which I realise as I become increasingly involved, is that we lose sight of the big picture. We have heard many statistics today—unfortunately, I have more to go through—but the most chilling was that 3,000 children will die during this debate. That is the figure on which we need to concentrate. We must remember that that is the basic reason why we are here today and put into the debate the passion and fire that I am sure brought many of us in this Chamber into politics in the first place.

I recognise the commitment of my right hon. Friends the Financial Secretary—even though he has briefly left while I am speaking—and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. My criticism of the HIPC initiative in no way indicates a lack of support from the Chancellor and Ministers in the Department for International Development and the Treasury during the years when I have worked on the issue.

It is, however, right to talk about HIPC's failings, as hon. Members have. I agree that we cannot just re-jig things and shuffle around the deck chairs. HIPC has reached the point at which its lack of credibility is

[Mr. Andy Reed]

recognised not only by NGOs and Jubilee Plus but by the World Bank. We have heard various quotes, which I shall not repeat, but World Bank reports show that there are fundamental flaws in what is being done.

Returning to the big picture, we need to ask what new structures are required and what a new HIPC should look like. I am not talking about a new enhanced HIPC or HIPC 3; we need to start again and perhaps base it on the informal workings of the Paris Club.

One difficulty, which I think my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon mentioned, is that countries such as Japan, which has tremendous debts compared with those of the UK, are still not playing ball. I therefore call on the Government to act unilaterally wherever possible. I know that there are arguments against doing that, but when we consider the problems with HIPC, there comes a time when we have to go the extra step. I hope that the Minister returns to the Chamber so that I can repeat that point when he is here.

Other Members will know from their constituency postbags that debt relief is certainly not a minority issue. I have the honour of representing Loughborough, which includes the Quorn hunt. Foxhunting tends to produce a large postbag. I was pleased this year when the Jubilee 2000 campaign letters outnumbered those from foxhunters and anti-foxhunters. It was a good indication that at last people recognised the importance of the issue and were conversing about it, especially in view of the chilling fact that during this debate 3,000 children will die, as they do every day.

I shall not go over the facts and statistics of HIPC's achievements and the problems involved as other hon. Members have already done so and time is short. We should focus on HIPC's success stories. In Uganda, for example, HIPC's ability to deliver on the poverty reduction programme means that money earmarked from the savings on debt relief has gone directly into primary schools and primary education. The Uganda Government have been able to double the number of primary school places available within three to four years, which is a relatively short time, and by 2004 all children may have access to primary education.

As the Minister said, it is so important to get the basics right; shifting the emphasis of the money for debt relief to health and education will give the next generation's economy the sustainability that it lacks at present, as even the World Bank and the IMF recognise.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The hon. Gentleman and I have worked closely together on this matter for several years. Does he agree that it is also necessary to encourage enterprise in the economies, because if the money saved as a result of debt reduction goes back into the economies, roads and transport infrastructure can be built? It is not just a matter of health and education or even of human rights but of generating what President Museveni has constantly written about in his books: self-help in the country's economy, creating wealth from within the population, generating enterprise and encouraging small businesses.

Mr. Reed: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman, with whom I have worked closely on the issue for some time. That such co-operation is possible is a strange thing about the House that is difficult to explain to constituents and others. The hon. Gentleman's great knowledge on the subject is something that I have welcomed in the past few years, despite our differences on a range of other issues. It is nice to hear him talk about something other than Europe.

The hon. Gentleman is entirely right; health and education are important for the next generation, but economic sustainability is important for countries too, as they need to be self-sufficient. That touches on other, interlinked, issues raised in the debate that have been affected by commodity prices since 11 September. As I said earlier, debt relief on its own is not a panacea; it has to work in conjunction with aid and be taken into account in world trade talks if we are to ensure that these countries have a sustainable, long-term future. We do not want them to come back in 20 or 30 years' time with the same problems.

HIPC's failures have already been discussed, but there are a series of questions to which I should like the Government's reply. I am delighted at the lead taken by the Chancellor and the Prime Minister in the G7 and the G8 to push the matter on to the international agenda. I am far from impressed by HIPC's performance; however, we can use our influence on the IMF and the World Bank to make these poverty reduction programmes work for the poorest people.

As hon. Members have said, we need to take a bottom-up approach to the problem. I have been doing some research and I have pages of tables. Although I am not 100 per cent. certain one way or the other whether the programmes are working, the evidence shows that they have not made one jot of difference to many of the world's poorest people. That is how I measure whether the programmes are working; we need to look at the situation from the perspective of the people we are trying to help.

It is difficult to get something from the Dispatch Box to the doorstep; an announcement in the House does not necessarily translate well to our constituencies. It is difficult enough getting to Loughborough; trying to apply some of the policies to far-flung places around the world that desperately, and quickly, need our help adds to the complications.

There are serious concerns about HIPC. Let us find a way to move beyond just re-jigging the furniture and having a HIPC 3. We should consider new ideas, but we have to consider how those ideas should be implemented. The IMF and the World Bank clearly approach this from a banking perspective, yet, ultimately, the people we are trying to help are not banking customers. They are not even the Governments. They are the people on the ground, and the World Bank and the IMF having a veto over these issues makes the situation extremely difficult.

The example that I have heard is that of a president—I shall not name the country—who wanted to present his own poverty reduction programme to the board of the World Bank but was refused by the junior official who had attended the original meetings. Although the official might have been very intelligent and had a couple of PhDs from Harvard, it is only right in terms of world democracy for an elected president to have the opportunity to present his own poverty reduction

programmes to the World Bank. I hope that we can use our influence on the World Bank and the IMF to ensure that the focus of what we are doing moves away from the technical and starts to look at the needs of the individual.

It has been a difficult debate and there are many who want to contribute to it. It is also a technical debate, and sometimes we can lose the big picture and get bogged down with HIPC, structural adjustment programmes, the IMF and all the technical arguments. I simply want to ensure that we focus on people. I have had my highs and lows in Parliament, but one of the highs was to hear the Chancellor announce the 100 per cent. debt relief at No. 11 Downing street. Eighteen years earlier, as a naïve teenager, I wrote my first letter to a Member of Parliament, but hearing that announcement was one of the humbling and unforgettable moments of my time in Parliament. Now I realise that there is so much more to do.

I have rejected all the technical arguments that I was going to put today. I have not read out anything that I wrote down and so my notes would be of no use to anybody. I feel this from the heart. This is about people and making sure that if we have this debate in 12 months' time another 3,000 children do not die during another three-hour period. Let us move away from the technical and try our hardest to move through this mire of figures, facts and tables and focus on delivering real poverty reduction, health, education and sustainable local economies in the countries that we are trying to support.

4.36 pm

Mr Mark Hoban (Fareham): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on a subject of particular interest to me. My father's cousin was a missionary in Kenya and as a child I constantly heard stories about the role that first missionaries and then NGOs such as CAFOD—the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development—played in looking after the health and education of many people in developing countries, as well as responding to their spiritual needs. It is entirely consistent with the compassion that they demonstrated to those of all faiths and none that Jubilee 2000 has raised the awareness of the issue of third world debt. It has played a major role in ensuring that third world debt is on the agenda not just of this Government but others in the international community.

In spite of Jubilee 2000's work, the alarming fact remains that, for all our aid and support to developing nations, through successive Governments of both major parties and successive generations, what we give has been nothing compared to what we ask in return. For every £1 in grant aid to developing countries, more than £13 comes back in debt repayments. On every day in 1999, $128 million was transferred from the poorest countries to the richest in debt repayments. Although hon. Members may differ on how they would tackle the effects of poverty, that balance sheet is unacceptable. The statistics on debt are shocking in aggregate. The total external debt of aid recipients was $2,534 billion at the end of 1999, with debt service payments of $300 billion. Those figures are quite dry and do not tell us about the impact of third world debt.

Let us look at the example of Zambia. Due to the HIV/AIDS crisis, life expectancy there is expected to fall from 43 to 33 years—a level last experienced in Europe in mediaeval times. More than 500,000 children are out of school, and those numbers are not declining. Yet debt service after enhanced relief under the HIPC scheme still remains more than combined spending on health and education in 1998.

To demonstrate the effect of debt relief, it has been estimated by the United Nations development programme that for each additional 1 per cent. of gross domestic product spent on health and education, child mortality is reduced by 24 per cent. In 1999, Zambia paid $438.5 million—13 per cent. of GDP—in total debt service. The same survey reveals that, if that money had been invested in Zambian health care, child mortality would have been reduced from 202 deaths per 1,000 live births to only eight per 1,000—the same rate as in the United States.

There are countless other examples of how the burden of debt can throttle what little life opportunities are on offer in many poorer nations. Other hon. Members have spoken about the initiatives that could be followed through to improve the effectiveness of the HPIC initiative. I shall not dwell on them, but I should like to raise one issue. We have said that debt relief is only part of the picture. I would like to deal with world trade, which offers developing nations the chance of a stable path out of poverty.

It is essential that the problems of the developing nations are not considered in a vacuum of debt relief policy, because those problems are intrinsically bound up with the real world economy. I found it strange when commentators complained about the Genoa summit prioritising concerns about the world economic situation—before 11 September—and argued that priority should have been given to the third world, as if the two were unrelated. We can more easily afford debt relief when the global economy is strong, while heavily indebted poor countries are more able to use debt relief to their long-term advantage when they are also able to increase trade and output.

As in Genoa, there is a problem in that many groups seeking to alleviate third-world debt are also sceptical about the benefits of free trade. The strongest charge against globalisation tends to involve accusations of increased inequality resulting from free trade and the global economy. However, let us consider the case of east Asia.

The World Bank states that the number of people living on less than $1 a day in east Asia fell from 418 million in 1987 to 278 million in 1998. The key reason for decreasing poverty in the poorest parts of Asia was the growth of China, which saw an average rise of 7.7 per cent. a year in private consumption per head between 1980 and 1997. The underlying reason was growing trade. The Chinese ratio of exported goods and services to GDP rose from 6 per cent. in 1980 to 22 per cent. in 1988.

An article in today's *Financial Times* quotes the World Bank report:

> "Abolishing all trade barriers could reduce global income by $2,800 billion ... and lift 320m people out of poverty by 2015, if co-ordinated actions were also taken to promote trade and reforms in developing countries".

The article goes on:

> "There is a strong concern in the bank that poverty reduction strategies that form the basis for IMF and World Bank lending to poor countries have too little trade strategy in them."

[Mr Mark Hoban]

That is an important message, so I hope that the World Trade Organisation meeting in Doha goes ahead.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The hon. Gentleman has argued that globalisation and increasing world trade can increase prosperity in certain parts of the world. Does he accept, however, that some parts of the world—Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, for example—have seen their percentage share of world trade decrease? If globalisation is to work, institutions such as the WTO and the IMF must recognise the need for sustainable development throughout the world. The hot spots during the period to which he referred should not have been allowed to arise.

Mr Hoban: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. We must ensure that trade policies are sustainable and reasonable. I agree that that is not as simple as saying that free trade will solve the world's problems—far from it. Trade reform must take account of different factors, many of which diverge, including environmental considerations. Indeed, an article on www.ft.com today referred to the impact on the next world trade round of environmental concerns raised by the EU and the worry of many developing countries that those concerns were being used as a pretext for legitimising protectionism, particularly in agriculture. We must ensure that the next world trade round considers the concerns of developing countries and that environmental arguments are not used as a form of covert protectionism.

Notwithstanding the concerns of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), growing free trade between prosperous nations and heavily indebted poor countries can be a source of sustainable poverty relief, but only if it goes hand in hand with sustainable debt relief.

4.15 pm

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): I declare an interest as a member of the council of the World Development Movement.

The Government should be commended for calling for a new international effort to tackle poverty, especially after the events of the past few weeks. There is little prospect of meeting our target of halving the number of people in absolute poverty by 2015 unless we crack the problem of massive debt cancellation. Only 23 countries are at decision point in the HIPC scheme, but another 50 countries have been identified by the Jubilee Plus campaign as being heavily indebted and poor. That shows the extent of the problem that we still face.

Some Members mentioned the failures of the HIPC scheme, into which many of us who campaigned on debt put much reliance and effort. Its aim—to reduce debt to a level where it could be repaid—was fundamentally flawed and written to the criteria of the creditors not the debtors. It ignored the latter's problems of development and poverty and how they would tackle them. Northern aid donations are still being used to pay off debts, and the Department for International Development last year used aid funds for Sierra Leone's debt repayments to the World Bank and IMF. As has been said, some African countries are paying $1.4 billion per annum on debt repayment, rather than using those resources for health, education, preventing AIDS and economic development.

The Chair of the International Development Committee spoke about the difficulties of calculating sustainability. A recent internal World Bank report stated that it overestimated growth level in HIPCs. If their exports continue to grow at just over 4 per cent., as they did in the 1990s, rather than at the growth rate estimated by the World Bank of over 6 per cent.—which seems excessive in view of world events—they will never reach a sustainable level of debt servicing, and that is in the World Bank's narrow criteria. It is also true that the World Bank is giving relief only on debts incurred at the point when the debtors announced that they had a problem with their debts. Debts incurred after that date are not taken into account in the sustainability equation and the criteria take no account of the extent or depth of poverty in a country.

Many hon. Members have mentioned today that HIPCs are still paying more in debt servicing than they are in their combined health and education budgets. The debt relief that was announced at Cologne has resulted so far in only 6 per cent. of HIPC debt being relieved and, as has been stated, further payments will not make any substantial difference if the current scheme continues. Government revenue should be spent first on poverty reduction, with resources left over being used to repay debts. As early as 1988, the International Development Committee accepted that unstable debt was debt that cannot be repaid without damaging the prospects of economic and human development. Studies estimate that if we take a rights-based approach to debt relief, we are talking about having to write off more than $600 billion owed by 71 countries.

HIPC applies only to official creditors—the World Bank and the development banks—but much of the poorest countries' debt repayment is to private international financial institutions that have not undertaken any risk. If a country does not repay its debt, the World Bank suspends relief to it. Banks are not made to take the penalty of bad lending decisions, which runs counter to normal commercial practice. Where there is no risk, there is no penalty and so the penalty falls on innocent people in third-world countries. On the other hand, private international institutions actively promote free market policies that have driven the pace of globalisation on behalf of the richest stakeholders and that create injustice in the world economic system.

It is also disgraceful that some donor countries have put pressure on HIPC countries to withdraw from the scheme. Japan, for example, has put pressure on such countries as Ghana and Laos to withdraw, on the basis that instead of debt relief they will be given grants or aid tied to Japanese goods. Again, we have had the difficulty of a delay in payments from the US Congress, which has in turn slowed down the entire procedure.

I also have doubts about the poverty reduction strategy papers that were introduced as part of the Cologne settlement. They were supposedly designed by the recipient countries and endorsed by the World Bank and the IMF but they bear a close similarity to the structural adjustment programmes that attracted so much criticism in the past decade. A quarter of the developing countries' debt has been estimated to be

odious—that is, debt that has unwisely been made to dictators, particularly those backed by the west during the cold war. My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) made a telling reference to the case of Pakistan and the debts provided under the regime of President Zia.

G8 leaders increasingly point to the value of other resources to hide their inaction on debt. I have severe doubts about the global health fund, which is in no way adequate to tackle the problems faced by the developing world. It applies a top-down rather than bottom-up policy, which does not bode well for good international relations. The issue of how trade can assist the situation has been mentioned. I agree that we have to look carefully at the next round of trade negotiations to ensure that we allow better trade terms for the poorest countries. However, only about 1 per cent. of world trade comes from the very poorest countries. Africa receives only 1 per cent. of foreign direct investment flows. Even the proposed trade reforms are unlikely to benefit the very poorest countries in the short and medium term.

The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has called for radical debt relief and has said that if we are to meet the international development targets to which the Minister referred all donor countries and private international financial institutions should consider wiping off all their official debts. It is widely thought that there is a link between conflict and poverty. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) made some telling points on the subject, but debt reduction would reduce the economic distress that leads to armed conflicts. Ultimately, the eradication of poverty comes down to political will. It is not just a question of pure finance. Leaders in the north who signed up to the international development targets will have to find sufficient funds if they are genuinely to support the poverty reduction process. We need immediately to stop taking payments from the poorest countries instead of waiting six, seven or eight years until they have reached some completion point that has been arbitrarily decided by the World Bank. All creditors need to commit to a 100 per cent. cancellation of debt for all the poorest countries.

We should reassess the basis of poverty reduction strategy papers so that they are the subject of valid discussion between the north and the south rather than an imposed solution. We need to consider a fundamental change to the multilateral trading system that permits a huge amount of northern protectionism, while liberalising southern markets without much protection to them. Trade should instead be focused on reducing world poverty. We need to begin new consultation and to engage in new dialogue between the north and the south, to establish a way of dealing with the money freed by debt cancellation. If we consider those aspects of the matter, we shall achieve the targets for which we have so long campaigned.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. I advise hon. Members that it is my intention to call the Minister not later than 5.20 pm.

4.55 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): There is always a danger that debates in this Chamber will be overshadowed by those on the Floor of the House, and no doubt today there is an even greater chance of that. However, what we are discussing is important in the context of the debate on the coalition against international terrorism. I dare say that the ideas and views emerging from members of all parties in this Chamber will be of more use to the Government's long-term efforts to defeat international terrorism and to settle a new world order than those to be heard on the Floor of the House. Not having been present in the House, I cannot be sure of that, although a good deal more sense is being spoken in this Chamber—and there is more consensus too. It is only by such consensus that we shall progress.

I recently had the pleasure in the House of meeting Paul Robeson Jr, the son of the American singer and civil rights campaigner. He reminded hon. Members of the words of his father down the telephone line to the miners' eisteddfod in Porthcawl in 1955, when the House Committee on Un-American Activities had stopped him travelling to Wales. As well as singing with the miners—which has become part of folk history in Wales—he spoke of "abundance, dignity and peace". It is my view and my party's view that we will not get peace until we secure abundance and dignity for the developing world—and particularly, now, in the middle east and the countries around Afghanistan.

We need to discuss abundance. We have riches in abundance in this country and the question arises how we can share our development, progress, technology and wealth with developing countries so that they also receive political progress and dignity, which will in turn lead to peace.

I had many positive things to say about the Government's present policies, which are very pro-active, but I shall not say them now—not as a criticism, but because those things have all been said. Instead, I shall straight away discuss the difficulties. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) made some pertinent points about changes that may occur with respect to international development aid. I should like to hear from the Minister about ensuring that, in cementing the international coalition against terrorism and related activity, we do not try to provide aid or debt relief to countries in a way that undermines some of their long-term aims. We shall shortly consider the International Development Bill for the second time. That Bill does away with tied aid and it is important that in doing that we do not introduce a form of tied debt relief. Are we looking to the political nature of some countries that we want to help?

I shall comment on Pakistan shortly, but I ask the Minister, if he cannot respond on my point today, to think about an imminent decision that the Government will have to take on the Ilisu dam. He mentioned the Export Credits Guarantee Department in his opening remarks. It is understandable that there might be pressures on the Government to give the go-ahead for the Ilisu dam, despite a damning environmental assessment, because, of course, we want Turkey on board in our efforts with respect to Afghanistan and related areas. We must think not only of the economic benefits that the Ilisu dam might bring, but the huge

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

destabilising effect with respect to water resources in the middle east. That question brings home the difficulty of some of the decisions that the Government must make.

It is unfortunate that this debate is taking place when not only this country but all the Development Assistance Committee countries—the richest countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—are contributing less as a proportion of GDP to development aid. Last year, that proportion dropped from 0.24 per cent. to 0.22 per cent. I accept that in the past year the Government have considerably increased the share of GDP given to international development. However, we are still well short of the DAC average of 0.39 per cent. Next year, we may reach 0.33 per cent., but that still falls well short of our international commitment to reach and maintain 0.7 per cent. Although the current rate of progress should be welcomed, it means that it will be 50 years before we reach that figure. Only four countries have reached 0.7 per cent., so we are in a majority, but it is not a majority to which we can be proud to belong. We should try instead to join the minority.

Many things have been said during the debate on the difficulties of the HIPC process, and many hon. Members have prayed in aid the important report by Jubilee Plus entitled "HIPC—flogging a dead process". From that report, hon. Members have understood that there are many questions to be asked about HIPC, but I will not reiterate those questions. I underline only what I take from that report: the HIPC process, however much it benefits countries such as Uganda, Mozambique and Benin, manages the long-term debts of those countries more than it allows them an exit from those debts. All hon. Members who have contributed to the debate want heavily indebted countries to come out of debt, not simply to manage their debt better. The Government are faced with the challenge of ensuring that a new or alternative HIPC initiative will enable them to do that.

Countries in conflict that lie outside the HIPC process form another important issue. It is frustrating that the countries most in need are in conflict and that we cannot deliver aid to them, as we cannot ensure that the aid gets to the people who need it. However, we should remember that the G8 statement after the Genoa summit said:

"Debt relief—particularly the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative—is a valuable contribution to the fight against poverty, but it is only one of the steps needed to stimulate faster growth in very poor countries...In particular we look to countries affected by conflict to turn away from violence. When they do, we confirm that we will strengthen our efforts to help them take the measures needed to receive debt relief."

There is no more pressing example of violence in developing countries at the moment than what is happening in Afghanistan and surrounding countries. We know that Afghanistan was the poorest country in Asia before 11 September. It had already suffered 25 years of civil war and three years of drought, and one quarter of Afghan children were dying before their fifth birthday. The country was in dire need of aid before 11 September, but the reasons for that are complex and go back further than the Taliban. I am anxious to know how we can deliver aid to Afghanistan in the course of a conflict—if it is not a war, it is certainly a conflict. That measure is being discussed in the House at the moment, but we must bear in mind that we are trying to defeat an opposition, a Government and a terrorist network in one of the poorest countries of the world.

Associated with the problems of Afghanistan are the problems for world trade following 11 September. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) made that point. The World Bank has already estimated that the poorest countries will suffer most as a result of the terrorist attacks, mainly due to commodity prices, as the hon. Gentleman said. The World Bank expects an extra 10 million people to fall below the poverty line of $1 a day, which will lead to an extra 20,000 to 40,000 child deaths. Although we all know about the scale of the attacks in Washington and New York, we should bear in mind the additional 20,000 to 40,000 deaths as a consequence of them. We must redouble our efforts to ensure that international aid reaches the places where it is most needed.

I conclude by referring to a couple of matters that have not so far come up in debate. First, the need for sustainable development should feature more strongly in international aid. I hope that we shall be able to amend the International Development Bill to put sustainable development on a far more secure footing in the legislation than it was when the Bill first came before the House. The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research carried out work about a year ago on the countries most likely to be affected by climate change. They were Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Afghanistan. Sustainable development must be included in international aid programmes.

Secondly, the Tobin tax has not been mentioned so far; perhaps it should have been. I know that the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) chaired a meeting last night on the subject, and will no doubt expand on it in this debate. If the Government are not in favour of the Tobin tax or something similar, they have a responsibility to explain what other form of global tax there should be to help to fund international development. If we are moving towards a system in which we support global Governments and, through the HIPC initiative, to a global programme of relief for the poorest and most heavily indebted countries, we must consider how we can use taxation measures in the next few years to help those countries.

I look forward to the Minister's response to this interesting and varied debate.

5.5 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), and with those of my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, who spoke about the link between this debate and that on the Floor of the House. The long-term way to deal with terrorism must be to tackle poverty worldwide. The world needs to make a fresh start in dealing with debt relief and poverty reduction. However, as the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) said, only 20 per cent. of developing countries are involved in the HIPC initiative; 80 per cent. are not. We need to expand the way in which we offer debt relief to the poorest countries of the world.

I noted the Financial Secretary's observation that conferences are all very well but what really matters is what happens on the ground. I agree. Nevertheless,

there are some interesting conferences coming up—four in the next 11 months. The World Trade Organisation is meeting in Qatar next week and the following week there is the meeting of the IMF and World Bank. I hope that the United Nations conference on financing for development in Monterey, Mexico in March 2002 will bring together those two. That will lead to the world summit for sustainable development in Johannesburg in September 2002. Thus, there is a road map for updating HIPC and making progress with debt relief and poverty reduction—learning the lessons from what we have got wrong in the past five years and building on what we have got right.

To make progress, and to ensure that debt relates to Governments' capacities to collect revenues, we must ensure that there are sustainable debt procedures. All countries have to borrow against their tax base and their Governments should ensure that only debt able to be repaid is taken on. That is an important principle. Parliaments that represent democratic civil society should be required to approve all new borrowing arrangements worldwide. I should certainly like that requirement in any update of the HIPC initiative. Those Parliaments should receive regular reports on the performance and use of those loans to ensure that they are going to areas of which they approve, especially in terms of poverty reduction.

That idea is not a new one. It was agreed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in Berlin in December 1999, at which a resolution was passed relating to a new global financial architecture. I was honoured to serve on the drafting committee of that conference. On my return, I discussed the matter with the Chancellor of the Exchequer who, after expressing doubts initially, said that it sounded like an excellent idea. Will the Financial Secretary—not necessarily today, as I have sprung it on him—pursue the issue and determine whether it can be taken forward? It is important that any new loans, especially if they relate to the way that the HIPC initiative progresses, must be approved by civil society which, so far as I am concerned as an elected Member of this House, is represented by parliamentarians.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there must be rigorous public accounting procedures in each of those countries and that those should be consistent with international accounting standards?

Mr. Colman: I certainly agree with that. The move towards international accounting standards should ensure that that is implemented throughout the world. My further point was that, to reassure the lower end of my postbag, it is crucial that the HIPC arrangements are accountable. The majority of letters that I receive are very much in favour of HIPC, but others write to tell me that they think that it is disgraceful that debt is being forgiven because the money saved is not being spent in the way in which I claim. It is important that Parliament has a role in each of the HIPC countries to review how the poverty reduction strategies are progressing. I am concerned that organisations such as Jubilee Plus has not sufficiently reviewed the situation. It needs to follow through to see what is happening.

As the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said, he and I and other hon. Members visited Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, which are part of the HIPC initiative, in September. Both of those cases are interesting. Burkina Faso is just coming to its decision point. Ivory Coast has completed its passage through the HIPC process and there is a decision pending about whether there should be a further HIPC procedure there. There was great consternation among developed countries and multilateral institutions that there was still no anti-corruption legislation in Ivory Coast. The delegation met all its political parties, but there was no consensus on how such legislation might proceed. There was rumour of a case in which 18 million euros had been embezzled by a member of the Government, which had not been followed up. I would hope that Jubilee Plus would examine that sort of thing.

Similarly, in the case of Burkina Faso, we heard allegations from non-governmental organisations based in the United Kingdom that civil society was not being allowed to review the poverty reduction strategy. The organisations were excluded. It is important for Jubilee Plus, which I strongly support and which is doing an excellent job, to ensure that the other half of the process—the review of how the HIPC initiative is working in the countries that have undergone the process—occurs. As the hon. Member for Banbury mentioned, we saw an excellent example of the other part of the process when we met the Speaker of the Parliament of Rwanda, where it is working very well indeed.

This debate is about poverty reduction, but hon. Members have extended it into other areas, so I seek the indulgence of the Chamber in doing so too. It was remarkable, in Ouagadougou, to be able to put one's bank card into a high street bank ATM and remove CFA francs. The CFA franc is the currency of Burkina Faso and it is linked to the French franc, which is linked to the euro. Extraordinarily, some 70 million Africans are in the eurozone—as it will be from 1 January 2002—and already have an exchange rate. That is a good example of the kind of alternative way of reducing poverty that should be examined. It is interesting that, in my experience, many Commonwealth countries have lost out significantly in currency depreciation since their currencies ceased to be linked to the pound sterling in the 1970s.

I have been talking about Lomé countries, and one of the themes of the debate has been the need to examine trade issues, which are also linked to poverty reduction. We need to ensure that access is tariff and quota-free. I am disappointed that the "Everything but Arms" initiative has been delayed for up to seven years and I hope that that can be brought forward. We need open access for developing countries to developed countries.

As the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) said, the *Financial Times* article explores the huge benefits for developing countries. The World Bank said:

> "Expanding trade could well increase annual GDP growth by an additional 0.5 percent over the long run—and by 2015 lift 300 million people out of poverty in addition to the 600 million escaping desperate poverty with normal growth. Developing countries stand to gain an estimated $1.5 trillion of additional income in the 10 years after liberalization policies are begun; developed countries would see their incomes rise by some $1.3 trillion."

The Government have not made a statement about what goals they believe are to be attained in Doha next week, but the World Bank has said that, for developing

[Mr. Colman]

countries to benefit, developed countries must be willing to put the issues of agricultural products and textiles on the negotiating table because those are what the world's poor produce. A round that brings down barriers in agriculture, advances the timetable on textiles and agrees to curtail anti-dumping while taking up the concerns of industrialised countries has the potential to be a true development round. I hope that the Financial Secretary will have a word with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is the lead Minister on the issue, to see whether we can make progress on those matters.

The WTO meeting will be followed by the IMF-World Bank meeting. There, we shall have a great advantage because my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has a chairing role at the IMF and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development plays a strong role at the World Bank. I hope that they will take up the proposals of numerous colleagues in this debate for revising the HIPC scheme and for introducing emergency standstills and independent arbitrations—those ideas are well worth exploring.

I am also concerned that Ministers should pick up on the comments of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) about countries such as Tanzania, Pakistan and many others, which receive large numbers of refugees and should get specific IMF help. Programmes are available in addition to the HIPC scheme for countries that are coming out of conflict, but it is important that we also consider countries that receive refugees.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Ceredigion picked up on my wish yesterday to debate the Tobin tax, which I hope the Financial Secretary will consider. There is new evidence on how it might work and my right hon. Friend should read the technical note to the Zedillo commission, which John Langmore, the deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, wrote on 21 August and which describes in detail how the proposals could be implemented.

The Continuing Linked Settlement system, which will come on stream at the beginning of 2002 and be based in London, will enable all currency transfers around the world to be put through a single system. The argument has been that the money will simply move offshore and into tax havens, but the post-11 September drive to stamp out tax havens and to deal with money laundering and hot money movements will make it possible for the world financial community to decide that it is best to put all currency transactions through one system, which will have sufficient capacity and ensure that the Tobin tax works. The small level of tax—0.001 per cent. of the currency transaction—would produce $53 billion, which would provide the basis that many people want for achieving overseas development assistance levels. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) said, the poorest countries would not benefit immediately from trade development. It is important to recognise the fact that overseas development assistance is needed and that a new source of it must be found.

Three or four conferences will soon take place and form an important map for dealing with debt relief and poverty reduction. After each conference, I look forward to further parliamentary debates so that we can hear how the Government have fared, hold them to account and move towards a world without poverty, which is what we all want.

5.19 pm

Mr. Boateng: The debate has been highly worth while and characterised by passion and conviction from all. It also showed experience and knowledge, not least in the considerable grasp of technical detail that one would expect from such distinguished members of the Select Committee on International Development as my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) and the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry). They certainly did not disappoint in that regard, and were right to be technical in such a way. We need to develop technically efficient and effective vehicles if we are to deliver a product that reflects the values and principles that we all espouse about the importance of reducing poverty, and the contribution of health, education and trade to that aim.

Some of the trenchant technical criticisms made in the past three hours, not least of the heavily indebted poor countries initiative—I intend to write to hon. Members to do justice to the nature of their arguments—draw attention to the need to ensure that we devise such mechanisms correctly. If we do not, there is a danger that they will be blown off course.

No technical mechanism could guarantee to guard against a crisis such as that sparked by the events of 11 September. Given that HIPCs are likely to be especially adversely affected by the recent economic slowdown, it will be important to ensure a trenchant analysis of its impact on them and their capacity to fulfil the process. At the G7 meeting of Finance Ministers, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer went out of his way to emphasise the importance of the International Monetary Fund, in collaboration with the World Bank, making a thorough analysis of the impact of the events of 11 September on sustainability and economic growth in the countries concerned. Such analysis is being made and it will be important to bear in mind the possible need to make modifications in policy and the delivery of it as a result, if that is shown to be necessary.

I want to tackle several of the points made, in addition to writing to hon. Members about some of the more technical ones. It was asserted that the HIPC initiative had failed as it would not deliver sustainable debt levels for most of its countries. It is true that recent IMF and World Bank analyses show that 67 countries will have a debt-to-export ratio above the threshold and we heard of some examples. The Government have always acknowledged that as a problem, and we shall continue to work to help those countries to exit the HIPC process with sustainable levels of debt. The assistance and contribution of the Committees of the House, of all right hon. and hon. Members and of NGOs is important.

The Government are committed in the long term—it is not a short-term response, stimulated by recent events—to supporting Pakistan's economic reform programme. We recognise that the current crisis has had, and will continue to have, an impact on Pakistan's economy and we are working with other donors to ensure that the whole reform process, including the reform relating to the entrenchment of democratic institutions, will stay on track. In the meantime, as well as taking a number of other measures, we have provided £40 million to help deal with the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and £11 million of short-term assistance to host communities in Pakistan. It is important to recognise that, as we are not major creditors of Pakistan, our influence is inevitably limited.

For reasons that hon. Members understand, Nigeria does not qualify for HIPC status. We are working with the IMF to ensure that, as Nigeria achieves the IMF programme of reform of its economy, it gains some benefit as a result. Nigeria has not dropped out of our agenda. It is a major and important nation and we are working with others internationally to ensure that its reform process is supported.

It is important to remember—several hon. Members have touched on this—that since this Government came into office a major plank of our programme has been that our relations with international financial institutions should be subject to reform. We have pioneered and championed a reforming agenda for the IMF and the World Bank, not least in view of some of the experiences that hon. Members on both sides of the House have outlined today. Those institutions still have a long way to go in terms of transparency and accountability, and in how well equipped they are to put in place the sort of programmes that deliver the changes that we all seek. I shall be writing to hon. Members on a number of issues. The Tobin tax is one.

What we have heard today is not only a justification of why it is just as important to debate the matter in this place as it is in the Chamber but a reflection of the real concerns of those whom we represent. We have done our best—all those who contributed to the debate and all those who bothered to attend—to reflect those concerns and to do justice to that vital topic.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Five o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 October 2001

DEFENCE

Biological Warfare

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what prophylactic research has been conducted by his Department and agencies responsible to his Department into *(a)* anthrax and *(b)* other biological agents. [8762]

Mr. Hoon: The remit of Defence Science Technology Laboratory Chemical (Dstl) and Biological Sciences at Porton Down is to provide the UK and its armed forces with safe and effective protection in the event of exposure to chemical or biological weapons. This involves conducting research into prophylactic measures, such as vaccines, antibiotics or antivirals for a variety of different biological agents including anthrax.

Dstl Porton Down seeks to publish the results of its research wherever security considerations allow. In recent years work has been published on a new vaccine against plague, which is currently undergoing clinical trials and the development of a new vaccine against anthrax which it is hoped will enter clinical trials in the near future. Additionally, research results on various prophylactic measures against a range of agents and diseases including Tularaemia, VEE, SEB, Brucellosis, Glanders, Ricin and Botulinum toxin have been published in the peer reviewed technical literature.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the potential for aerosol cloud travel; and what clinical and epidemiological data on human infections has been collated relating to a deliberate release of contagious organisms and toxins. [8618]

Mr. Hoon: The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Porton Down has developed a package of state of the art atmospheric dispersion models to determine the potential travel of aerosol clouds.

These models form part of an extensive suite of tools and data which are used by the Ministry of Defence to assess the potential hazard posed by chemical and biological weapons. For agents of biological origin, the data include estimates of the human toxicity or infectivity, the transmissibility, atmospheric stability and the availability of detection, protection and medical countermeasures.

Cluster Bombs

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to review the use of cluster bombs by the armed forces; and if he will make a statement; [8724]

(2) what recent representations he has received regarding the use of cluster bombs. [8716]

Mr. Ingram: A large number of hon. Members have written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence requesting reaction to recent large scale postcard campaigns co-ordinated by the non-governmental organisations Tearfund, Activist and Landmine Action. These pre-printed postcards express concerns about cluster bombs.

The Government have no plans to review the use of cluster bombs, which are a legitimate weapon that provide a capability against certain targets which cannot be effectively achieved in other ways.

Unexploded ordnance, including unexploded cluster bomblets, will form a major theme of the Review Conference of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in December 2001. Our central aim there will be to work towards a practical solution that secures our necessary capability as well as addressing humanitarian concerns.

Prisoners of War (Compensation)

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance his Department has given to the Association of British Civilian Internees Far East Region as to the criteria former prisoners of the Japanese are required to meet in order to qualify for the ex gratia payments announced on 7 November 2000. [8980]

Dr. Moonie: The ex gratia scheme for former captives of the Japanese is administered by the War Pensions Agency, which became an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Defence with effect from 8 June 2001.

A leaflet setting out who can claim the ex gratia payment was issued to all those who contacted the War Pensions Agency for information and with every claim form. Copies were also sent to all ex-service organisations and groups representing civilian internees. The eligibility criteria relating to civilian internees were set out in my answer on 11 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 516–17W to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton).

Royal Navy Vessels

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy vessels are deployed east of Suez; and in what role they operate. [9036]

Mr. Ingram: The following Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels are currently deployed east of Suez:

HMS Illustrious, HMS Cornwall, HMS Marlborough, HMS Southampton, HMS Monmouth, HMS Fearless, HMS Ocean, HMS Nottingham, HMS Inverness, HMS Cattistock, HMS Quorn, HMS Walney, HMS Roebuck, HMS Kent, HMS Beagle, HMS Northumberland, HMS Triumph, HMS Trafalgar, HMS Superb, RFA Fort Victoria, RFA Brambleleaf, RFA Sir Tristram, RFA Sir Bedivere, RFA Sir Percivale, RFA Sir Galahad, RFA Fort Rosalie, RFA Fort Austin, RFA Oakleaf, RFA Diligence, RFA Sea Centurion, RFA Bayleaf.

The majority of Royal Navy vessels deployed east of Suez are part of Argonaut 01, a routine training deployment, the primary focus of which is Exercise Saif Sareea II in Oman. The vessels involved in Exercise Saif Sareea II are split into a number of Task Groups as follows:

A Carrier Group led by HMS Illustrious comprising: HMS Cornwall, HMS Marlborough, HMS Southampton and HMS Monmouth. The group is supported by RFA Fort Victoria and RFA Brambleleaf.

An Amphibious Group led by HMS Fearless comprising: HMS Ocean, HMS Nottingham and Landing Ships RFA Sir Tristram, RFA Sir Bedivere, RFA Sir Percivale, RFA Sir Galahad with support provided by RFA Fort Rosalie, RFA Fort Austin and RFA Oakleaf.

A Mine Countermeasure Group comprising of HMS Inverness, HMS Cattistock, HMS Quorn and HMS Walney with support from RFA Diligence.

The survey ship HMS Roebuck is conducting Survey Operations and Beach Survey in support of Saif Sareea II.

In addition, RFA Sea Centurion, which remains in the Gulf, has provided heavy lift for Exercise Saif Sareea.

HMS Kent is deployed to the Gulf as the Armilla Patrol ship with her support ship RFA Bayleaf. RFA Bayleaf is also participating in Exercise Saif Sareea II. In addition, the survey ship HMS Beagle is in the Gulf on a long planned deployment and briefly participate in Saif Sareea II before resuming her Survey Operations.

HMS Northumberland is also deployed east of Suez. Initially tasked as the Armilla Patrol ship, on relief, she subsequently deployed out of area in order to participate in long-standing commitments in Australia.

HMS Triumph, HMS Trafalgar and HMS Superb are currently deployed east of Suez on operational tasking.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what visits are planned by Royal Navy ships to Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong or Singapore in the next 12 months. [9037]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Nottingham is scheduled to deploy to the Asia Pacific region between March-December 2002 to meet our annual commitments to the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) with Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. Her programme is currently under consideration, and while specific details remain confidential for security reasons, it is hoped that port visits to Singapore, Australia and New Zealand will be undertaken during her deployment.

HMS York is also scheduled to deploy to the Asia Pacific region between January-June 2002 as an integral part of a multinational French Task Group deployment. Her programme is currently under consideration in consultation with the French authorities but it is anticipated that the programme will include visits to both Singapore and Australia.

Non-lethal Weapons

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many individuals comprised the UK participants in each of the formal meetings and war games under the auspices of the US-UK Master Exchange Memorandum of Understanding on Non-Lethal Weapons; from which organisations; and what the estimated cost was of UK participation in each event. [7117]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholding the information requested under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information as disclosure could affect the conduct of business under the agreement. The detailed costings for each event could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Forces Personnel

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the shortfall in personnel is in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Marines, *(c)* Royal Air Force and *(d)* Royal Navy. [8427]

Mr. Ingram: In the case of the trained strength of the Army, the shortfall against the current requirement as at 1 September 2001 stood at 6,669. In the case of the other Services, the shortfalls were: RN 1,358, RM 313 and RAF 1,029.

Apache Helicopter Programme

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what delays there have been in the Apache helicopter programme; and if he will make a statement. [8301]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The Apache aircraft delivery programme has remained close to schedule since contract award in March 1996. The in-service date, based on the delivery of nine aircraft, was achieved on 16 January 2001, only two weeks later than contractually scheduled.

However, Apache aircrew training has been delayed by eight months due to problems with the Full Mission Simulator (FMS). Substantial progress has been made towards resolving these problems, but the FMS is not expected to become available until May 2002. Aircrew training is now scheduled to begin in June 2002. In the meantime, some training is being undertaken in the US.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to recognise all those who have served less than five years in the armed forces as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and if he will make a statement. [9018]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* There are no specific plans to recognise the service of any members of the Armed Forces as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 15 February, a Golden Jubilee Medal will be instituted. It will be awarded to uniformed members of the Armed Forces, who are serving on the 6 February 2002, the anniversary of The Queen's accession, and have completed five years or more qualifying service. There are no plans to extend this to all serving members of the Armed Forces. The purpose of the medal is to commemorate the Golden Jubilee, not to recognise the service of its recipients.

Gurkhas

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase the pay of Gurkha service men to the same level as that of British service men. [9035]

Mr. Ingram: Under the terms of the Tri-Partite Agreement (TPA) between India, Nepal and the UK, Gurkha pay is linked to the Indian Army pay code. Gurkhas also receive a cost of living allowance known as Universal Addition payable wherever a Gurkha serves. This combination of basic Indian Army pay and Universal

Addition, means that overall total Gurkha remuneration is in line with the net pay of comparable British service men. These arrangements have been in place since 1997

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Gurkha regiments; and what plans he has to increase the number of Gurkhas serving in the British armed forces. [9034]

Mr. Ingram: The total number of trained Gurkhas in the British Army as at 1 September, was 3,500. There are two Gurkha Infantry Regiments serving with the British Army; 1 Royal Gurkha Rifles and 2 Royal Gurkha Rifles. Gurkha Reinforcement Companies are currently serving with the 2nd Battalion Parachute Regiment, 1 Royal Irish and 1 Highlanders. There are also formed Gurkha units serving with 10 Transport Regiment, 30 Signal Regiment, 36 Engineer Regiment and in training establishments at Sandhurst and Brecon. In addition, there are small numbers of Gurkha service men serving as "Attached Arms" within numerous other units and establishments across the British.

There are no plans to increase the total number of Gurkhas in the future.

Anti-anthrax Drugs

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additions to the MOD stockpile of anti-anthrax drugs were acquired in the six-week period prior to 11 September. [9538]

Dr. Moonie: Potential drugs for post exposure treatment of anthrax are Ciprofloxacin or Doxycycline but these antibiotics are also used to treat a wide range of clinical conditions. Other than supplies to meet ongoing primary and secondary healthcare requirements, no additional quantities of these drugs were acquired in the six-week period prior to 11 September.

Afghanistan

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements have been made by the Ministry of Defence to treat service personnel who may be injured in Afghanistan and the surrounding areas. [8702]

Mr. Hoon: The current UK contribution to coalition operations in Afghanistan comprises Royal Navy submarines equipped with Tomahawk land attack missiles and Royal Air Force assets supporting the air campaign. Suitable medical facilities are available on board the submarines and at the air bases from which the aircraft are operating. An aeromedical evacuation capability is also in place should any casualties need to be returned to the UK for treatment.

Dublin and Monaghan Bombings

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has responded to requests for information from the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 17 May 1974 by the delivery of relevant documents; and if he will make a statement. [7948]

Dr. John Reid: The request from Mr. Justice Henry Barron, the Independent Commissioner of Inquiry into the Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk bombings, was shared with all relevant Government Departments and agencies. This has led to an extensive and time-consuming manual search of a large number of old files. As soon as this has been completed I will make a single co-ordinated response to Mr. Justice Barron.

I am replying on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will provide the House with an opportunity to invite Elizabeth Filkin to accept a second term as Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [9472]

Mr. Kirkwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1285W.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

India

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the influence which the GATS (general agreement on trade on services) agreement will have on the biodiversity in the Ghats forest of India. [8181]

Hilary Benn: Our preliminary assessment is that, in its present but still evolving form, the GATS agreement will have no specific influence on the biodiversity in the western and eastern Ghats forests of India.

Romania

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the impact of foot and mouth disease on the supply of Christmas gift boxes to Romanian orphanages. [8335]

Hilary Benn: Romanian import regulations are becoming more restrictive, made more so by a Government decision earlier this year. Restrictions are not limited to the import of foodstuffs but also, among other things, the import of clothing and toys. The British Embassy in Bucharest are aware of this issue and are taking it up with the Romanian authorities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Security

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library a copy of the report by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security on nuclear security. [8235]

Mr. Wilson: When the Office for Civil Nuclear Security joined the Department of Trade and Industry on 1 October 2000, the Minister announced that the Director

would make an annual report which would be placed in the Library of both Houses. No report has yet been received as OCNS has not yet been part of the Department for a full financial year. I expect to receive a report in March 2002, which I shall place in the Library of the House.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the terms of reference for the review of nuclear security being conducted by the OCNS include the security implications of commissioning the Sellafield MOX plant and the transportation of MOX fuel to overseas customers. [8236]

Mr. Wilson: All aspects of the security of nuclear installations and transportation of nuclear material are kept under continuing review by the Director of Civil Nuclear Security, who regulates security in the civil nuclear industry.

Minimum Wage

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to amend the regulations relating to the National Minimum Wage Act 1998; and if he will make a statement. [9111]

Alan Johnson: We have no such plans. The national minimum wage has been a resounding success bringing substantial benefits to nearly 1.5 million workers, especially women and part-time workers, without having had any significant adverse impact on employment or the economy. The operation of the minimum wage is kept continually under review to ensure that this success is maintained.

Cumbria Business Link

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the availability of funds to Cumbria Business Link. [7525]

Nigel Griffiths: Business Link Cumbria receives funding from the Small Business Service for the delivery of support services to small and medium-sized enterprises and those considering setting up in business in Cumbria. This financial year, Business Link Cumbria has available £1,456,274 for the delivery of a range of business support services, including support for high growth start-ups. Business Link Cumbria also receive resources to support farmers, including those directly affected by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease (FMD) under the Farm Business Advice Services. The North West Development Agency has also made available resources, via the Business Recovery Fund, to assist non-agricultural businesses who are experiencing difficulties as a result of FMD.

There are further sources of public funding which Business Link Cumbria may be able to access. These include European Structural Funds as well as funding from local authorities and other resources from the North West Development Agency. In addition, Business Link Cumbria can seek contributions towards service delivery from private sources.

Coal Reserves

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what provisions have been made to make use of reserves of coal in the UK that are readily available. [9144]

Mr. Wilson: Provisions of the Coal Industry Act 1994 vested ownership of the nation's coal reserves in the Coal Authority. In carrying out its function of licensing coal-mining operations, the Authority must have regard to its statutory duty to endeavour to maintain and develop an economically viable domestic coal-mining industry.

Turkish Banks (Union Recognition)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement concerning the tactics adopted by Turkish banks in the City relating to union recognition. [8667]

Alan Johnson: The Central Arbitration Committee is currently considering an application for recognition involving Turkiye Is Bankasi. The committee is independent and the Government do not intervene in its consideration of individual cases under the statutory recognition procedure.

Small Business Service

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress the Small Business Service has made in identifying barriers faced by women and ethnic minority entrepreneurs since April 2000; and what action has been taken as a result. [8239]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service (SBS) has undertaken research and taken action to identify and tackle the barriers faced by women and ethnic minority entrepreneurs.

Firstly, SBS has commissioned research to explore the evidence of barriers (as part of research strategy on socially excluded groups). Reports on women and ethnic minority entrepreneurs have been completed and the reports are now publicly available. Other research projects are ongoing.

Secondly, SBS has sponsored two events to help identify barriers:

a Kingston University Seminar on 1 May 2001 to examine ethnic minority businesses; and

sponsorship of a three-day female entrepreneurship conference at Durham, 10–12 September 2001.

Thirdly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry created an Ethnic Minority Business Forum in July 2000. The forum's remit to strengthen Government's dialogue with ethnic minority business communities. It advises the Secretary of State and the SBS Chief Executive, David Irwin, on policies to help ethnic minority communities at work and in running their own businesses. Its first annual report was published on 18 September 2001. The DTI and SBS plan to respond formally to the report's recommendations at the forum's next meeting on 4 December.

Fourthly, SBS is supporting projects through the Phoenix Development Fund to encourage innovative ways of promoting enterprise in deprived areas, and among

groups of people currently under-represented in terms of business ownership. Of the 96 projects currently supported, 37 directly target women or ethnic minorities.

All SBS and Business Link services aim to meet the needs of all existing and "would-be" entrepreneurs, regardless of their gender or ethnicity. We will continue to research barriers which exclusively or disproportionately affect women or ethnic minority entrepreneurs, and where appropriate will take prompt and efficient action to remove these or reduce their impact.

Railtrack

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigations she has carried out into the management of Railtrack Group plc and Railtrack plc. [8182]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* It is not the policy of my Department to comment on the affairs of particular companies.

Where I consider it to be in the public interest I may use discretionary powers under the Companies Acts to conduct inquiries if it appears that there has been misconduct in relation to the affairs of a company. If the hon. Member provides my officials with evidence that he considers justifies an investigation, my officials will give it full consideration.

Manufacturing

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on employment in manufacturing in Worcestershire. [8989]

Alan Johnson: The latest Labour Force Survey figures show that in Worcestershire over the last 12 months there were on average around 5,000 more manufacturing jobs than in the previous 12 months.

Advantage West Midlands

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of Advantage West Midlands' budget will be spent in Worcestershire in the current financial year. [8635]

Alan Johnson: Advantage West Midlands spend in Worcestershire for the financial year 2001–02 is around £2.2 million. This amounts to around 1.3 per cent. of its total budget for the period.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to inform local government of the Government's negotiating position on the General Agreement on Trade in Services, with particular reference to the application of the agreement to measures taken by central, regional or local governments and authorities. [R] [6472]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government will, as part of the normal consultation process, consult with bodies such as the LGA in relation to any requests made of the European Community that touch on local government interest. I am aware that the Scottish Parliament is also considering this.

Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what value was put on British Nuclear Fuels'-owned stocks of *(a)* plutonium and *(b)* reprocessed uranium, in the entry for British Nuclear Fuels at page 490 of The National Asset Register, CM5221. [8764]

Mr. Wilson: These items were given a nil value.

Ilisu Dam (Turkey)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will extend the consultation period on the Ilisu Dam project in South East Turkey to November. [5969]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I do not intend to extend the closing date for comments on the Environmental Impact Assessment Report. This Report was made publicly available on 3 July 2001 and the public were informed that comments received by 7 September 2001 would be taken into account when I make my decision regarding ECGD support for the Ilisu Project. A number of comments have been received during this period and these are being reviewed.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the Environmental Impact Assessment on the Ilisu Dam project in south-east Turkey; and if she will make a statement. [5968]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* ECGD has commissioned consultants' reports on the Environmental Impact Assessment Report on the Ilisu Dam Project and also on the Resettlement Action Plan. These reports are being studied, together with the comments received from non-governmental organisations and the public. The reports and the comments received will be the subject of discussion with other interested Government Departments, in particular the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport prior to any decision being taken regarding ECGD support.

Renewable Energy

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will lay before the House the order to establish the renewable obligation on electricity suppliers; and if she will make a statement. [9764]

Mr. Wilson: We published our Statutory Consultation on the Renewables Obligation in August. The consultation period has just ended and we are now analysing the responses received with a view to bringing forward an Order in the House before Christmas, subject to availability of parliamentary time and State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

Wind Turbines

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of wind turbines operating in the UK were manufactured domestically. [7877]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The proportion of wind turbines operating in the UK that were manufactured domestically is estimated to be just under 6 per cent. The proportion containing UK components is estimated to be at least 43 per cent.

Much more British manufacturing of wind turbines and components is expected in the future. Aerolaminates have moved into a new larger factory with much greater capacity on the Isle of Wight. As well as blades, they are now supplying some complete turbine rotors to their parent company, NEG-Micon. Cambrian Engineering have manufactured, or have orders, for 95 per cent. of the wind turbine towers to be installed in the UK this year. Vestas, who are among the world-leaders in wind turbine manufacture, announced in June that they are to start UK operations at Machrihanish near Campbeltown in the west of Scotland where their new factory will create 124 direct jobs and 44 associated jobs.

Wave and Tidal Energy

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further research she plans to assess the environmental impact of wave and tidal energy devices; and if she will make a statement. [8255]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has carried out general studies on the potential impact of offshore energy devices, as well as Environmental Impact Assessments for specific schemes, including one for a proposed tidal stream development. These studies indicate that, providing the schemes are deployed with some care, they should not have any significant adverse effect on the environment and simple steps can be taken to ensure that such schemes are not a navigation or environmental hazard.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what estimate she has made of the numbers of new jobs which will be generated by *(a)* 2010 and *(b)* 2020 in wave and tidal power companies in the UK; [8252]

(2) what estimate she has made of the size of the *(a)* domestic and *(b)* overseas markets for wave and tidal energy in (i) 2010 and (ii) 2020; and if she will make a statement. [8251]

Mr. Wilson: The recent report of the Science and Technology Committee Inquiry into wave and tidal energy estimated that energy from wave and tidal currents around the UK have the theoretical potential to generate about 25 per cent. of the nation's electricity.

The same report estimated that if 0.1 per cent. of the energy resource in the ocean could be converted to electricity it would satisfy the present world demand for energy five times over.

This represents a significant new source of energy and the Department is vigorously encouraging and assisting industry to develop promising technologies. Success in this would lead to the development of new sustainable industries but it is too early in the technology development to provide reliable estimates of the size of the market and jobs.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what further research funding is planned to increase the efficiency of wave and tidal power devices; [8256]

(2) what plans her Department has to provide further assistance for stimulating wave and tidal power. [8253]

Mr. Wilson: In the case of wave energy, my Department has already supported the development of the world's first commercial wave power device at Islay, and we recently announced that we will provide further support to the company involved, Wavegen, by increasing the level of R&D funding for their most recent project to almost £1.67 million. This funding will assist with the further development of their new offshore wave energy concept and the construction and testing at sea of a prototype. This substantial funding confirms the Government's commitment to its new wave energy programme.

The Department commissioned a study into the prospects for tidal stream technology in the UK and this has now been completed. It was positive about the prospects for tidal stream, and is being taken forward in association with the industry. There are a useful amount of tidal currents around the shores of the UK and these are already well charted. There a number of sites where tidal stream generators could be deployed, but as yet no prototype device. Tidal stream is now covered as a technology in my Department's Sustainable Energy Programme.

The Department recently initiated a call for proposals under the Sustainable Energy Programme, which invites bids for funds to support the development of both wave and tidal power. The level of funding will be dependent on the number of good quality R&D proposals which are received from the industry.

Both technologies will also continue to be eligible for funding for R&D into Electricity Generation from renewable and clean sources from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). This programme provides £3.5 million of support per year for research into the full range of renewables technologies. To date, wave and tidal projects have received over £769,000 of support from this source.

We anticipate that the introduction of the Renewables Obligation will also provide a further stimulus to these and the wider range of eligible renewables, including wave and tidal power. Both technologies may also benefit from a proportion of the £100 million announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister earlier this year.

Renewable Energy (Planning Applications)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what timescale her Department has set for the implementation of a one-stop-shop for offshore renewable planning applications; and when she expects the first planning application under this system to be granted. [8254]

Mr. Wilson: Draft guidance describing the streamlined consenting process for offshore windfarms has recently been circulated by my Department to the industry and all the main statutory consultees for comment. A copy is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses. I intend that the guidance will be finalised shortly. The first application under this system has been received and the consenting authorities are now progressing the application in consultation with the developer as necessary but I am not able to say when the process will be complete.

Offshore Energy Technologies

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will encourage development and long term investment in the energy potential of a range of offshore technologies. [8249]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has put in place a range of measures to encourage and assist development and long term investment in offshore technologies.

The Government have allocated at least £49 million to capital grants for offshore wind. £39 million will come from DTI, the remainder from the New Opportunities Fund. The capital grants programme was officially launched this week, and application forms/guidance notes are now available from DTI at www.dti.gov.uk/renew/eoi.htm. These grants will support early deployment of a number of demonstration projects and enable the industry to develop a bank of knowledge and expertise to maximise the contribution of this technology to the UK's 10 per cent. target. We have also consulted recently on the offshore consents process and plan to bring forward a new 'one-stop-shop' approach which should make it easier for project developers to get their projects up and running.

Already this year, 18 wind farm developments have achieved pre-qualification status for a lease of sea bed from the Crown Estate. We hope to see these projects coming to fruition as quickly as possible. In the light of the interest expressed in the first round of leases we would also hope that the Crown Estate can provide further opportunities.

In connection with support provided to wave and tidal power, I would refer my hon. Friend to the questions answered early today PQ's ref No. 8256 and 8253.

All three technologies will also benefit from the forthcoming introduction of the Renewables Obligation. The Obligation marks a significant commitment by Government to the renewables industry as a whole, with the potential to create a market worth over £1 billion per annum by the year 2010. We have backed up our commitment to the Obligation with funding worth over £260 million for this and the next two financial years, including the capital grants funding and R&D programmes already mentioned. A proportion of the £100 million for renewables announced by the Prime Minister earlier this year may also be allocated to the early deployment of offshore technologies.

Electricity Transmission Lines

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government are taking to provide incentives for the strengthening of electricity transmission lines to enable the expansion of grid connections. [8250]

Mr. Wilson: This is a matter for the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem). I have asked the Director of Regulation and Financial Affairs to reply and will place a copy of his letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total amount of spending by her Department was in each nation and region of the UK, in the last year for which figures are available; what proportion of her Department's total spending this constitutes; and if she will make a statement. [6839]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 854–56W, to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Ministerial Visits

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) on how many occasions in each year since 1992 non-commercial flights were used by Ministers in her Department for official overseas visits; what the *(a)* destination, *(b)* Ministers involved, *(c)* cost and *(d)* reason for use of non-commercial flights were on each occasion; and if she will make a statement. [6884]

(2) if she will list all official overseas visits undertaken by Ministers in her Department in each year since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the cost in (i) cash and (ii) real terms, *(b)* the number and grade of (i) civil servants and (ii) special advisers accompanying ministers and *(c)* the number of official engagements or meetings undertaken on each visit; and if she will make a statement. [6883]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's answer on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 823W.

PRIME MINISTER

Afghanistan

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the latest situation with regard to the bombing in Afghanistan. [9822]

The Prime Minister: I attended the informal meeting of EU Heads of Government in Belgium on 19 October.

The meeting was originally called to have an informal discussion about the future institutional development of the European Union. In the light of 11 September we, the Presidency and all our partners, wanted to use the meeting to focus on developments in Afghanistan.

The continuing and wholehearted solidarity of the European Union in the face of the 11 September attacks was confirmed in the discussion in Ghent on Friday and in the statement which was issued, a copy of which I have placed in the Library of the House. The statement emphasises the crucial need to relaunch the middle east peace process without preconditions.

The European Union's solidarity with the United States has been shown in action as well as in words, not just by our own contribution but by those of other EU partners.

Since the beginning of this crisis, we and our EU partners have placed as much importance on the humanitarian as on the military aspects of our campaign. So far this year, aid amounting to over 310 million euros has been mobilised by the European Union to relieve the suffering of the Afghan people. That includes emergency aid and food aid released through the world food programme.

The EU has also been looking to the protection of our own citizens. The Commission has proposed uniform EU-wide security and safety standards in aviation, standards which have already been significantly tightened across the EU since 11 September. The co-operation between civil protection authorities across the EU has been stepped up and we are developing an EU system for surveillance and control of communicable diseases, including an early warning and response system to help us deal with threats from biological or chemical agents. EU-wide legislation is being negotiated on common penalties for terrorist offences and a European arrest warrant.

I have also placed in the Library statements on the economic situation in the European Union and on preparations for the euro. At the meeting, I stressed the importance of sticking to the economic reform agenda we outlined at the Lisbon Summit 18 months ago. The essential requirement in the present economic climate is to create jobs and that will happen if, at EU level and beyond, we can open up markets in energy, financial services, transport and other sectors. We also have to be steadfast for free trade. I welcome the commitment of Prime Minister Aznar to pursue that economic reform agenda vigorously under the Spanish Presidency.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met Lord Haskins to discuss the impact of foot and mouth disease in Cumbria; and when he next plans to do so. [7523]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations, it is not my practice to provide details of such meetings.

Jo Moore

Mr. Luff: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1165, if people serving in his office requested the resignation of Jo Moore, adviser to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and Regions; and if he will make a statement. [9276]

The Prime Minister: I have made my position clear on this, and I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him in the House on Wednesday 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1165. I regard the matter as closed.

"Defeating Terrorism: Campaign Objectives"

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister if the information released by Her Majesty's Government to the British media, during an official briefing in Oman on 10 October 2001, entitled "Defeating Terrorism: Campaign Objectives" is identical to the document placed in the Library on 16 October, entitled "Defeating International Terrorism: Campaign Objectives". [9462]

The Prime Minister: Yes. The document was published on Tuesday 16 October by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. It was made available to MPs and the media at the same time. However, the information and arguments in the document have been drawn on by Ministers and officials since it was first drawn up several weeks ago.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dublin and Monaghan Bombings

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) which Government Departments and agencies have been asked whether they hold any information relevant to the request for information from the independent commission of inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings on 17 May 1974 established by the Irish Government; when he will provide information to the commission; and if he will make a statement; [7895]

(2) if his Department has responded to requests for information from the independent commission of inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 17 May 1974 by the delivery of relevant documents; and if he will make a statement. [7949]

Dr. John Reid: The request from Mr. Justice Henry Barron, the Independent Commissioner of Inquiry into the Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk bombings, was shared with all relevant Government Departments and agencies. This has led to an extensive and time-consuming manual search of a large number of old files. As soon as this has been completed I will make a single co-ordinated response to Mr. Justice Barron.

I am replying on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has responded to requests for information from the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 17 May 1974 by the delivery of relevant documents; and if he will make a statement. [7950]

Dr. John Reid: The request from Mr. Justice Henry Barron, the Independent Commissioner of Inquiry into the Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk bombings, was shared with all relevant Government Departments and agencies. This has led to an extensive and time-consuming manual search of a large number of old files. As soon as this has been completed I will make a single co-ordinated response to Mr. Justice Barron.

I am replying on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Turkey

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of sanctions upon the economy and social welfare of the south-east Anatolia region of Turkey and its Kurdish inhabitants; and if he will make a statement. [9119]

Peter Hain: There are no sanctions against Turkey. There is little evidence to show that the economy in south-east Anatolia has suffered as a result of sanctions against Iraq. The United Kingdom firmly supports Turkish economic reform through institutions such as the IMF and the European Commission. We believe implementation of economic and structural reforms should help raise market confidence in Turkey and improve the long-term prosperity of the Turkish people.

Protocol

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will indicate whether the Mayor of London or the Lord Mayor of London has the higher protocol status as regards invitations and functions originated by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [8657]

Mr. Straw: This is a matter for the Lord Chancellor's Department; however, I understand that the position is as follows: there are conventions governing functions held in the City of London where the Lord Mayor of London takes precedence immediately after the Sovereign.

Outside the City, guidance will vary depending on the nature or location of the function. In more ceremonial events with a wider or national basis that include members of the Royal Family, the Lord Mayor may continue to have precedence over the Mayor of London, but, in other events, where no member of the Royal Family is present, the event organisers will take into account the nature of the function and the necessary courtesies.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Sri Lankan Government regarding *(a)* the situation of the Tamil people and *(b)* human rights violations against the Tamil people; [8733]

(2) if he will list the recent meetings he has had with representatives of the Sri Lankan Government regarding the situation of the Tamil people. [8726]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are concerned about the plight of civilians affected by the conflict and urge the Government and the LTTE to cease hostilities and negotiate a peaceful settlement. The Prime Minister and the then Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), reiterated our support for the peace process when they met President Kumaratunga and Foreign Minister Kadirgamar in March.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the representations that he has received from representatives of the Tamil people regarding human rights in Sri Lanka; [8727]

(2) if he will list the recent meetings he has had with representatives of the Tamil people regarding human rights violations in Sri Lanka. [8725]

Mr. Bradshaw: Staff in our High Commission in Colombo regularly meet representatives from all communities in Sri Lanka, including the Tamil community. We stay in touch with UK-based Sri Lankan groups and human rights organisations. We remain concerned by reports of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka and continue to remind the Government of the need to respect human rights. We are also concerned about human rights abuses committed by the LTTE and reports that they are still using child soldiers.

Maluku

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the UK contribution to the work of the United Nations Development Programme in respect of the international humanitarian response to the conflict in Maluku. [8234]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department for International Development (DFID) has pledged more than £4 million to help establish the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conflict prevention and recovery unit in Jakarta. The unit will build up capacity in conflict reduction and recovery in the provinces torn apart by ethnic conflict, particularly in north Maluku. These new initiatives will complement DFID-supported humanitarian relief programmes by addressing the causes underlying conflict—abuse of power, alienation and loss of access to and control of resources essential for every day life. We will continue to work with the Indonesian authorities and UNDP to promote reconciliation, begin wider reconstruction work and to offer practical assistance where appropriate.

The UK's message to the Indonesian Government has been consistently clear: a long-term solution to regional conflicts can only be achieved through political negotiation and consultation with the people.

Travel Advice

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what safety advice is given to persons planning to travel abroad. [8703]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office issues travel advice notices for over 200 countries. These notices are constantly reviewed on the basis of information received from British missions overseas. The advice varies from country to country and we advise any British nationals intending to travel abroad to read the relevant advice prior to travel. This advice can be accessed: on the FCO website at www.fco.gov.uk/; by telephone on 020 7008 0232/0233; by fax on 020 7008 0155/0164; or by letter to the travel advice unit in our Consular Division.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which countries his Department is recommending that holidaymakers should not travel. [8704]

Mr. Bradshaw: As at 19 October the FCO advises against travel to the following countries:

Afghanistan; Burundi; Central African Republic; Iraq; Pakistan; Tajikistan; Somalia; Yemen

and to the following specific areas:

Azerbaijan (western region of Nagorno-Karabakh and the militarily occupied area surrounding it); Republic of the Congo (except Brazzaville and Pointe Noire only); Ecuador (northern border areas with Colombia particularly Sucumbios province); Eritrea (south of the Barentu-Dekemahare line and the Eritrea/Sudan border area); Ethiopia (east of the Harar to Gode line, and within 20 kms of the Eritrean border in the Tigray and Afar regions only); Guinea (border region with Liberia and Sierra Leone only); India (Jammu and Kashmir only); Indonesia (Aceh,

Ambon and the rest of Maluku province, Nias island, central Kalimantan and Poso in central Sulawesi only); Israel and the Palestinian authority (only west bank and Gaza and Israel/Lebanon and Israel/Gaza border areas); Kyrgyzstan (south and west of Osh only and the Ferghana valley region only); Liberia (north-west only); Mozambique (Montepuez only); Namibia (border areas from Ruacana eastwards to Kongola and Namibia/Angola border areas north of the trans Caprivi highway); Philippines (southern and western Mindanao); Russian Federation (Chechen republic, Ingushetia, Dagestan, north Ossetia, Karachai-Cherkassia, Kabardino-Balkaria (including the Elbrus area) and to the eastern and southern parts of Stavrapol Krai only); Somalia (southern Somalia and the north-east region (Puntland) only); Sri Lanka (north and east only); Uganda (Mgahinga and Bwindi national parks, border areas with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, Gulu and Kitgum and Bundibugyo districts only):

and against all holiday and other non-essential travel to:

Algeria; Angola; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Côte D'Ivoire; East Timor; Haiti; Indonesia; Macedonia; Sierra Leone;

and against all holiday and other non-essential travel to the following specific areas:

Albania (the border with Kosovo only); Comoros (Anjouan only); Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville and Pointe Noire only); Ethiopia (across the land border to Djibouti); India (Manipur and Tripura only); Liberia (and against all travel to north-west); Philippines (Mindanao and Palawan only); Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Kosovo only).

Cultural Projects (Islam)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what cultural projects with new funding arrangements have been initiated by *(a)* the British Council and *(b)* BBC World Service to broaden understanding of the Muslim world since 11 September. [9273]

Mr. MacShane: The BBC World Service continues to serve as an independent forum for the exchange of ideas across cultural boundaries. BBC World Service news and current affairs programmes across all 43 of its language services have paid special attention to Islamic issues since 11 September. Regional language services have been enhanced, for which extra funding will be required. The BBC World Service is currently broadcasting a series on the principles of Islam.

The British Council is re-prioritising £1 million of current spending as the first step in an initiative called Open Minds, designed to encourage mutual understanding between young people from different cultures. Projects will include with UK diaspora communities, a major expansion of youth and school links, an enhanced dialogue for young professionals and future leaders and the development of on-line links in knowledge and learning centres in the Muslim world.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Carter Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost of the Carter report was. [7855]

Tessa Jowell: The cost of Patrick Carter's reviews into the English National Stadium, and the Lee Valley Stadium was £313,505.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost has been to *(a)* the National Lottery, *(b)* the Treasury, *(c)* her Department and *(d)* others of the production of the Carter report into Wembley Stadium and Picketts Lock. [7931]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The production costs for the reviews conducted into the English National Stadium and the Lee Valley Stadium by Patrick Carter were as follows:

£

	Cost (including VAT)
Sport England	294,076
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	15,932
Cabinet office	3,497
Total	313,505

The costs incurred by Sport England, my Department and the Cabinet Office exclude the pay cost of officials. Costs were incurred by the Cabinet Office prior to the Commonwealth Games Division, which supported Patrick Carter, transferring to my Department following the General Election. No costs were incurred by the Treasury or the National Lottery. The Reports were delivered on 31 August 2001.

World Athletics Championship

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what discussions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department have had on the prospect of staging the 2005 World Athletics Championship; [7926]

(2) when *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department first (i) met and (ii) spoke to representatives of the (A) Sheffield city council, (B) UK Athletics and (C) Don Valley stadium to discuss the prospect of staging the 2005 World Athletics Championship. [7933]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Officials and Ministers have had discussions with a wide variety of interested parties about the staging of the 2005 World Athletics Championships.

UK Athletics were involved in Patrick Carter's review of the Lee Valley National Athletics Centre project and were briefed by the project team on his conclusions on 4 October. Together with my officials and Sport England, I also met UK Athletics on 4 October to discuss the Championships.

I have not spoken to or met representatives of Sheffield city council or the Sheffield city trust in connection with the Championships. However, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, who was not involved in the process from 31 August-4 October spoke to both after a decision on the Championships was taken. My officials first met the Chief Executive of Sheffield city council at his request on 20 September to discuss a wide range of sports issues. During that meeting the Chief Executive reiterated Sheffield's offer to stage the 2005 World Athletics Championships. My officials together with Sport England colleagues met representatives of Sheffield city council and Sheffield city trust on 27 September to discuss in detail the feasibility of staging the Championships in Sheffield.

Wembley National Stadium Ltd.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if Wembley National Stadium Ltd. will be expected to repay any of the grant it received from Sport England; and, if so, how much. [7859]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* In December 1999, the Football Association offered to repay £20 million of the lottery grant received by Wembley National Stadium Ltd. as the stadium is no longer required to stage athletics. An application to Sport England to amend the Lottery Funding agreement was made by Wembley National Stadium Ltd. and the Football Association in September 2000. A review of the Lottery Funding Agreement will be taken forward in the next stage of the National Stadium project and the Football Association's offer to repay the £20 million will be part of that process.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on measures taken to help sports find alternative sponsorship and funding to tobacco advertising. [8435]

Mr. Caborn: As my hon. Friend is aware, the Tobacco Task Force was set up for the seven sports which sought assistance in the transition from tobacco sponsorship. The Task Force quickly concluded the first phase of its operation which was to identify the needs of the sports currently receiving Tobacco sponsorship and how best they could be assisted.

I wrote to the seven sports on 28 July to determine whether they still needed assistance and whether they would make use of the Task Force. Since then I have met representatives from snooker and I am due to meet shortly representatives from darts, pool and angling. To date rugby league, ice hockey and clay pigeon shooting have not replied.

Once these meetings have taken place I will then be in a position to determine what role if any the Task Force will play in the future.

Football (Grants)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what measures were taken by the Government to ensure that football clubs applying to the Football Foundation and the former Football Trust for grants for improvements to stadiums were awarded them as a result of competitive tendering; and if she will make a statement; [8463]

(2) which clubs received grants from the Football Foundation and the former Football Trust; when such grants were made; and what the value was in each case; [8461]

(3) if she will list those companies, and the football clubs involved, who were awarded contracts for improvements to grounds funded by the Football Foundation and the former Football Trust; what was the value of such grants in each case; when the grants were awarded; and if she will make a statement; [8462]

(4) what monitoring has been made of decisions of the Football Foundation and the former Football Trust in allocating grants to football clubs for improvements to stadiums; and if she will make a statement. [8460]

Mr. Caborn: On the winding-up of the Football Trust in 2000, its work in funding football stadium improvements passed to the Football Stadia Improvement Fund, a company limited by guarantee. Details of all stadium improvement grants made to individual clubs by the Fund, and before it by the former Football Trust, together with details of all grants made since July 2000 by the Football Foundation from its grass roots and community/education funds, are deposited regularly in the Library of the House.

On its inception, the Football Stadia Improvement Fund adopted the tendering policy of the former Football Trust. Contracts for stadium improvement work which is financed by grants from the Fund must be the subject of a minimum of three competitive tenders. In respect of work financed by grants in excess of £100,000, the Fund reserves the right to be present at the opening of the tenders. Although full details of all funded projects are retained by the Fund, and were retained by the former Football Trust, details of individual tenders are not retained by the Fund, and were not retained by the former Football Trust.

The Government monitor the decisions of the Football Stadia Improvement Fund and the Football Foundation through their representative on the Boards of these bodies, currently Lord Pendry. The Government were also represented on the Board of the former Football Trust. The annual accounts of the Fund, the Football Foundation, and the former Football Trust are and were subject to internal and external audit, and are and were submitted to the Audit Commission.

New Opportunities Fund

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the grants paid by the new opportunities fund under the space for sport and the arts initiative. [8759]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England is administering the grants for the Space for Sport and Arts programme on behalf of the other funding partners—the New Opportunities Fund, the Arts Council of England, DCMS and DfES. The 65 local education authorities involved in the programme are due to submit detailed applications by the end of October. Only once applications have been received and assessed will final funding allocations for each project be confirmed and the grants issued. Although a small number of applications have been received, no grant has yet been paid.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funds will be made available to parish and town councils to fund Golden Jubilee celebrations; and if she will make a statement. [9019]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Lottery funding will be available to help local communities mark and celebrate the Golden Jubilee. Local groups, including town and parish councils, can

apply through the cross distributor Awards for All for grants of between £500 and £5,000 for Jubilee related projects. Projects must meet existing criteria and involve one or more of the lottery good causes of the arts, sport, heritage, charities, health, education or the environment. Larger applications associated with the Jubilee will be considered by Lottery distributors if the project meets the criteria and timetable of an existing programme or scheme.

Recreation Facilities

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to enhance the protection and preservation of *(a)* school and *(b)* community sports and recreation facilities. [139]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* We are determined to build on our success in protecting playing fields and improve the playing field infrastructure for both schools and communities. £750 million from the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) will bring about a step change in opportunities for young people to play sport, through new and refurbished school sports facilities, including playing fields, which will be available for community use, throughout the country. NOF has selected Sport England as an Award Partner to deliver an additional £31 million of Lottery money to projects in England for the creation of playing fields and community spaces, as part of NOF's Green Spaces Initiative. My Department will encourage organisations funding green spaces to prioritise their funding allocations in line with local playing field strategies where they are available.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (DfES) recently issued strengthened Guidance for the Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for City Academies. The new guidance: introduces the role that the new School Playing Field Advisory Panel will play in advising on applications to dispose or change the use of school playing fields and the new criteria under which those applications will be assessed; gives more protection to playing fields provided for pupils under eight; and ensures that any proceeds arising from the sale of playing fields at operating schools are ploughed back into providing outdoor sport or recreational facilities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is currently considering the responses to his consultation on a revised draft of Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 on Sport, Open Spaces and Recreation. My Department is working closely with the DTLR to ensure that the new PPG 17 is robust in strengthening and extending our protection of school and community playing fields, and assists local authorities in planning constructively for sport and recreation for the future.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Landfill (Tyres)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made towards meeting the EU directive banning disposal of tyres in landfill. [8505]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have issued for consultation draft regulations giving effect to the requirements of the EC Landfill Directive, including those banning the landfilling of whole and shredded tyres. The consultation period closes on 26 October 2001 and we will then move to lay the regulations before Parliament as soon as possible. In advance of the regulations coming into effect the Environment Agency is using its existing powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations 2000 to apply the Directive's requirements to any permits issued in the interim.

Energy Savings

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to extend the obligation on energy suppliers to deliver energy savings to their customers. [8200]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Under the Utilities Act 2000, the Government will set an Energy Efficiency Commitment obligation for electricity and gas suppliers for the period 1 April 2002 until 31 March 2005. Under the commitment, electricity and gas suppliers will be required to achieve targets for the promotion of improvements in energy efficiency. There will be a focus on helping lower income consumers, including those in receipt of income and disability benefits.

A statutory consultation document on our proposals was issued in August, and we are currently considering responses. We intend to lay the Statutory Order for the Commitment during the autumn. It will be subject to affirmative resolution in both Houses of Parliament.

Radioactive Waste

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the Government consultation document on the storage of nuclear waste. [6363]

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what progress she has made towards developing long-term disposal of high level nuclear waste referred to in the Nirex document, Managing Radioactive Waste; [6731]

(2) when she expects the long-term disposal review of intermediate level nuclear waste, referred to in the Nirex document Managing Radioactive Waste, to be concluded; and if she will make a statement. [6736]

Mr. Meacher: The UK Government and Devolved Administrations published the consultation paper "Managing radioactive waste safely" on 12 September. People in the UK must have a central role in the decision on how radioactive waste is managed in the future. The paper proposes a programme of national debate and information gathering leading to decisions on the long-term management of radioactive waste, and explores how best we should organise that programme. It does not invite comments at this stage on specific options—such as storage or disposal—but it does summarise the main options, so people can always comment on them if they want to.

Foot and Mouth

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list for each county of England the disposal sites which are *(a)* available and *(b)* being used for the disposal of foot and mouth disease (i) carcases and (ii) ash from pyres. [5261]

Mr. Morley: Over the last few weeks most carcases resulting from new cases of foot and mouth disease have been disposed of by rendering. The two rendering plants that are currently available for use for the disposal of foot and mouth disease carcases are in Bradford (West Yorkshire) and Lancaster (Lancashire). The extent to which these plants are used depends on the demand for disposal on any given day.

On the few occasions when disposal demand has exceeded available rendering capacity use has been made of licensed landfill and mass burial sites. The only licensed landfill and mass burial sites that have been used for the disposal of foot and mouth disease carcases in recent weeks are those at Hespin Wood in Cumbria and Tow Law in Co. Durham. Other licensed landfill sites and mass burial sites could be contracted or brought back into operation should additional disposal capacity be required.

Wherever possible, ash from pyres is being buried on site. Where this is not possible it is being disposed of in licensed landfill. The landfill sites in England that are being used for this purpose are at Bishops Cleeve (Gloucestershire), Calvert (Buckinghamshire), Hespin Wood (Cumbria) and Workington (Cumbria). There are no plans to use any other landfill sites for ash disposal.

Organic Farmers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to launch a Countryside Stewardship Scheme for organic farmers. [8547]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Countryside Stewardship Scheme is already open to organic farmers. Because it is a discretionary scheme, applications are assessed and approved on the basis of the environmental benefits they can offer. This assessment process takes account of the potential additional benefits of combining Countryside Stewardship with organic farming and as a result many organic farmers have been accepted into the Scheme. Officials are also conducting a review of agri-environment schemes which will consider a range of issues including the structure of existing schemes and the interrelationship between them. The review will report in 2003.

London Weighting

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the total annual value of London weightings and London living allowances for her Department; and if she will make a statement. [6842]

Mr. Morley: Although different rates of basic salary apply in London the Department does not pay separate London weighting or local pay additions for staff working in London. Those were abolished on 1 October 1994.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the total annual running costs for buildings used, owned or rented by her Department for each nation and region of the UK, and estimate the average cost per square metre for properties used by her Department as a whole, and by region and nation of the UK. [6843]

Mr. Morley: The figures are as follows:

£ per annum

Nation/region	*Total running cost*	*Average running cost*
Wales	295,000	69
London	9,847,000	189
South West England	5,513,000	129
South East England	17,312,000	284
Anglia	5,971,000	121
North East England	15,869,000	253
North West England	2,625,000	129
	57,432,000	—
Overall average	—	196

Farmland Birds

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has for reversing the decline in the farmland bird population by 2020; [8169]

(2) what progress she has made in fulfilling the Government's commitment to reversing the decline in the farmland bird population. [8170]

Alun Michael: The farmland bird index, based on populations of 20 species, increased last year, though this may have been partly due to the relatively mild preceding winter. Expert advice is that it will take several years before we could expect to see the effects of current policy measures. Nevertheless, analysis of the underlying trend by the British Trust for Ornithology has shown that the rate of population decline is now slowing.

A number of existing policy measures will help this Department to achieve its Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to reverse the long-term decline in the number of farmland birds by 2020—not least the significant expansion of our agri-environment schemes under the England Rural Development Programme. In particular, we are very hopeful that next year's national rollout of arable Countryside Stewardship options, based on the successful pilot scheme, will prove beneficial for birds.

The reasons for the decline in farmland bird numbers are complex. That is why we have commissioned research from the British Trust for Ornithology, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Oxford University to help us identify more precisely what needs to be done to deliver the PSA target.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many and what proportion of each civil service grade in her

Department is located in each region and nation of the UK, what the average salary is for each grade; and if she will make a statement; [6844]

(2) how many and what proportion of each civil service grade in her Department is located in each region and nation of the UK, what the average salary is for each grade; and if she will make a statement; [6838]

(3) if she will estimate the number of staff employed by her Department by region and nation of the UK; and if she will make a statement. [6840]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1008–09W.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) on how many occasions in each year since 1992 non-commercial flights were used by Ministers in her Department for official overseas visits; what the *(a)* destination, *(b)* Ministers involved, *(c)* cost and *(d)* reason for use of non-commercial flights were on each occasion; and if she will make a statement; [6904]

(2) if she will list all official overseas visits undertaken by Ministers in her Department in each year since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the cost in (i) cash and (ii) real terms, *(b)* the number and grade of (i) civil servants and (ii) special advisers accompanying Ministers and *(c)* the number of official engagements or meetings undertaken on each visit; and if she will make a statement. [6903]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 823W.

WALES

Devolved Administrations

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his policy is with regard to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly committees; and to what categories of document he gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (1) Scottish Parliament, (2) Welsh Assembly, (3) Northern Ireland Assembly and (4) House of Commons Select Committees. [7024]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office gave on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1004W.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people his Department employed, expressed as full time equivalents, and what was the total cost of employing them in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001 to date. [9190]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Staff numbers are as follows:

	Welsh Office[1]	*Wales Office*[2]
1997	2,298	—
1998	2,320	—
1999	2,452	29
2000	—	33
2001	—	39

[1] To 30 June 1999.
[2] From 1 July 1999.
Notes:
1. On 1 July 1999, most of the Secretary of State's executive functions transferred to the National Assembly for Wales.
2. Figures include casual employees.
1997, 1998 and 2000 figures are full-time equivalents averaged over the year.
3. 1999 figures are January to June average for Welsh Office and July to December average for Wales Office.
4. 2001 figure is full-time equivalents averaged from January to the present.

Running costs are published in annual departmental reports.

HEALTH

Continuing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residents in nursing homes are fully funded by the NHS under continuing care criteria. [7395]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The total number of people in the year 2000–01 newly meeting the eligibility criteria for continuing national health service health care was 25,303.

Dystonia

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of existing research programmes into conditions of dystonia; [7711]

(2) what research his Department is sponsoring into *(a)* a cure for and *(b)* treatment of conditions of dystonia. [7710]

Mr. Hutton: The cause of dystonia is unknown and there is not, currently, an effective cure. That is why the research being carried out by the Medical Research Council (MRC) is so important. The MRC is the main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatment of disease and is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC has provided substantial funding for research into the causes of dystonia and other movement disorders. The Medical Research Council spent £2.25 million in 2000–01 on dystonia research.

Current projects being supported are:

Dr. R. Apps—"Role of climbing fibre pathways in movement control"

Professor R. N. Lemon—"Neural control of movement"

Professor Rothwell—"Neuronal pathways underlying central nervous system responses to injury and disease"

Professor P. G. Morris—"Fundamental improvements to functional magnetic resonance imaging and their application to hearing, movement disorder and stroke"

Professor Rothwell—"Physiology and pathophysiology of voluntary limb and trunk movement"

Dr. A. M. Bronstein "Visual and autonomic influences on balance mechanisms.

The Department keeps priorities for research under review and these are determined through discussion with the departmental research committee and others. In the national health service, priorities are identified through widespread consultation with those using, delivering and managing services.

Waiting Times

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list waiting times in each hospital trust in England for *(a)* cataracts, *(b)* hip replacements and *(c)* heart bypasses, in (i) 1997 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available. [7614]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Data on median waiting times for cataract, hip replacement and heart bypass procedures for 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 have been placed in the Library.

Clinical Services

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider proposals for strategic health authorities that cross boundaries of Government office regions to coincide with patterns of delivery of clinical services. [8041]

Mr. Hutton: The criteria for proposed strategic health authorities are that they should have a population of around 1.5 million, their boundaries should be coterminous with an aggregate of local authority boundaries and their boundaries should not cut across Government office for the regions boundaries. It has also been determined that boundaries should reflect clinical networks as closely as possible. The criteria for strategic health authority boundaries are in line with the principles set out in the Modernising Government White Paper. We have no plans to review the criteria for strategic health authority boundaries.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire dated 18 August concerning drug prices in Great Britain and other European countries. [7353]

Ms Blears: A reply to the hon. Member's letter of the 15 August was sent on 18 October.

Pharmacists Remuneration

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to agree pharmacists' remuneration terms for 2001–02. [7266]

Mr. Hutton: We have made an offer to the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC), which represents all community pharmacies providing National Health Service pharmaceutical services in England and Wales. We hope to conclude discussions with PSNC shortly.

Hospices

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole will receive a reply to her question of 4 July concerning funding for hospices ref 2853. [8721]

Ms Blears: I wrote to the hon. Member on 8 October 2001.

HPV Scheme

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people he expects to participate in the limited implementation HPV pilot scheme in *(a)* Newcastle, *(b)* north Bristol and *(c)* Norfolk and Norwich; [8499]

(2) how many people have taken part in the limited implementation HPV pilot scheme in *(a)* Newcastle, *(b)* north Bristol and *(c)* Norfolk and Norwich; and if the targets for the scheme have been met; [8498]

(3) what is the timescale for the implementation of the HPV screening programme following the completion of the trials; [8497]

(4) what plans he has to introduce screening for human papilloma virus into the national screening programme for cervical cancer; and if he will make a statement. [8482]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The pilot study of liquid based cytology and human papilloma virus testing as triage for women with mild or borderline abnormalities began in April 2001, as planned. Women with a mild or borderline screening result in the pilot will have an HPV test in accordance with the pilot protocol. In 2000–01, the number of cervical screening tests and the percentage of tests with a mild or borderline result for the three pilot site areas are shown in the table.

	Pilot sites		
2000–01	*Newcastle*	*North Bristol*	*Norfolk and Norwich*
Number of women screened	54,000	54,000	30,000
Percentage of women with a borderline/mild abnormality	8	7	13

Source:
Statistical Bulletin—Cervical Screening Programme, England: 2000–01

The HPV arm of the pilot will end in September 2002. Analysis of the data will begin in October 2002, and the report of the evaluation of the pilot will be submitted in early 2003. The pilot study is expected to cost some £1.3 million.

The NHS Cancer Plan set out the commitment that if evaluation of the pilots is successful, the Government will fund their introduction across the national health service.

Cervical Cancer

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what (1) proportion of deaths from cervical cancer occurred in women *(a)* over the age of 60 and *(b)* under the age of 30 years in each year since 1994; [8501]

(2) what percentage of UK women participate in the National PAP Screening Programme, broken down by *(a)* age 30 or below, *(b)* age 31 to 50, *(c)* age 51 to 60, *(d)* age 61 years or above and *(e)* ethnic group; [8500]

(3) what proportion of smear tests in England and Wales resulted in women being recalled as a result of inadequate smears in the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [8484]

(4) how many cases of cervical cancer have been diagnosed in women who have had a clear PAP test smear record in every year since 1994. [8483]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The number of deaths from cervical cancer since 1994 are shown in the table:

	Under 30 (percentage)	*30 to 59 (percentage)*	*60 and over (percentage)*	*All ages*
1994	25 (1.9)	505 (36.9)	838 (61.2)	1,369
1995	33 (2.5)	538 (40.2)	768 (57.4)	1,339
1996	28 (2.1)	508 (38.6)	779 (59.2)	1,315
1997	25 (2.0)	494 (40.3)	706 (57.6)	1,225
1998	24 (2.1)	470 (40.6)	664 (57.3)	1,158
1999	24 (2.2)	421 (38.0)	662 (59.8)	1,107
2000	14 (1.3)	437 (39.7)	651 (59.1)	1,102

Source:
Office for National Statistics

The percentage of United Kingdom women participating in the cervical screening programme is shown in the table:

Age range	*Percentage coverage*[1]
Under 30	66.8
30 to 49	84.9
50 to 59	83.9
60 to 64	77.6
25 to 64	83.0

[1] Proportion of women resident who have had a test with a result in the last five years

Source:
Statistical Bulletin—Cervical Screening Programme, England: 1996–97 to 2000–01

Women aged over 64 are invited if their previous two tests were not clear or if they have never been screened. Data by ethnic group are not held centrally.

Year	*Total number of cervical screening tests*	*Percentage inadequate*
1996–97	4,408,908	8.3
1997–98	4,428,938	9.1
1998–99	4,351,670	9.3
1999–2000	4,259,454	9.8
2000–01	4,089,440	9.7

Source:
Statistical Bulletin—Cervical Screening Programme, England: 1996–97 to 2000–01

Information is not held centrally on the number of women diagnosed with cervical cancer who had a clear test record. When a woman is diagnosed with cervical cancer, her screening history and smear slides are reviewed. No screening test is 100 per cent. accurate. Early detection and treatment can prevent 80 to 90 per cent. of cervical cancers developing.

Pancreatic Cancer

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for pancreatic cancer surgery at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital on 6 March. [7520]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Patients who need pancreatic cancer surgery at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital are brought in very urgently and do not appear on the trust's waiting list. There were no patients waiting for pancreatic cancer surgery at the end of March 2001, the closest date for which figures are available.

BMA

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had recently with the BMA on the relationship between the NHS and the private sector. [8573]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Ministers have not had any discussions recently with the British Medical Association on the relationship between the national health service and the private sector.

Care Charges

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to change care charges. [8568]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* We published for consultation draft guidance to local councils on fairer charging policies for non-residential social services on 3 January, and plan to issue final guidance later this year.

Care Direct

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on Care Direct. [8569]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* As announced in the NHS Plan, the Department will pilot Care Direct in six councils in the south-west of England, starting in 2001.

Plymouth and Somerset commenced on 1 October 2001; Gloucestershire and Bournemouth will follow on 22 and 29 October, respectively. Bristol will commence on 1 November and Devon on 1 December.

As announced in February this year, the second phase of pilots, which will start next year, will include the remainder of the councils in the south-west and a small number of additional councils. The Department will announce shortly who these will be.

Vegetables

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent evidence he has assessed on changes in the nutritional content of vegetables. [4682]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Food Standards Agency collects data on the nutrient content of a wide range of foods, including fruit and vegetables, on a regular basis. A report published last year suggests there has been some decline in the nutrient content of fruit and vegetables. Due to a variety of factors,

the range of nutrient levels in foods can be very wide and is approximately the same for conventional and organic produce.

The composition of individual foods is less important than the nutrient content and overall balance of the diet. Data show that nutrient intakes for the population as a whole are generally adequate.

Residential Care

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will hold an investigation into the costs of residential care. [9130]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Our response to the Royal Commission on long-term care, as announced in the NHS Plan, has been to introduce a range of measures to ensure the system of funding and charging for residential care is fairer.

We routinely monitor the costs of residential and nursing home care through performance indicators included in the performance assessment framework for personal social services. In addition, we have commissioned research into costs, fees and profitability in the care home sector. Residential care is subject to the best value regime that requires councils to balance costs, outcomes and quality.

Dental Students

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide funding support for those students who undertake dental technician courses. [8902]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Trainee dental technicians employed by the National Health Service are already eligible to apply for funding support through their employers. However, most trainee dental technicians are employed in privately owned dental laboratories. The Department has funded a project to draw up and define appropriate qualifications for occupational standards for dental technicians. When they are agreed, funding support for these qualifications may be available from a number of sources, including employers.

Health Visitors

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to recognise the work of health visitors in the proposed nursing and midwifery councils; and if he will make a statement. [8914]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 3 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 150W.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the annual report and accounts of the Medicines Control Agency. [9823]

Ms Blears: We have received the report and copies have today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of sections 5(2) and 5(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Instrumental Music Tuition

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money has been allocated to each local education authority in order to support instrumental music tuition in the 2001–02 financial year. [8126]

Mr. Timms: Funding for LEAs to maintain and extend their music services is allocated via the music standards fund. This includes the provision of instrumental tuition.

The music standards fund allocation for each LEA in the current financial year is contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The figures include both the DFES contribution and any LEA matched funding provided.

Veterinary Medicine

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to increase the number of veterinary schools. [6539]

Margaret Hodge: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)—not the Government—has responsibility for determining the number and location of higher education places, including those for veterinary medicine. The funding council takes demand for veterinary surgeons into account in setting the number of places.

In recent years, there has been a steady rise in the number of students entering veterinary schools, from 430 in 1991 to 660 in 2000, as well as a similar rise in the numbers graduating, from 360 to 560 over the same period.

Further Education

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of further education colleges would be able to pay the full 3.7 per cent. recommended pay rise for the coming year without making cuts in other budget headings. [6673]

Margaret Hodge: This information is not available to the Department. It is for college corporations to determine spending priorities within the overall need to balance their budgets. Colleges' ability to pay the recommended pay rise will depend on their overall financial health, their success in recruiting and retaining students (which will affect the funding they receive from the Learning and Skills Council) and the level of their staff costs in relation to overall college expenditure.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what factors relating to the responsibilities and duties of teachers in sixth-form colleges underlie the pay differential with further education colleges. [6681]

Margaret Hodge: The pay, terms and conditions of staff in general further education and sixth-form colleges are matters for college corporations and management to determine in consultation with the relevant unions. I understand that over the years since incorporation, sixth-form colleges have sought to mirror pay and conditions arrangements in schools, because staff responsibilities are similar in both. In general FE colleges,

a wider range of pay and conditions arrangements now exist, reflecting the diverse learning needs of colleges local communities and colleges individual decisions on implementing the nationally recommended pay settlement each year.

In addition, sixth-form colleges have, this year, been given proportionately a larger share of teaching pay initiative (TPI) funding than general FE colleges. This honours a commitment given by the former Secretary of State, identifying the scale of implementation of TPI in sixth-form colleges in 2001. Under TPI, sixth-form colleges should, this year, be able to replicate the £2,000 threshold payments that apply in schools; and in general FE, colleges should be able to pay at least £1,000 and up to £2,000 to eligible staff, with up to £4,000 to a minority of their most able staff.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the ratio of administrative staff to teaching staff in further education colleges for each year since incorporation in 1993. [6682]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council (and formerly the Further Education Funding Council) collects information about teaching and non-teaching staff employed for 15 hours a week or more over a teaching year. Non-teaching staff data are categorised into "supporting teaching and learning" (Support) and "other support" (Other). 1994–95 was the first year data were collected; the last year for which data are currently available is 1999–2000. Details about the number of administrative staff in further education colleges, or about staff employed for less than 15 hours a week, are not collected centrally.

The ratio between teaching and non-teaching staff is shown in the following table:

Year	*Teaching (thousand)*	*Support (thousand)*	*Other (thousand)*	*Non teaching ie support plus other (thousand)*	*Ratio (Non-teaching/ teaching)*
1994–95	130.9	19.0	54.9	73.9	0.56
1995–96	134.7	21.4	60.6	82.0	0.61
1996–97	130.9	23.6	63.6	87.2	0.67
1997–98	139.7	24.9	64.7	89.6	0.64
1998–99	141.8	23.8	65.3	89.1	0.63
1999–2000	136.7	24.5	68.6	93.1	0.68

Renewable Energy Education

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to promote increased access to training and development in renewable energy-related disciplines in higher education. [7358]

Margaret Hodge: Higher education institutions are autonomous organisations which design and determine their own courses, in response to market forces. A substantial number of higher education institutions are offering a range of courses in renewable energy-related disciplines in the current academic year. The Government are keen to promote an interest in science and technology generally. Science Year (September 2001 to August 2002) will raise the profile of science and increase pupil engagement with science, particularly in the 10–19 age range. It aims to boost the take-up of science subjects post-16.

Post-16 Education

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the role is of the Learning and Skills Council in the provision of post-16 education. [8151]

Margaret Hodge: The role of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is to plan, fund, monitor and improve the quality of post-16 learning up to higher education. We expect the LSC to encourage more young people to stay in learning; increase demand for learning among adults; and improve the skills of the work force. We also expect it to drive up standards in teaching, learning and training and to build equality of opportunity into everything it does.

Sixth-forms (Funding)

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans she has to review the funding formula for sixth-forms to reflect local needs; [8166]

(2) if she will make a statement on the rejection of the area cost adjustment formula for funding school sixth-forms; [8168]

(3) what steps her Department is taking to ensure no school will lose funding when the Learning and Skills Council assumes control of sixth-form resources. [8167]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: These are matters for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's chief executive, to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many separate funding streams are available to secondary schools with sixth-forms; and if she will make a statement. [8981]

Mr. Timms: All maintained schools, including schools with sixth-forms, receive almost all their public funding from their local education authority. The bulk of such funding—including support from the school standards grant—is delegated to a school through the authority's fair funding scheme. Schools also receive funding, via their local education authority, under the standards fund, and the teachers threshold pay grant. Individual schools may also receive support from a wide range of other sources, including the national lottery, and private sector contributions.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

From 2002–03, funding for school sixth-forms will be allocated to local education authorities by the Learning and Skills Council. Schools with sixth-forms will continue to receive this funding through their local education authority's fair funding scheme.

After-school Clubs

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to allow schools to run after-school clubs on their premises; and if she will make a statement. [8173]

Mr. Timms: Through the White Paper "Schools achieving success", launched in September, we gave our intention to legislate to enable school governors to run a wide range of family and community facilities and services, including child care.

Under existing legislation, school governors are able to run study support (out of school hours learning) activities and this will not be affected by the proposed changes.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will include information on acquired brain injury in new guidance on the education of sick children; [8326]

(2) if she will include within guidance for health professionals accompanying the Special Educational Needs code of practice, material on the particular SEN needs likely to arise in respect of acquired brain injury. [8327]

Mr. Timms: We will be including information on acquired brain injury (ABI) in the joint Department for Education and Skills/Department of Health guidance on "Access to Education for Children and Young People with Medical Needs", which will be published on 1 November 2001.

The importance of close liaison between education and health services to all issues that may affect learning for children and young people with ABI will also be highlighted in the SEN toolkit to be published alongside the SEN code of practice.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children attending *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools have SEN statements, broken down by (i) Church of England, (ii) Catholic, (iii) Jewish, (iv) Muslim and (v) Sikh schools. [8396]

Mr. Timms: The latest year for which we have complete special educational needs data is January 2000.

Special educational needs data for January 2001 are known to be incomplete.

Percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs, January 2000

	Maintained	
	Primary schools	*Secondary schools*
Church of England	1.5	2.2
Roman Catholic	1.1	1.9
Jewish	1.1	1.5
Muslim	0.6	[1]—
Sikh	0.6	0.0
Other[2]	1.7	2.6

[1] No schools of this type
[2] Includes mixed denominational schools, other christian faith schools and schools with no religious character

Illiteracy

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the Government's policies for combating illiteracy in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England. [8343]

John Healey: The Government are fully committed to helping the estimated one in five adults who do not have adequate literacy skills. The Prime Minister launched "Skills for Life", the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy in England on 1 March. New national standards, a core curriculum for literacy and numeracy, teacher training and national tests in literacy and numeracy are all now available nationally after a successful pilot. A national promotional campaign is currently boosting demand. We are working across Government and with key partner organisations to ensure that all those who can help adults with literacy and numeracy skills needs are able to do so. Our target is that 750,000 adults improve their literacy and numeracy by 2004. More than 70,000 adults have already gained literacy and numeracy qualifications since April 2001.

Policy for adult literacy in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

Free School Meals

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children attending *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary faith schools are eligible for free school meals, broken down by (i) Church of England, (ii) Catholic, (iii) Jewish, (iv) Muslim and (v) Sikh schools. [8398]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table.

Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, January 2001

	Maintained primary schools	*Maintained secondary schools*
Church of England	11.5	11.4
Roman Catholic	16.1	15.6
Jewish	4.0	6.2
Muslim	30.6	[1]—
Sikh	5.6	6.5
Other[2]	19.5	16.1

[1] No schools of this type
[2] Includes mixed denominational schools, other christian faith schools and schools with no religious character

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children attending *(a)* language, *(b)* sports, *(c)* technology and *(d)* arts specialist schools are eligible for free school meals. [8397]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the table.

Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, January 2001

	Schools designated as specialist as at September 2001
Language specialist schools	10.5
Sports specialist schools	17.8
Technology specialist schools	14.4
Arts specialist schools	18.5

Fast-track Scheme

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many people have accepted places on the fast-track scheme; and how many of them started their course; [8399]

(2) how many fast-track trainees started courses in September; and what subjects they are being trained to teach. [8403]

Mr. Timms: One hundred and twenty people accepted places on the fast-track teaching programme in this its first year. Nine have deferred taking up their places until autumn 2002. One hundred and eleven started a year of enhanced initial teacher training at nine of England's best ITT providers in September. They are training in the following areas:

	Number
Primary	27
Secondary	
English	23
Geography	10
History	11
Information and Communications Technology	1
Modern Foreign Languages	10
Mathematics	6
Music	3
Science	19
Withdrawn since starting training	1
Total	111

Teachers Returner Bonus

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers had registered for the returner bonus by 1 September. [8401]

Mr. Timms: By 1 September, 1,944 people had registered their details with the welcome back bonus registration line. By 17 October, this figure was in excess of 2,500.

The number of people registering their details so far does not necessarily represent the number who will receive the bonus. That will become clear when eligible teachers have returned application forms. We expect more people to register over the next few weeks as application forms become available, and to continue to do so until the scheme comes to an end in February 2002.

Church of England Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision has been made to ensure that some new Church of England schools are established in areas of economic and social hardship. [8407]

Mr. Timms: We welcomed Lord Dearing's June report to the Archbishop's Council, which recommended an increase in the number of Church of England secondary school places to build on the Church's record of meeting parental demand and local community need. However, decisions to set up new faith schools, or close other schools and reopen them as faith schools, are taken at local level—by the school organisation committee for the area, or the schools adjudicator where the committee cannot agree—and depend on proposals coming forward.

In the White Paper "Schools: achieving success", published on 5 September, we proposed to legislate for different procedures, where a need for a wholly new school is identified by a LEA. The LEA will have to invite any interested parties—which may include the Church of England or other faith group—to bring forward proposals to establish the new school. After the local school organisation committee has commented on alternative proposals, the Secretary of State will decide between them, taking account of the proposals educational merits, value for money and the outcome of local consultation.

Nursery Places

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what further spending will be made available for nursery places in Lancashire. [8419]

Mr. Timms: The Department for Education and Skills will notify Lancashire local education authority of its allocation of nursery education places for 2002–03 shortly.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many free nursery places were not taken up in Lancashire in the last 12 months. [8420]

Mr. Timms: Central Government made available sufficient funding for Lancashire local education authority to provide 5,008 free early education places for three-year-olds in 2001–02. In both the summer and autumn terms all of those places were taken up. Those places are in addition to those made available by the local education authority. We are unable to comment on the take-up of free places made available by Lancashire local education authority from its own resources.

Anaphylaxis (Children)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision *(a)* has been made and *(b)* will be made to enable children with anaphylaxis to participate in out-of-school activities; what work (i) has and (ii) will be undertaken with the Department of Health to ensure that such children are given the right to partake in such activities; and if the matter will be referred to the Cabinet Committee on children and young people. [8449]

Mr. Timms: My Department has produced good practice guidance, "Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits (1998)"; "Safe Keeping—A good practice guide for health and safety in study support settings (2000)"; and a joint good practice guide with the

Department of Health "Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs (1996)", all of which include advice to schools on including pupils with medical needs in out-of-school activities. The joint DFES and Department of Health website www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk also carries advice on problems relating to anaphylaxis. The Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 will bring access to education within the remit of the Disability Discrimination Act and will outlaw discrimination against disabled pupils or prospective pupils from September 2002. Out-of-school activities will be covered by the Act. One of the Government's children services objectives is to increase the number of disabled children who use inclusive play and leisure services, with appropriate support if necessary. It is standard practice not to comment on the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

Education Funding (East Sussex)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received from *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools in east Sussex regarding the level of funding for education in the county. [8677]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from schools in east Sussex over the past year concerning the level of the area cost adjustment applied to the county.

AS-levels

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for modifying AS-Levels. [8831]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: On 12 September, the Secretary of State announced changes which will reduce the burden of assessment on candidates taking their AS examinations next year.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority will submit a further report on vocational A-levels and key skills in December.

Post-16 Students

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of funding will be for post 16 students in schools where there is an overall increase in numbers on roll after April 2002. [8845]

Margaret Hodge: Ministers have set a national figure of £2,600 per pupil for adjustments in pupil numbers in 2002–03 that are above or below the real terms guarantee baseline set for each school sixth form.

Student Support

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the timetable for consultation on her plans to review the system of student support. [8887]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* No decisions have been taken yet on the timing of consultation.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to produce a consultation paper as part of the Government's review of the current system of student support. [8888]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* We have said that we plan to consult on any proposals for change that may emerge from the review. No decisions have been taken yet on the detail of the consultation process.

University Staff

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 554W, on university staff, if the information from the Higher Education Funding Council is now publicly available. [8907]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Provisional figures from the Higher Education Funding Council are now available. The following table provides figures by institution for the number of staff defined by institutions as research active that left positions between 1 January and 30 March 2001, as reported in institutions research assessment exercise returns. Under research assessment exercise rules, part of the work of some of these staff would have been included in the submission of the institution they had recently left.

Research active academic staff that left positions

Institution	*Number*
College of Ripon and York St. John	2
University College Northampton	7
Kent Institute of Art and Design	1
Institute of Historical Research	1
University of Sunderland	8
London Guildhall University	3
Chester College of Higher Education	1
University of Lincoln	3
Cheltenham and Gloucester College of HE	5
Anglia Polytechnic University	3
University of Teesside	3
Royal Academy of Music	1
University of Wolverhampton	3
University of Glamorgan	3
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff	2
Staffordshire University	3
Nottingham Trent University	6
University of Huddersfield	3
Brunel University	5
Royal Holloway, University of London	8
Middlesex University	4
Southampton Institute	1
Bolton Institute of Higher Education	1
University of Luton	2
Wimbledon School of Art	1
Bournemouth University	1
University of North London	2
University of Central England	3
Liverpool John Moores University	3
Aston University	2
University of Central Lancashire	2
University of Portsmouth	4
South Bank University	2
University College Chichester	1
Napier University	1
University of East London	2
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College	1
Manchester Metropolitan University	3
Sheffield Hallam University	3
University of Southampton	9

Research active academic staff that left positions

Institution	*Number*
University of Wales College of Medicine	2
University of Aberdeen	5
Oxford Brookes University	3
Birkbeck College	2
University of Wales, Swansea	3
University of Derby	2
University of Leicester	10
University of West of England, Bristol	2
University of Birmingham	9
University of Kent at Canterbury	2
University of Oxford	28
University of Stirling	4
University of Hull	6
Keele University	5
University of Warwick	4
Coventry University	1
University College London	19
Glasgow Caledonian University	1
University of York	7
St. George's Hospital Medical School	2
De Montfort University	4
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	3
University of East Anglia	3
Loughborough University	2
University of Edinburgh	9
University of Exeter	3
University of Dundee	2
Imperial College	8
Cranfield University	1
The London Institute	1
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	2
University of Sussex	4
University of Salford	1
Open University	3
University of Hertfordshire	2
University of Bradford	1
University of Manchester	9
University of Cambridge	14
University of Sheffield	4
University of Essex	3
University of Nottingham	4
University of Bristol	7
University of St. Andrews	3
University of Glasgow	3
King's College London	7
University of Bath	2
UMIST	4
Lancaster University	1
London School of Economics and Political Science	2
University of Ulster	2
University of Durham	3
University of Strathclyde	3
University of Reading	2
Queen Mary, University of London	21
Cardiff University	2
The Queen's University of Belfast	3
University of Newcastle	1
University of Leeds	2
Institute of Zoology	1
University of Wales, Lampeter	4
Royal College of Music	2
Falmouth College of Arts	1
Liverpool Hope	1
Royal Veterinary College	1
Bath Spa University College	1
University of Wales, Bangor	2
University of Surrey	2
School of Oriental and African Studies	1
University of Plymouth	1
University of Wales, Aberystwyth	1
Heriot-Watt University	1

Teachers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if work has begun on the research project into the reasons why teachers are leaving the profession. [8997]

Mr. Timms: The Department is in the process of commissioning this research project. Work is planned to commence in early December 2001.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what work has been done to investigate if teacher shortages are being tackled by teachers taking classes in subjects for which they are not qualified. [8998]

Mr. Timms: Many teachers are qualified in more than one subject. What subjects they should be asked to teach is a matter for the professional judgment of the headteachers concerned. The latest figures available show that in 1996–97, 82 per cent. of secondary school teachers held an appropriate subject qualification.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers who received their golden hello completed their contract. [9380]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally. In order to apply for a golden hello, an eligible teacher must have completed induction successfully and be employed in a relevant post in a maintained school or a maintained or non-maintained special school in England on a permanent contract or a fixed-term contract of one term or more.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Social Exclusion Unit

Angus Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many staff are employed in the Social Exclusion Unit in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK; [8596]

(2) what was the Social Exclusion Unit's expenditure on administration and staff costs in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK in each of the last five years; [8599]

(3) what representatives the Scottish Executive have in the running of the Social Exclusion Unit; and what their remits are. [8600]

Mrs. Roche: The Social Exclusion Unit is part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and reports to the Prime Minister through the Deputy Prime Minister. Its remit is to help improve Government action to reduce social exclusion by producing "joined-up solutions to joined-up problems". It works mainly on specific projects, chosen following consultation with other Ministers and suggestions from interested groups. The unit's remit covers only matters which are the responsibility of the Government, but it keeps in close touch with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland devolved Administrations, which have their own strategies for tackling social exclusion.

On 1 October 2001 there were 52 members of staff in the SEU. The administration and pay costs for the unit for the past five years are as follows:

SEU

£

	Admin costs	*Pay costs*	*Total*
1 December 1997–31 March 1998	42,841	45,914	88,756
1 April 1998–31 March 1999	262,600	418,518	681,119
1 April 1999–31 March 2000	760,046	810,618	1,570,665
1 April 2000–31 March 2001	1,100,289	1,145,957	2,246,247
1 April 2001–31 March 2002[1]	712,000	1,659,000	2,371,000

[1] Budget allocation

There are no staff employed in the Social Exclusion Unit in Scotland and there were no administration and staff costs over the past five years.

e-Democracy

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he plans to publish a Green Paper on e-democracy. [7357]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the e-Envoy, in conjunction with DTLR, is developing early proposals to enhance opportunities for all forms of participation in the democratic process through the use of information and communication technologies.

Before any proposals are taken forward, we anticipate undertaking a wide-ranging consultation, which will include elected representatives, civil society, business and individuals, as well as government at all levels—including the devolved Administrations and local government. However, no decision has yet been taken on the publication date of any consultation paper.

Civil Contingencies Secretariat

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister to which minister the Civil Contingencies Secretariat reports; and if he will list the staff working in it. [8223]

Mr. Leslie: The Civil Contingencies Secretariat is accountable to the Prime Minister through the Secretary of the Cabinet and to the Ministers who chair the Committees and Sub-Committees that the secretariat services. The Home Secretary chairs the Civil Contingencies Committee.

Nearly 100 staff currently work in the secretariat, which is headed by Mike Granatt. This number includes teaching and support staff at the Emergency Planning College.

Government Office for London

Harry Cohen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the activities and performance of the Government Office for London over the past six months. [9194]

Mrs. Roche: The mission of the Government Office for London (GOL) is to make London a better place by working with partner organisations to promote the Government's policies and achievement of their planned outcomes. GOL delivers policies and programmes for six Departments with a programme budget of over £2 billion in 2001–02. Its main activities are neighbourhood renewal, planning, skills and education, enterprise, sustainable development, housing, crime and community safety and culture. It is also a main liaison point with the Greater London Authority.

Some examples of what GOL has done in the past six months include the establishing of a Youth Crime team working in partnership of a Youth Crime team working in partnership with the police and boroughs to tackle youth crime and victimisation in 10 London boroughs; administration of nearly £600 million of European funds to 2006; and the launch of two Connexions Partnerships, to deliver services to young people in north and south London.

GOL is currently undertaking its mid-year review so I am unable to furnish my hon. Friend with details of performance for the past six months. However, a report on GOL's performance for the previous financial year is available in its annual review 2000–01 which is in the Library or accessible from GOL's website http//: www.go-london.gov.uk.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Maintenance Arrears

Mr. Heald: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average amount of money outstanding in maintenance arrears in respect of maintenance defaulters who have appeared before Huntingdon family proceedings court in 2001. [9397]

Mr. Wills: Information at this level of detail is not held centrally by the Department, and it would involve disproportionate cost to obtain details from the local Magistrates' Courts Committee.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the total amount of money owed in respect of arrears of maintenance under orders registered at Peterborough magistrates' court. [9396]

Mr. Wills: I have been informed by the Justices' Clerk for the area that the total arrears of maintenance orders at Peterborough Magistrates' Court appears to be £6,185,950. However, it is possible that this figure is overstated, as maintenance may have been paid direct between parties, parties may have reconciled, re-married or one of the parties may have died.

Arrest Warrants

Mr. Heald: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many arrest warrants not backed for bail were issued by family proceedings courts in Cambridgeshire in 2001; how many such warrants were executed and how many remain unexecuted; and if he will make a statement. [9395]

Mr. Wills: I have been informed by the Justices' Clerk for the area that nine warrants not backed for bail have been issued in Cambridgeshire in 2001; two of these warrants have been successfully executed and three warrants are still with the court's private enforcement contractors for execution. The remaining four have been returned to the court because the defaulters cannot be traced.

Freedom of Information Act

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) on what date he expects the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to come into force; and if he will make a statement; [6022]

(2) if he will set out the programme in place, giving date targets where appropriate, for achieving implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [6021]

Mr. Wills: The Freedom of Information Act received Royal Assent on 30 November 2000 and, by section 87(3), has to be fully implemented by the 30 November 2005. However, the Government are committed to the implementation of the Act before this deadline. The Lord Chancellor also has a statutory duty to report to Parliament by 29 November this year on his proposals for bringing fully into force those provisions that are not yet fully in force.

In his appearance before the Home Affairs Select Committee on 16 October, the Lord Chancellor outlined the two possible approaches to implementation. A 'Sector by Sector' approach would mean implementing the Act in stages, by type of public authority, with publications schemes provisions implemented first and the right of access following, say, six months later. The alternative is a 'Big Bang' approach, under which the publication scheme provisions are rolled out, by type of public authority, and the individual's right of access to all public authorities commences at the end of that complete process. The Government are considering which of these two to adopt.

Some parts of the Act are already in force. The provisions of the Act set out in section 87(1) came into force on 30 November 2000, when the Act was passed. These provisions relate mainly to the work of the Information Commissioner, the coverage of the Act and Order making powers. The provisions set out in section 87(2) of the Act came into force on 30 January 2001. These relate primarily to the creation of the post of the Information Commissioner. Provisions relating to the amendment of the Data Protection Act, as provided for by the Freedom of Information Act, were also brought into force by Commencement Order in Statutory Instrument 2001 Number 1637, on 30 April 2001.

The Government are determined that the time taken to implement the Act will be used well to ensure that the Act is a success. There is a parallel to be drawn here between the Freedom of Information Act and the Human Rights Act. Time was taken to ensure that the Human Rights Act was implemented properly. This meant that, despite criticism at the time, the implementation of the Act has been considered a success.

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many officials and what reasons are deployed to secure implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 *(a)* in his Department and *(b)* elsewhere in Government. [6024]

Mr. Wills: Within the Lord Chancellor's Department there is a Division devoted to central policy on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. It has a delegated budget of approximately £310,000 for work on Freedom of Information. In addition, the Division has allocated a grant in aid, for this financial year, to the Information Commissioner of £2 million, for her responsibilities under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

Each Public Authority is responsible for the implementation of the Act within its own jurisdiction and therefore, there are a number of staff involved in the implementation of the Act in the Lord Chancellor's Department itself, as well as in its Agencies and Associated Offices, as there are in other Departments.

Key staff in each Department include the Management Board level 'Champion' for Freedom of Information and the Implementation Team Leader. Records and knowledge management staff, including website staff, are also involved, as are many others throughout the Department. The work is clearly an aspect of many people's jobs; for example, the Home Office has in the region of 50 staff involved in the implementation as some part of their job.

City Status

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the announcement will be made of which towns have been awarded city status to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the accession of Her Majesty the Queen; and if she will make a statement. [8455]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Competitions for grants of city status to one suitably qualified town in each of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee were launched on 25 July, with a closing date of 12 October. Forty-two applications have been received and are now under consideration. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor hopes to announce the results in the early months of next year.

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the names of the communities which have applied for the conferment of city status to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the accession of Her Majesty the Queen. [8454]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Applications for grants of city status to mark Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee have been received, and are now under consideration, from the local authorities for the following areas:

England

Blackburn with Darwen
Blackpool
Bolton
Chelmsford
Colchester
Croydon
Doncaster
Dover
Greenwich
Guildford
Ipswich
Luton
Maidstone
Medway
Middlesbrough
Milton Keynes
Northampton
Preston
Reading
Shrewsbury and Atcham
Southend-on-Sea
Stockport

Swindon
Telford
Warrington
Wirral

Wales

Aberystwyth
Machynlleth
Newport
Newton
St. Asaph
Wrexham

Scotland

Ayr
Dumfries
Paisley
Stirling

Northern Ireland

Ballymena
Carrickfergus
Coleraine
Craigavon
Lisburn
Newry.

Ministerial Travel

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will list all official overseas visits undertaken by Ministers in his Department in each year since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the cost in (i) cash and (ii) real terms, *(b)* the number and grade of (i) civil servants and (ii) special advisers accompanying Ministers and *(c)* the number of official engagements or meetings undertaken on each visit; and if he will make a statement; [6915]

(2) on how many occasions in each year since 1992 non-commercial flights were used by Ministers in his Department for official overseas visits; what the *(a)* destination, *(b)* Ministers involved, *(c)* cost and *(d)* reason for use of non-commercial flights were on each occasion; and if he will make a statement. [6916]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 823W.

Devolved Administrations

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his policy is with regard to *(a)* ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly committees; and to what categories of document he gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (1) Scottish Parliament, (2) Welsh Assembly, (3) Northern Ireland Assembly and (4) House of Commons select committees. [7015]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1003–04W.

Departmental Staff

Pete Wishart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will estimate the number of staff employed by his Department by region and nation of the UK; and if she will make a statement. [6792]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1008W.

Possession Orders

Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of applications for possession orders were by *(a)* local authority landlords, *(b)* registered social landlords and *(c)* private landlords on grounds of arrears of rent in the most recent 12 month period for which figures are available, where delays in housing benefit were claimed to be the cause of the arrears. [8448]

Mr. Wills: Figures concerning possession applications brought by landlords are not collected in the form requested, nor by reason of application. The figures could be provided only at disproportion cost.

Early Listing Dates

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the delays to the arrangements of early listing dates in cases where the Crown Prosecution Service and the police have not prepared statements and arranged for witnesses to be available before pleas are entered. [9275]

Mr. Wills: The national Trial Issues Group carried out a review of the reducing delay measures in November of last year, in so far as they affected the magistrates' courts. One of the recommendations was that a national agreement should be established on file quality standards so that it was clear when they were "fit for purpose" and ready to proceed to court.

The Government's strategy to reduce unnecessary delay in the criminal justice system is being taken forward at a national level by the Trial Issues Group through its Reducing Delays Sub Group (RDSG). To achieve this, RDSG established a National Implementation Team consisting of officials from the Home Office, Lord Chancellor's Department, Crown Prosecution Service, police, Law Society and the Court Service. A "post-Narey" evaluation of most of the new procedures has now been carried out and an action plan based on its recommendations has been drawn up. TIG will oversee action generally on this during the course of this year.

Child Abduction

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many cases of child abduction occurred in the United Kingdom in the past year; and to which countries; [6737]

(2) what international treaties the United Kingdom has signed relating to child abduction; with which countries; and what other international legislation covers child abduction; [6738]

(3) what assessment is made after the negotiation of the return to the United Kingdom of a child abducted by one parent to a foreign country of the child's preferences; and what priority the outcome of such an assessment has in relation to agreements signed with that country; [7070]

(4) if it is his policy, in cases of child abduction, to examine the circumstances and suitability of the UK-based parent prior to entering into negotiations about the child's return; [6766]

(5) what agreements the UK Government have made with other countries on the return of abducted children to the United Kingdom. [6739]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Between September 2000 and August 2001, there were 140 cases reported to the Child Abduction Unit of children removed from England and Wales to countries which are signatories to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. These are broken down as follows:

Country	*Number of cases*
United States of America	27
Ireland	23
Spain	18
France	14
Germany	8
Canada	6
Australia	5
Netherlands	5
Belgium	4
New Zealand	4
Sweden	3
Greece	2
Poland	2
South Africa	2
St. Kitts and Nevis	2
Turkey	2
Zimbabwe	2
Cyprus	1
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	1
Hong Kong	1
Italy	1
Mauritius	1
Slovakia	1
Switzerland	1

In addition, there are abductions to countries which are not party to the convention or which, for other reasons, are not reported to the Child Abduction Unit.

The United Kingdom has signed the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and the European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children. A list of countries in which both conventions are in force with the UK is given in the table. In March 2001 the Brussels II regulation came into force. This regulation deals with the recognition and enforcement of judgments made in matrimonial proceedings and orders for parental responsibility in respect of children of both spouses. If a child is abducted or retained following a contact visit the left behind parent can use this legislation to recover the child. This regulation can only be used to enforce judgments made after 1 March 2001.

If a child has been abducted to a country which is a signatory to the Hague Convention the court in the foreign country is normally under a duty to return the child to his state of habitual residence as quickly as possible. The underlying basis of the convention is that the receiving state should not enter into an investigation in relation to the custodial issues, but leave these to be resolved by the courts in the country of habitual residence. However, the foreign court is not under a duty to return the child if he objects to being returned and has attained an age and degree of maturity at which it is appropriate to take account of his views.

While the foreign court is under a duty to return a child to his country of habitual residence as quickly as possible it may decline to do so if it would expose him to a risk of psychological or physical harm.

The agreements the Government have made in relation to the return of abducted children to the United Kingdom are the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and the Council of Europe Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions Relating to the Custody of Children.

Details of countries in which the Hague and European conventions are in force with the United Kingdom at 1 February 2001

Country	*Convention*	*Date*
Argentina	Hague	(1.6.91)
Australia	Hague	(1.1.87)
Austria	Hague/European	(1.10.88) (1.8.86)
Bahamas	Hague	(1.1.94)
Belgium	Hague/European	(1.5.99) (1.8.86)
Belize	Hague	(1.10.89)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Hague	(7.4.92)
Burkina Faso	Hague	(1.8.92)
Canada (most states)	Hague	(1.8.86)
Chile	Hague	(1.5.94)
Colombia	Hague	(1.3.96)
Croatia	Hague	(1.12.91)
Cyprus (Southern)	Hague/European	(1.2.95) (1.10.86)
Czech Republic	Hague/European	(1.3.98) (1.7.00)
Denmark	Hague/European	(1.7.91) (1.8.91)
Ecuador	Hague	(1.4.92)
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	Hague	(27.4.92)
Finland	Hague/European	(1.8.94)
France	Hague/European	(1.8.86)
Georgia	Hague	(1.12.97)
Germany	Hague/European	(1.12.90) (1.2.91)
Greece	Hague/Eurpean	(1.6.93) (1.7.93)
Honduras	Hague	(1.3.94)
Hong Kong	Hague	(1.9.97)
Hungary	Hague	(1.9.86)
Iceland	Hague/European	(1.11.96)
Republic of Ireland	Hague/European	(1.10.91)
Israel	Hague	(1.12.91)
Italy	Hague/European	(1.5.95) (1.6.95)
Liechtenstein	European	(1.8.97)
Luxembourg	Hague/European	(1.1.87) (1.8.86)
Macao	Hague	(1.3.99)
Macedonia	Hague	(1.12.91)
Malta	European	(1.2.00)
Mauritius	Hague	(1.6.93)
Mexico	Hague	(1.9.91)
Monaco	Hague	(1.2.93)
Netherlands	Hague/European	(1.9.90)
New Zealand	Hague	(1.8.91)
Norway	Hague/European	(1.4.98) (1.5.98)
Panama	Hague	(1.12.91)
Poland	Hague/European	(1.11.92) (1.3.96)
Portugal	Hague/European	(1.8.86)
Romania	Hague	(1.2.93)
Slovenia	Hague	(1.6.94)
Slovakia	Hague	(1.2.01)
South Africa	Hague	(1.12.97)

Details of countries in which the Hague and European conventions are in force with the United Kingdom at 1 February 2001

Country	*Convention*	*Date*
Spain	Hague/European	(1.9.87) (1.8.86)
St. Kitts and Nevis	Hague	(1.8.94)
Sweden	Hague/European	(1.6.89) (1.7.89)
Switzerland	Hague/European	(1.8.86)
Turkey	Hague/European	(1.8.00) (1.6.00)
Turkmenistan	Hague	(1.5.98)
U.S.A.	Hague	(1.7.88)
Venezuela	Hague	(1.1.97)
Zimbabwe	Hague	(1.7.95)

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Budgets

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the budget for *(a)* the current fiscal year and *(b)* the next five years for (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland for departmental spending by his Department. [9398]

Mr. Nick Brown: The information requested is not available. Expenditure plans are published in Departmental Reports. However, the Department for Work and Pensions was created only in 2001–02 and the first Parliamentary Estimate covering the whole of the new Department is still being prepared.

Departmental plans are not broken down by region but information regarding expenditure in Scotland up to the 1999–2000 fiscal year is available in HM Treasury's publication "Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis (PESA) (2001–02)" published in April 2001 under Command Number 5101.

SEMA Doctors

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the work of SEMA doctors for the Benefits Agency in south Cumbria. [7524]

Maria Eagle: There is currently a shortage of examining doctors in south Cumbria. This has resulted in some delay, particularly during the summer months, to the processing of claims for Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance. SchlumbergerSema Medical Services are actively recruiting new doctors to address the shortage, and as a temporary measure they are planning to use doctors from the North East to cover Cumbria if necessary.

Pension Awareness Advertising

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library the research into the pension awareness advertising campaign referred to in his Department's press release of 21 September. [7901]

Mr. McCartney: The evaluation of the pensions education advertising campaign has been placed in the Library.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the targets set for reducing fraud in respect of each benefit and payment for which his Department has responsibility; and what progress has been made towards meeting such targets in each year since 1997. [7476]

Malcolm Wicks: We have put in place a comprehensive strategy to reduce fraud across all benefits. We are tightening up the system to make sure that from the very first claim, the right benefits are going to the right people.

We have firm targets for reducing the amount of fraud and error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance. The Department is aiming for a reduction of 25 per cent. by 2004 and 50 per cent. by 2006. We have met our first milestone, which was to achieve a 10 per cent. reduction by March 2002, 18 months ahead of schedule.

This year we have also introduced for the first time a continuous measure of the level of Housing Benefit fraud. We will consider the appropriateness and scope for setting targets for reducing the level of incorrectness in Housing Benefit in the light of the results of this exercise.

We have also introduced an ongoing programme of National Benefit Reviews looking at other benefits. These reviews are providing us with the intelligence we need to focus our efforts where it is needed most.

Jobseeker's Allowance (Earnings Limit)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will change the limit on earnings which can be retained by people on Jobseeker's Allowance; and if he will make a statement. [8097]

Malcolm Wicks: The earnings disregards for Jobseeker's Allowance are aimed at achieving a balance between encouraging people to undertake part-time work and remain in touch with the labour market, while not creating disincentives for them to take up full-time work and become independent.

We keep the levels of earnings disregards under review. The higher earnings disregard for lone parents, people with disabilities and certain other special groups was increased by a third to £20 from April this year.

Maintenance Payments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how much money in excess of the proper calculation was paid by parents without care through the Child Support Agency to parents with care, in the last year for which information is available; and how much was recovered from parents with care and repaid to parents without care; [7718]

(2) how much money below the proper calculation was paid by parents without care through the Child Support Agency to parents with care, in the last year for which information is available; and how much was subsequently recovered and paid over. [7719]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 11 October 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the Child Support Agency.

Mr Smith is unavailable and therefore I am writing to you on his behalf.

You asked how much money in excess of the proper calculation was paid by parents without care through the Child Support Agency to parents with care in the last year for which information is available; and how much was recovered from parents with care and repaid to parents without care.

You also asked how much money below the proper calculation was paid by parents without care through the Child Support Agency to parents with care in the last year for which information is available; and how much was subsequently recovered and paid over.

The information you have requested in the first part of each question is not available, as it is not collected in the format you have asked for.

However in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts for 2000–2001, the National Audit Office estimated that overpayments amounted to £5 million and underpayments amount to £12 million. These figures were based on a sample of cases examined, which showed underlying errors in maintenance assessments and incorrect adjustments to customer's accounts. Any variance of 1p of more in an assessment is regarded as an error.

Where we identify that maintenance has been overpaid it will be refunded to the parent without care either in a lump sum or by means of reducing the ongoing liability that has to be paid.

Maintenance that was due but not paid is collected as arrears. Arrears are either received in lump sum payments or agreements are reached where by a parent without care will pay an amount towards arrears in addition to regular maintenance. If no agreement can be reached between the Agency and the parent without care then that case would undergo enforcement action.

The value of the excess of the proper calculation and also that, which is below the proper calculation, is not collected in the format you have requested to enable me to give a definitive reply.

I hope this is helpful.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out for Q1 1998–99 to Q1 2001–02 *(a)* how many people were awaiting an appeal for Invalid Care Allowance at the end of each quarter, *(b)* the average time it took to process the appeal and *(c)* the average time it took to process the original claim. [7479]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The information is as follows:

(a) The number of Invalid Care Allowance appeals outstanding at the end of each quarter from 1998 to 2001 are shown in table 1. The figures for 2001–02 are not available.

Table 1: Invalid Care Allowance appeals on the last day of each quarter

	Number
1998–99	
Quarter 1	1,217
Quarter 2	1,274
Quarter 3	1,223
Quarter 4	1,358
1999–2000	
Quarter 1	911
Quarter 2	661
Quarter 3	449
Quarter 4	336
2000–01	
Quarter 1	273
Quarter 2	304
Quarter 3	366
Quarter 4	392

Notes:

1. Information taken from 100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System (GAPS). All figures are subject to change. Figures are being provided by BA DCBD.
2. Quarters run:

1. April-June, 2. July-September, 3. October-December, 4. January–March each year.

(b) The average clearance times from receipt of the Appeal by the Benefits Agency to the Appeals Service issuing the tribunal's decision and the average waiting times from receipt of the appeal by the Benefits Agency to the first hearing by a tribunal for 1998 to 2001 are shown in table 2. The figures for 2001–02 are not available.

Table 2: Invalid Care Allowance average clearance and waiting times—in weeks—for cases heard in the quarter

	Clearance times[1]	Waiting times[2]
1998–99		
Quarter 1	28.2	27.5
Quarter 2	28.5	27.8
Quarter 3	26.2	24.1
Quarter 4	28.6	24.6
1999–2000		
Quarter 1	28.9	24.4
Quarter 2	29.3	25.2
Quarter 3	30.8	23.6
Quarter 4	39.1	26.5
2000–01		
Quarter 1	28.7	22.0
Quarter 2	29.9	22.0
Quarter 3	27.1	21.7
Quarter 4	28.6	23.0

Notes:

1. Clearance times shown apply from the date of lodgement with the Benefits Agency to the Appeals Service issuing the tribunal's decision. Thus delays caused by adjournments are included. The time taken for the Benefits Agency to implement the decision is not included.
2. Waiting times shown apply from the date of lodgement with the Benefits Agency to the date of the first tribunal hearing.
3. Quarters run:

1. April-June, 2. July-September, 3. October-December, 4. January–March each year.

(c) The average times taken to process Invalid Care Allowance claims for 1998 to the first quarter of 2001–02 are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Average time taken to process an Invalid Care Allowance claim—in days—for quarters

	Days
1998–99	
Quarter 1	19.3
Quarter 2	18.3
Quarter 3	19.0
Quarter 4	18.7

Table 3: Average time taken to process an Invalid Care Allowance claim—in days—for quarters

	Days
1999–2000	
Quarter 1	18.0
Quarter 2	18.7
Quarter 3	21.0
Quarter 4	19.7
2000–01	
Quarter 1	18.0
Quarter 2	20.3
Quarter 3	21.3
Quarter 4	20.0
2001–02	
Quarter 1	19.7

Note:
1. Quarters run:
1. April-June, 2. July-September, 3. October-December, 4. January–March each year.

Benefit Claims

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is his intended timetable for allowing local authorities to receive permissive powers to allow agency and contractor staff to determine benefit claims. [9543]

Malcolm Wicks: We will shortly begin informal discussions with local authorities with a view to introducing permissive powers from spring 2002. In addition to this we will fully consult with the Local Authority Associations and take account of any views expressed by other interested parties.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the effect will be on incapacity benefit entitlement where an incapacity benefit recipient applies for employment following a work-focused interview; and if the fact that the application has been made will have any bearing on the outcome of any future personal capability assessment; [9534]

(2) if it is his intention that, after a work-focused interview for an incapacity benefit claimant there will be continued one to one contact between the interviewer and the claimant for provision of future advice and guidance; and if he will make a statement; [9535]

(3) what is the level of contact anticipated between a work-focused interviewer and a Personal Capability Assessment Medical Examiner for incapacity benefit claimants in pilot areas for the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001; and if records from work-focused interviews will be available to PCA examiners; [9536]

(4) if the outcome of a work-focused interview for incapacity benefit claimants in pilot areas for the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001 will influence the timing of a claimant's next personal capability assessment. [9537]

Malcolm Wicks: Work-focused Interviews will enable people receiving incapacity benefit to consider their work options and to hear about the practical and financial help that is available to them. An application for employment following a work-focused interview will have no effect on an individual's incapacity benefit entitlement and would not in itself have any bearing on the outcome of any future personal capability assessment. If a person subsequently took up employment, entitlement might be affected as there are limited circumstances in which people can work and receive incapacity benefit.

A person receiving incapacity benefit will be able contact their Personal Adviser at any time following the work-focused interview to seek further advice and guidance. They will also be able to take part in a review when they will have the opportunity to discuss the help and benefits available to them.

There will be no direct contact between the work-focused interview Personal Adviser and the personal capability assessment medical examiner. Records from the work-focused interview will not be available to personal capability assessment medical advisers.

The participation of a person in a work-focused interview will not generally influence the timing of their next personal capability assessment. However, if at the time their Personal Adviser considers it appropriate they may refer the case to a benefit decision-maker to consider if, in the light of all the available evidence, a personal capability assessment is required.

Occupational Pensions

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate he has made of the number of integrated private schemes which take into account increases to the state pension after retirement age when calculating the amount of occupational pension payable; [8408]

(2) if the Government will introduce similar legislation to that enacted in Ireland to prohibit integrated private schemes which take into account increases to the state pension after retirement age when calculating the amount of occupational pension payable. [8409]

Mr. McCartney: The Government have no plans to introduce legislation on integration in the manner described because there is no evidence that UK occupational pension schemes take increases in the state pension into account once state pension age has passed and the scheme member's pension is in payment.

It is estimated that in 1995 there were approximately 7,200 private sector defined benefit occupational pension schemes which operated integration of some form to allow for the receipt of state pensions.

In general, the integration adjustment is applied at the time the pension is calculated at the date of retirement or at the date state pension age is reached. The resultant pension is then subject to increases according to the scheme rules. These rules also protect against the level of pension from being reduced once it has gone into payment.

TREASURY

LETS and Time Banks

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on

people who take part in *(a)* local exchange trading schemes and *(b)* time banks with specific reference to taxation. [8589]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Local exchange and trading schemes and time banks are dealt with in accordance with normal tax rules. If a trader offers their goods and services through a LETS scheme then they will be liable to tax in the normal way. If a non-trader offers their goods and services through a scheme there should be no liability. Since both the form of these organisations and of members' activities within them can differ, anyone in doubt about the tax position, whether organiser or scheme member, should check the position with the local tax office.

Beer Imports

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate HM Customs has made of the amount of beer imported illegally into the UK in lorries and containers in each of the last five years. [8217]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* HM Customs and Excise do not currently produce an estimate of the amount of beer illegally imported to the UK in lorries and containers.

VAT (Wet Suits)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on exempting VAT on specialist wet suits for those agencies who operate in the area of emergency rescue. [8590]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Those publicly funded agencies who operate in the area of emergency rescue are fully compensated for any VAT they may incur when purchasing specialist wet suits. In this respect such equipment does not require an exemption from VAT.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce relief from the Climate Change Levy for businesses which invest in processes which significantly reduce electricity consumption; and if he will make a statement. [9203]

Mr. Boateng: To protect the competitiveness of UK industry, sectors covered by the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive Parts A1 and A2 are able to get 80 per cent. reductions in the Climate Change Levy in exchange for entering negotiated agreements with the Government to deliver specific energy reductions. These agreements covet the main energy intensive sectors exposed to international competition.

Any business may benefit from the levy-funded Enhanced Capital Allowances when they invest in approved energy efficient products or technologies. And they can obtain energy efficiency advice and audits through the new Carbon Trust. Businesses which reduce their energy consumption will of course pay less Climate Change Levy and reduce their level of environmental pollution.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many businesses benefit from relief on the Climate Change Levy; and if he will make a statement; [9205]

(2) what agreements exist with industry representative bodies for relief from Climate Change Levy; and if he will make a statement. [9207]

Mr. Boateng: To protect the competitiveness of UK industry, sectors covered by the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive Parts A1 and A2 are able to get 80 per cent. reductions in the Climate Change Levy in exchange for entering negotiated agreements with the Government to deliver specific energy reductions.

There are 44 overarching agreements with representative bodies covering 39 sectors. These relate to over 5,000 firms, operating at just under 13,000 sites.

There are other reliefs available to any business, including exemptions for new forms of renewable energy and for combined heat and power systems.

Home Maintenance

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the definition of an improvement in the context of tax deductibility of expenditure on home maintenance. [8613]

Mr. Boateng: In general terms improvements to domestic property constitute personal expenditure and are not tax deductible. In the case of a trader whether expenditure on a business asset constitutes an improvement or a repair for tax purposes is a question of fact and will depend upon the circumstances in each case.

Vehicle Excise Rebate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason he decided that the rebates on vehicle excise duty for cars up to 1549cc would apply only to licences obtained after November 2000. [8513]

Mr. Boateng: In the November 2000 pre-Budget report, the Chancellor proposed that he would extend the small car engine VED rate for cars first registered before 1 March 2001 from 1200cc to 1500cc, subject to consultation. The Chancellor also proposed that this extension should have immediate effect, as if starting in November 2000.

In Budget 2001, the Chancellor confirmed that following consultation, the Government would extend the small car engine VED rate from 1200cc to 1549cc. To deliver the commitment to ensure that the extension applied from November 2000, all motorists who took out vehicle licences between November 2000 and June 2001 inclusive have been invited to apply for rebates. Any new licences taken out from 1 July 2001 are charged at the new, lower rate.

Football Transfer Fees

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much VAT was raised on football transfer fees in each of the last five years at current prices. [8856]

Mr. Boateng: The information is not available.

VAT (Housing Associations)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to interpret VAT regulations so that zero-rating of aids and adaptation works is applied to non-charitable housing associations. [8615]

Mr. Boateng: The zero-rate for aids and adaptation works is available only to disabled people, charities and housing associations that choose to operate as charities. The UK's ability to extend zero rates is limited by EU agreements.

Social Housing (VAT)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to reduce VAT to 5 per cent. on all works to existing social housing. [8614]

Mr. Boateng: A reduced rate of VAT on all works to social housing would be a major change to the VAT base. Such a change would require careful consideration of all the social, environmental and economic effects.

Biofuels

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extent to which the proposed 20p rebate on biodiesel will stimulate production of biodiesel in order to meet the expected EU targets for road transport fuel to be from bio sources. [8611]

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal steps he has taken to ensure that the United Kingdom can meet the European Commission target for road transport fuel to be provided by biofuels by the year 2005. [9426]

Mr. Boateng: Under the Green Fuel Challenge launched in November last year, the Government announced that, subject to EU agreement, it will introduce a new duty rate for biodiesel in Budget 2002, at 20p per litre below the rate for ultra-low sulphur diesel. This rate takes account of the environmental benefits of using biodiesel.

The rate for biodiesel will be reviewed each year in the light of the prevailing social and economic circumstances, including any relevant European requirements. At present, the European Union has not published any targets for the use of biofuels as road transport fuel.

Railtrack

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from Railtrack employees with shareholdings in the company. [8393]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers receive a variety of representations from a wide range of people on a daily basis.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he had with Cabinet colleagues about Railtrack in the week prior to the announcement that it was going into administration. [8447]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers have discussions on a wide range of issues with colleagues and a variety of people and organisations on a daily basis.

Public-Private Partnership

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received since 8 October from *(a)* actual and *(b)* potential public-private partnership partners concerning the structure of partnership contracts. [8446]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers receive a wide range of representations from a variety of groups and individuals on a daily basis.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidelines his Department sets down on how Departments should *(a)* assess, *(b)* quantify and *(c)* define political risk in public-private partnerships; and if he will make a statement. [8605]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In assessing programmes, policies and projects, it is important that Departments take proper account of all risks likely to affect achievement of their requirements. General Treasury guidance on risk assessment in the context of investment appraisal for all types of projects, including those taken forward by way of public-private partnerships, is set out in "Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government" published by the Stationery Office. In addition, the Treasury has published general guidance on the strategic management of risk, including political risk, in "Management of Risk: a Strategic Overview". Copies of both publications are available in the Library of the House.

Teenage Parents (Jarrow)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of teenage parents is not in education, employment or training in the Jarrow constituency. [9105]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Stephen Hepburn, dated 22 October 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the proportion of teenage parents not in education, employment or training in the Jarrow constituency (9105).

Information on teenage parents is not available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for Parliamentary Constituencies.

The wards comprising Jarrow constituency fall within the local authority districts of South Tyneside and Gateshead, but the LFS sample size for teenage parents in these districts is too small to provide reliable estimates of the proportion who are not in education, employment or training.

Barnett Formula

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has *(a)* to review the Barnett formula and *(b)* to undertake a review of Government expenditure in the regions of the UK. [8673]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government's policy on funding the devolved Administrations, including the Barnett formula, is set out in the Statement of Funding

Policy, published by the Treasury in July 2000. The spending of UK Government Departments will be reviewed in the 2002 spending review in the normal way.

Auditors

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the work of auditors. [8901]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The Government are currently considering recommendations made by Lord Sharman in his report "Holding to Account" which arose out of his review of audit and accountability for central Government in the 21st century. The report includes recommendations designed to ensure high quality external audit in central Government. The Government will be responding to the report following due consideration of the issues raised.

With regard to external audit standards in the economy more widely, there are statutory arrangements which require company auditors to be properly supervised and appropriately qualified. These arrangements are a matter for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Personal Investment Authority Investigations

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firms have paid an administrative fee for Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman investigations into complaints brought by clients regarding financial advice in the last financial year; on how many occasions fees were levied; how much money was raised in total; in what percentage of cases the firm was found to be at fault; and what was the total cost to the FSA of investigating those cases. [9254]

Ruth Kelly: In the year ending 31 March 2001, the Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman Bureau (PIAOB) received 17,255 new cases against PIA regulated firms, each of which attracted a £500 case fee. 13,000 cases were resolved during this period, of which 46 per cent. were resolved by voluntary agreement between each side, through conciliation or mediation, and 22 per cent. of which were found against the firm.

The total cost to the PIAOB of dealing with these 13,000 complaints was £9.5 million. This was funded by £6.5 million in case fees; £2.8 million direct from the PIA; and the £0.2 million balance from other income (mainly sale of publications). The PIAOB investigates complaints itself and so there was no cost to the FSA in investigating these cases.

Census

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what measures will be taken to provide accurate and reliable census data for Eastbourne; [9099]

(2) when the *(a)* summary and *(b)* full census results for Eastbourne will be published; [9097]

(3) what percentage of households in *(a)* Eastbourne and *(b)* Wealden completed a census return. [9098]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Nigel Waterson, dated 22 October 2001:

As National Statistician and Registrar for England and Wales, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on:

1. what measures will be taken to provide accurate and reliable census data for Eastbourne (9099);

2. when (a) summary and (b) full census results for Eastbourne will be published (9097);

3. what percentage of households in (a) Eastbourne and (b) Wealden completed a census return (9098).

In answer to the first question, a number of measures have either already been implemented or will be taken to provide accurate and reliable census data. Prior to the Census, an important new initiative was the Community Liaison programme. Its main objectives were:

to facilitate enumeration and to ensure full coverage;

to help provide a source of potential field staff;

to advertise the Census and to underline its uses;

to provide help to individual members of local communities;

to help with translations and advertising.

This, coupled with the new strategy of asking the public to post their completed forms back, enabled resources to be targeted to where they were most needed.

Despite these efforts, it was always anticipated that some people would not be counted and that the degree of under-enumeration would vary across the country. The extent and nature of such under-enumeration will be more accurately assessed than ever before by the extensive, separate, follow-up Census Coverage Survey carried out by interviewing around 300,000 households shortly after the Census enumeration was completed. Once the interview responses and all the Census returns have been analysed, we will have a definitive picture of how well we have done at Local Authority level. The sample size was large enough for estimates of levels of under-enumeration for each Local Authority to be made and will enable the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to create a complete dataset for analysis of individual communities that takes account of this estimated under-enumeration.

Information about the quality of Census data will be published on the National Statistics website and brought together in a Census Quality Report to be published in 2003.

With regard to your second question, the target date for mid-year 2001 population estimates by sex and age for all local authority areas based on the 2001 Census is August 2002. These will include an adjustment for births, deaths and migration between Census Day (29 April 2001) and 30 June 2001. The target date for summary Census results—Key Statistics for areas throughout England and Wales (including Eastbourne) is December 2002. They will be laid before Parliament and accessible through the National Statistics website.

The full census data for Eastbourne will be published along with the detailed results for all the other local authority areas in the first half of 2003; these will be accessible via the National Statistics website.

In response to your final question, I am unable, at this stage, to provide detailed information on the response rate to the Census in Eastbourne and Wealden. This will be available in Autumn 2002. Currently the ONS estimates that the 2001 Census response rate nationally will reach 98 per cent. of households.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for changes to the eligibility criteria for the VAT annual accounting scheme. [9739]

Mr. Boateng: Customs are currently analysing responses to the recent consultation exercise and will be making recommendations to Ministers in due course.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Numbers (Northamptonshire)

18. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the chief constable on police numbers in Northamptonshire. [5159]

Mr. Denham: I have not had any discussions with the chief constable about police numbers in Northamptonshire.

On 1 October Northamptonshire police had 1,209 officers, 52 more than in March 2001. This is a record number of officers. The force also had 724 civilian staff, 30 more than in March 2001.

Under the crime fighting fund (CFF) recruitment initiative, Northamptonshire police has been allocated a total of 90 additional recruits, over and above its previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003.

In 2000–01 Northamptonshire police recruited all 32 of its CFF allocation for that year and had approval to accelerate 31 of its 2001–02 allocation into 2000–01. There will therefore be one CFF recruit in 2001–02 and a further 26 CFF recruits in 2002–03.

Police Complaints

20. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the police complaints system. [5161]

Mr. Denham: We will bring forward legislation in this Session, which will include provisions to establish a new police complaints system to replace the current system. The new system will mean a new body, the Independent Police Complaints Commission, will replace the Police Complaints Authority. The Government published their plans for a new system in a framework document on 18 December last year, copies of which can be found in the Library.

Police (Reassurance Work)

21. **Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the reassurance work of the police. [5162]

Mr. Denham: The police reform process is looking at the ways in which the visibility and accessibility of the police can be increased. We have been working closely with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to identify how these approaches could be used to increase levels of public reassurance. We are also looking at how to make best use of those who work with the police as partners in delivering community safety.

Police (North Yorkshire)

22. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the chief constable on increasing the number of police officers in North Yorkshire. [5163]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has not discussed police numbers with the chief constable. He has arranged to visit the North Yorkshire police in the near future. A range of issues will be discussed including the resources available to the force.

I am told by the chief constable that the force had 1,388 police officers on 21 September which is 83 more than on 31 March 2001. I understand that the force is on target to have 1,420 officers by 31 March 2002. The force also had 682 civilian support staff—91 more than in March.

28. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to visit Scarborough and Whitby to inspect the North Yorkshire police force and the rural mobile police station initiative. [5169]

Mr. Denham: I am keen to visit as many police forces as I can to hear the views of the police service and to see the work being done to reduce crime and provide public reassurance. I will be visiting North Yorkshire police on 1 November and will be interested to hear of innovative ways of making police officers more visible and accessible to the communities they serve.

Drug Education Programmes

23. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will visit the DARE drug education programme and make it a model for a nationwide scheme for all 10-year-olds. [5164]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I am unable to visit the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) Programme at present.

I am aware of the contribution made by DARE Programme to drug education schemes in a number of areas, particularly the strong support it has in the Nottinghamshire area. However, it is for local education authorities to decide on the most appropriate approach to drug education in their schools, taking account of the specific needs and circumstances of pupils in that area.

The Department for Education and Skills (DFES) has issued guidance encouraging schools to deliver drug, alcohol and tobacco education as part of a broader personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. This framework has been in place since September 2000 for pupils aged five to 16 and gives PSHE an assured place in the national curriculum.

Drug education in schools is part of a wide range of services for young people jointly planned and commissioned through Drug Action Teams (DATs), and monitored through Young Persons Substance Misuse Plans. The plans aim to ensure that, by 2004, in every DAT area there will be substance misuse education and information for all young people and their families; advice and support targeted at vulnerable groups; early identification of need; and tailored support to all who need it.

Police Suspensions (Wales)

24. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in the *(a)* Dyfed Powys area and *(b)* Aberystwyth division were

suspended from work on full, part or sick pay for (i) six months, (ii) one year and (iii) two years or more during the last year. [5165]

Mr. Denham: The Professional Standards Department of Dyfed-Powys police has informed me that there are currently four officers suspended, two of whom are based in the Aberystwyth division. These two officers have been suspended since September and December 1999. The other two officers are from the Brecon division and have been suspended since October 2000.

In addition, one officer from Aberystwyth division was suspended on 27 June 2000 and reinstated on 27 July 2001 (a period of some 13 months). Another officer from the same division was suspended on 10 October 2000 and reinstated on 31 November 2000 (a period of one month).

During the year 2000–01 the following officers have also now been reinstated, or have resigned, following a period of suspension. They are given in chronological date order. One officer from a headquarters department was suspended on 13 August 1999 and resigned from the service on 15 March 2000 (a period of some seven months). One officer from Carmarthen division was suspended on 3 September 1999 and reinstated on 7 April 2000 (a period of some seven months). One officer from Brecon division was suspended on 6 December 1999 and reinstated on 15 May 2000 (a period of some five months). One officer from Pembrokeshire division was suspended on 6 June 2000 and reinstated on 6 September 2001 (a period of some 15 months). One officer from Pembrokeshire division was suspended on 19 February 2001 and reinstated on 6 September 2001 (a period of some seven months). The Dyfed-Powys police have confirmed that all the officers concerned were, or are, suspended on full pay.

Police Personnel Management

25. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the management of personnel within police forces. [5166]

Mr. Denham: The Government are committed to ensuring that the police service as a whole has modern and effective personnel policies. Such policies are vital to improving the fitness, the readiness and the availability of all forces to tackle crime. We want the police service to have the very best modern management practices. A key part of our strategy is the development of an occupational health service to be co-ordinated nationally and delivered locally.

Female Police Officers

27. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve retention of female officers in the police force. [5168]

Mr. Denham: The police reform process should deliver working conditions and practices which will support all officers and in particular female officers. We have already taken action to support more flexible working practices; we have recently laid the Police (Amendment) Regulations 2001 which will, from 1 November, extend part-time working to chief inspector rank. This, and a report which the Home Office is about to publish on flexible working in the police service, should greatly assist chief officers to adopt a more strategic approach to improve recruitment, retention, efficiency and effectiveness.

Police Numbers (Sussex)

29. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police numbers in Sussex. [5170]

Mr. Denham: I understand from the acting chief constable that on 1 October 2001 Sussex police had 2,963 police officers, 108 more than in March 2001. The force also had 1,573 civilian support staff, 119 more than in March 2001.

Under the crime fighting fund (CFF) we have allocated Sussex police 206 CFF recruits over three years to March 2003; 47 were recruited in 2000–01. Latest information from the force indicates that it expects to recruit 83 of its CFF allocation in 2001–02 and a further 76 in 2002–03.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about police numbers in Sussex. [5148]

Mr. Denham: I am told by the acting chief constable of Sussex that on 1 October 2001 Sussex police had 2,963 police officers, 108 more than in March 2001. The force also had 1,573 civilian support staff, 119 more than in March 2001.

The crime fighting fund is delivering more police officers to Sussex police. Information supplied by the force shows that Sussex expects to take on a total of 224 new recruits this year.

Police Numbers (South-East)

30. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on police numbers in the south-east. [5171]

Mr. Denham: I have received a number of representations from forces in the area covered by the Government offices for the south-east and London since April 2001.

There have been six representations by means of parliamentary questions and an Adjournment debate. There have also been written representations from hon. Members about police numbers in Sussex and Thames Valley. I have had representations from the City of London police about its resources.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary meets regularly with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, the Chairman of the Metropolitan Police Authority and the Mayor of London at which a range of issues are discussed, including police numbers.

There have been two representations about police numbers in the Essex police.

Police numbers in the Government regions for the south-east and London and the Essex police as at 31 March 2001 are set in the table.

Force	Police numbers	Increase over March 2000	Civilian support staff numbers	Change over 31 March 2000
City of London	703	–29	233	–52
Metropolitan police[1]	24,878	–607	10,040	–565
Hampshire	3,435	+16	1,482	+39
Kent	3,319	+115	1,796	+149
Surrey[1]	2,066	+281	897	+135
Sussex	2,855	+33	1,454	+127
Thames Valley	3,703	–37	1,891	+105
Essex[1]	2,887	+81	1,447	+99

[1] Most of the reduction in policy numbers in the Metropolitan police is due to the boundary changes on 1 April with Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey. These changes will therefore have contributed to the increase in police numbers in Essex and Surrey for 2000–01.

Speed Cameras

31. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the guidance issued on the siting of speed control cameras. [5172]

Mr. Denham: Since speed cameras were introduced in 1992, they have been sited in accordance with guidance set out in Home Office Circular 38/92. This specifies that they should be located where there is a known history of accidents and the major contributory factor is excessive speed. The Home Office is currently working with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), the police and local authorities to produce firmer guidance on siting, visibility and signing.

Avon and Somerset Police Authority

32. **Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make increased funding available to the Avon and Somerset police authority. [5173]

Mr. Denham: Under the funding settlement for 2001–02 Avon and Somerset police authority set a budget of £189.7 million. This was an increase of 4.7 per cent. over 2000–01.

The police authority received an increase in grant supported funding of £7.7 million (4.4 per cent) in 2001–02. The force will also benefit this year from an allocation of £0.993 million from the rural policing fund. Provision in 2001–02 for 67 officers recruited last year under the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) will be about £1.69 million. In addition, if the force's forecast of recruitment for this year holds, it will receive about £0.99 million for 51 CFF recruits agreed for 2001–02.

Drug Abuse

33. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a Royal Commission to examine the law on drug abuse. [5174]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to the question from the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 15–17.

Rural Policing

34. **Peter Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect on crime levels of the increased funding for rural policing; and if he will make a statement. [5175]

Mr. Keith Bradley: During the 2000–01 financial year, police authorities in rural areas received £15 million from the police modernisation fund to improve policing in rural areas. For the 2001–02 financial year, police authorities received £30 million.

Police authorities are required to publish a statement on how the money has been, and will be, spent in their annual policing/best value performance plan. This statement includes what aspects of rural policing were or will be targeted for improvement; what level of improvement was or will be achieved and how the impact of the police in rural areas will be enhanced. Police authorities can use the suite of best value performance indicators to demonstrate the improvements in policing.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to extend the use of antisocial behaviour orders. [5138]

Beverley Hughes: Antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) are one measure in this Government's drive to control disorder on estates and in communities. I am determined that ASBOs play their proper part in reducing crime and disorder. We have conducted a research review of the effectiveness of ASBOs during their first two years in operation. We will announce later this year our detailed conclusions on how to extend their use.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been applied for and issued in *(a)* the north-west and *(b)* Wales. [7695]

Mr. Denham: There is known to have been some under-recording of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) in a few police force areas. With the co-operation of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), we are therefore undertaking a one-off reconciliation exercise to establish any differences between the numbers of ASBOs known to the police and the data from court returns. I will write to the hon. Member when the information becomes available.

Police Numbers (South Wales)

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to meet the chief constable of south Wales police to discuss staffing of police stations in south Wales. [5145]

Mr. Denham: I have met the chief constable on a number of occasions mostly in his capacity as president of the Association of Chief Police Officers. We have discussed a range of issues including the resourcing of the police service.

It is for the chief constable to determine staffing levels at police stations in south Wales. He will assess local needs in line with operational priorities and the force policing plan and allocate available resources accordingly.

I am told by the chief constable that in September the force had 3,217 officers, which is a record number. Between March and September this year police numbers in the force increased by 117. The force also had 1,235 civilian support staff.

Young Offenders

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the measures he is taking to reduce youth offending. [5155]

Beverley Hughes: We have introduced a wide programme across Government to tackle those factors which lead young people into crime. This includes initiatives which focus on the family; tackle deprivation; and address absenteeism from school, under-age drinking and drug misuse.

We have also transformed youth justice by cutting delays, expanding the options available to the police and courts and establishing new national and local structures. We are currently introducing the intensive supervision and surveillance programme for persistent young offenders, and next April referral orders will start operating nationally.

Police Recruitment and Retention

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police retention and recruitment. [5157]

Mr. Denham: Police numbers rose to 125,519 at March 2001 following the largest single annual increase in police numbers since 1988–89. In the 12 months to 31 March forces recruited 64 per cent. more officers than the previous year. Wastage remains low compared with other occupations at under 5 per cent. of strength.

The upward trend in police numbers will continue as the impact of the crime fighting fund increases. We expect the total number of police officers to reach 128,000 by March 2002 and 130,000 by March 2004.

Violent Crime

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on levels of violent crime. [5160]

Mr. Denham: Crime overall has fallen under this Government. The most recent British Crime Survey, which is widely recognised as providing the best picture of long-term trends in crime, shows a drop in violent crime of 4 per cent. between 1997 and 1999. But we know from the increase shown in police recorded crime figures that level of violent crime remains too high and we must continue to do all we can to reduce it.

Our strategic approach to tackling violent crime is based on improving support for victims, more efficient, intelligence-led policing, more effective punishment, dealing with the causes of violent crime and tackling the conditions which breed violence.

Last year we gave £20 million to the five metropolitan forces which account for nearly three quarters of all recorded robberies, specifically to assist them in meeting their five-year robbery reduction targets. They have used the money to introduce a number of new initiatives and to reinforce good practice. These include the targeting of hotspots (including transport routes) and offenders based on better intelligence, higher visibility of uniformed officers on the street, mobile CCTV vans, a range of publicity measures, improved recording, scene of crime management, investigation and identification techniques; youth diversion measures, the creation of safe routes into city centres, and targeted anti-mobile phone theft campaigns.

Crime Reduction Partnerships

26. **Geraint Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on crime reduction partnerships. [5167]

Mr. Denham: Crime and disorder reduction partnerships lie at the heart of crime reduction and the effective development and implementation of local strategies by police, local authorities and other local groups to ensure a community-based approach to tackle local problems.

Police Numbers

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of police officers is per 10,000 of population in *(a)* England and *(b)* Cambridgeshire. [6171]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 16 October 2001]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

Number of staff per 10,000 population

	Cambridgeshire constabulary	*England*
31 March 2001		
Police officers	[1]17.87	23.4
Civilian support staff	[1]8.47	10.3

[1] Population figures are those for mid-1999, the latest available from the ONS.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many compensation payments the Immigration and Nationality Directorate has made for the loss of passports and original documents, and at what cost, in each of the past 10 years. [8069]

Angela Eagle: Details of compensation payments were not recorded centrally prior to April 2000.

Records of compensation payments made in respect of claims against the Integrated Casework Directorate have been kept centrally since April 2000. In the financial year 2000–01, 410 claims were approved; £44,550 was paid in compensation. In the first six months of the current financial year, 214 claims have been approved and £68,165 has been paid. As there is a timelag of around two months between authorisation and payment, a number of claims agreed in 2000–01 will have been paid in the current financial year. Records of payments do not differentiate between claims in connection with lost passports and other claims arising from maladministration by the directorate but we estimate that around 85 per cent. relate to lost passports and associated costs such as travel expenses.

Asylum Seekers (Algeria)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers have been returned to Algeria in each of the last 10 years; and what guidance he gives for returning Algerians to that country. [8074]

Angela Eagle: The requested information on the number of failed asylum seekers returned to Algeria in each of the last 10 years is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Available information on the number of Algerian nationals who were removed from the United Kingdom, having at some stage sought asylum, is shown in the table.

	Number
1995	150
1996	200
1997	180
1998	80
1999	100
2000	80

Guidance on returning Algerians to Algeria takes account of objective country information and advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The country information sources are listed in the bibliography of the Algerian country assessment, a copy of which is in the Library and on the Home Office website. The policy to remove failed asylum seekers to Algeria if they have no other basis of stay in the United Kingdom is in line with that of other European countries.

Assets (Confiscation)

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to take steps to confiscate the assets of serious criminals. [9152]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Last Thursday the House gave a First Reading to the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which sets out the Government's broad-based attack on those who seek to profit from the misery of others. I look forward to the views of my hon. Friend and other hon. Members when we debate the Second Reading of the Bill shortly.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment the NCIS has made about the effects of the action in Afghanistan on the UK market for illegal drugs; and if he will make a statement. [9465]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: NCIS has made no assessment but we are keeping the position under review.

Work Training and Job Kiosks

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons have work training and job kiosks; and what plans he has to extend these initiatives across the prison estate. [9143]

Beverley Hughes: Prisons provide prisoners with information from the Employment Service (ES) job-bank, by contacting ES Direct or by hard copies of vacancies sent/brought to prisons by ES staff working directly with the Prison Service. Information from the job-bank is obtained from the internet by Prison Service staff.

We are considering piloting a number of stand-alone job point kiosks in selected prisons which prisoners can use to access this information directly. We are also considering piloting the ES work train databases within some prisons which have well developed job clubs or pre-release programmes run by prison staff or a voluntary sector partner (with a phone line to ES Direct). If the results look promising, we will consider a wider roll-out across the prison estate.

Palestinian Mandate Refugees

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Palestinian mandate refugees and their descendants are living in the United Kingdom; and if he will bring forward proposals to give them permanent refugee status. [8119]

Angela Eagle: Palestinians are or can be protected or assisted by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the near east (UNRWA), which is another agency of the United Nations. They do not therefore fall under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandate and are not recognised as mandate refugees. I understand there are no Palestinians therefore present in the United Kingdom as the result of an application made under the resettlement programme relating to mandate refugees.

Terrorists

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been arrested or detained for questioning and subsequently released without charge in connection with the terrorist events of 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [8685]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Following requests for information and assistance from the FBI six people were detained under the provisions of the Terrorism Act 2000. All were released without charge but one was immediately re-arrested under the terms of an extradition warrant. Since 11 September a further 17 people were detained under the provisions of the Act. All but one were released without charge.

The police and security services continue to monitor and assess any potential terrorist suspects, including any who are already in custody for other offences.

Police Car Chases

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been involved in crashes while taking part in car chases, over the latest year for which figures are available. [8783]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The latest figures available are for the 12 months from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 and refer only to accidents involving police vehicles which were engaged in immediate/emergency response or pursuit at the time of the accident. During this period one officer was killed, 60 sustained serious injuries, and 1,018 were slightly injured. Figures are not held centrally on the number of police officers involved in emergency/pursuit accidents which did not result in a death or injury.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letters of 8 August and 18 September, ref 13889/1. [8738]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 22 October. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Police Numbers (London)

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the manpower level of police is in London; and if he will make a statement. [9154]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that on 31 August the force had 25,514 officers. This is 636 more officers than in March 2001. In addition the force had 10,338 civilian support staff—298 more than in March 2001.

Pakistani Nationals

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Pakistani nationals holding UK visas have been refused entry to the UK since 11 September; and how many of these were refused at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick and *(c)* Manchester. [8196]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* I regret that the information requested is not currently published.

Motorcycle Nuisance

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action his Department is taking to reduce motorcycle nuisance on estates and open spaces; [4909]

(2) what action he proposes to curb illegal use of motorcycles by children. [4910]

Mr. Denham: In his speech to the Superintendents Association on 11 September my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made it clear that untrained, unlicensed and uncontrolled off-road motorcyclists can create misery and danger in a public park or open space, and that action was needed.

Where this is a particular problem, we would expect it to be covered within the local crime and disorder strategy. There are a number of existing powers which can be brought to bear. The antisocial behaviour order provides an important tool in respect of antisocial activity by particular individuals. Other measures include provisions in the Road Traffic Acts 1988 and 1991 and, as regards excessive and avoidable noise, in the Environment Protection Act 1990. Where appropriate, local authorities can consider enacting byelaws specifically to restrict the use of motorcycles on council estates and in open public spaces. Current research is looking at aspects of unlicensed driving and motorcycle riding, and we shall consider carefully any further measures it recommends to address the issues.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if asylum seekers arriving at Heathrow are informed of their entitlement to receive legal advice before being interviewed substantively; and if he will make a statement. [5204]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 19 July 2001]:* Asylum seekers arriving at ports of entry are informed of the availability of legal advice by way of a form (IS97E), which also explains asylum procedures. Shortly after being identified as a person applying for asylum this form is served upon the applicant by an immigration officer.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers awaiting adjudication there are in prisons in Wales [7744]

Angela Eagle: The latest published information on the number of asylum seekers detained under Immigration Act 1988 powers relates to 30 June 2001. As at that date, 40 persons (to the nearest five) who were detained under Immigration Act powers in prisons in Wales are recorded as having claimed asylum at some point, all of which were being held at Her Majesty's prison Cardiff. My right hon. Friend Lord Rooker visited Her Majesty's prison Cardiff on 17 September 2001 when there were 21 detainees in the prison. Information on how many of these persons were awaiting adjudication on 30 June 2001 is not available and could be obtained only by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost.

The temporary use of Her Majesty's prison Cardiff to hold immigration detainees will end by Christmas, with the other local prisons providing temporary places following suit by the end of January.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants for asylum, broken down by country of origin, have had their applications refused in the last four years; and how many are known *(a)* to have left the United Kingdom and *(b)* to have remained within the United Kingdom. [7118]

Angela Eagle *[pursuant to the reply, 16 October 2001, c.1192W]:* The total numbers of known removals in each of the last four years, excluding dependants, are given in the table:

Year	Removed[1,2] asylum seekers[3]
1997	7,165
1998	6,990
1999	7,660
2000	8,980

[1] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action was initiated against them.
[2] Figures are rounded to the nearest 5. Figure for 2000 is provisional.
[3] Persons who had sought asylum at some point, excluding dependants. Includes persons leaving under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme.

Departmental Staff

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of staff employed by his Department by region and nation of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [6852]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend, Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office gave on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1008W, which included a table showing the number of staff in the Home Office by region and nation of the United Kingdom.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of each civil service grade in his Department is located in each region and nation of the UK, what the average salary is for each grade; and if he will make a statement. [6856]

Mr. Blunkett: Information on Home Office staff by grade in each region and nation of the United Kingdom at 1 April 2000 is set out in the tables. Information on average salaries for the same date is not available.

Table 1: Numbers and percentages of staff by grade level and region/nation as at 1 April 2000—Home Office[1]

Number of staff by grade level and region (full-time equivalent)

Government office region	All grades	SCS level	Level 6/7	SEO/HEO level	EO level	AO/AA level	Industrial/ other grades
London	6,951.3	161.5	463.5	1,577.4	2,191.1	2,548.8	9
South East	1,058	3	22.9	166.1	628.4	229.6	8
South West	240.7	3	15.6	68.7	56.4	57.5	39.5
West Midlands	686.5	1	57	169.8	204.4	250.3	4
North West	336	—	27	94.3	134.5	75.2	5
North East	51	—	2	8.1	29.8	10.1	—
Merseyside	955.7	—	8.8	77.3	217.5	652.1	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	350.7	3	22	127.8	83.2	111.7	3
East Midlands	40	1	3	13	18	5	—
Eastern	609.4	2	31.7	110.7	211.9	249.1	4
England total	11,279.3	174.5	653.5	2,413.2	3,775.2	4,189.4	73.5
Wales	428.3	—	26.8	47.4	62.6	288.5	3
Scotland	249.6	2	4	16	58.2	160.4	—
Northern Ireland	132.3	—	—	5	20.4	106.9	—
Grand total[2]	12,080.5	176.5	684.3	2,481.6	3,916.4	4,745.2	76.5

Percentage of staff by grade level and region

Government office region	All grades	SCS level	Level 6/7	SEO/HEO level	EO level	AO/AA level	Industrial/ other grades
London	57.5	91.5	67.7	63.6	55.9	53.7	11.8
South East	8.8	1.7	3.3	6.7	16.0	4.8	10.5
South West	2.0	1.7	2.3	2.8	1.4	1.2	51.6
West Midlands	5.7	0.6	8.3	6.8	5.2	5.3	5.2
North West	2.8	0.0	3.9	3.8	3.4	1.6	6.5
North East	0.4	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.8	0.2	1.3
Merseyside	7.9	0.0	1.3	3.1	5.6	13.7	0.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	2.9	1.7	3.2	5.1	2.1	2.4	3.9
East Midlands	0.3	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.0
Eastern	5.0	1.1	4.6	4.5	5.4	5.2	5.2
England total	93.4	98.9	95.5	97.2	96.4	88.3	96.1
Wales	3.5	0.0	3.9	1.9	1.6	6.1	3.9
Scotland	2.0	1.1	0.6	0.6	1.5	3.4	0.0
Northern Ireland	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.5	2.3	0.0
Grand total[2]	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[1] Includes staff in UKPA, Forensic Science Service and Fire Service College
[2] Excluded 426 seconded non-industrial civil servants whose data are not centrally recorded

Note:

Responsibility for Fire Service College transferred to DTLR as part of the machinery of Government changes in June 2001.

Table 2: Numbers and percentages of staff by grade level and region/nation as at 1 April 2000—Prison Service

Number of staff by grade level and region (full-time equivalent)

Government office region	*All grades*	*SCS level*	*Level 6/7*	*SEO/HEO level*	*EO level*	*AO/AA level*	*Industrial/ other grades*
London	6,319.4	42	254.9	652.8	687.5	4,472.8	209.4
South East	6,417.1	9.2	87.1	239.1	564.7	5,092.8	424.2
South West	3,234.6	3	45.1	107.3	317.6	2,488.9	272.7
West Midlands	3,832.4	1	47.8	158.9	417.8	2,887.6	319.3
North West	4,271.7	4	39.9	146.4	432.7	3,326.7	322
North East	3,038.9	—	31.5	95.7	252.2	2,494.1	165.4
Merseyside	784.5	1	6	22	62	671.5	22
Yorkshire and Humberside	4,545.3	5	48.8	137.8	465.4	3,586.4	301.9
East Midlands	3,494.2	3	49.6	157.8	399.6	2,607.7	276.5
Eastern	3,746.0	5	46.5	134.9	375.3	2,904	280.3
England total	39,684.1	73.2	657.2	1,852.7	3,974.8	30,532.5	2,593.7
Wales	753.2	1	14.5	24.3	61	587.4	65
Scotland	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
Northern Ireland	103	—	2	1	5	94	1
Grand total	40,541.3	74.2	673.7	1,878	4,040.8	31,214.9	2,659.7

Percentage of staff by grade level and region

Government office region	*All grades*	*SCS level*	*Level 6/7*	*SEO/HEO level*	*EO level*	*AO/AA level*	*Industrial/ other grades*
London	15.6	56.6	37.8	34.8	17.0	14.3	7.9
South East	15.8	12.4	12.9	12.7	14.0	16.3	15.9
South West	8.0	4.0	6.7	5.7	7.9	8.0	10.3
West Midlands	9.5	1.3	7.1	8.5	10.3	9.3	12.0
North West	10.5	5.4	5.9	7.8	10.7	10.7	12.1
North East	7.5	0.0	4.7	5.1	6.2	8.0	6.2
Merseyside	1.9	1.3	0.9	1.2	1.5	2.2	0.8
Yorkshire and Humberside	11.2	6.7	7.2	7.3	11.5	11.5	11.4
East Midlands	8.6	4.0	7.4	8.4	9.9	8.4	10.4
Eastern	9.2	6.7	6.9	7.2	9.3	9.3	10.5
England total	97.9	98.7	97.6	98.7	98.4	97.8	97.5
Wales	1.9	1.3	2.2	1.3	1.5	1.9	2.4
Scotland	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Northern Ireland	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.0
Grand total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Numbers and percentages of staff by grade level and region/nation as at 1 April 2000—Totals

Number of staff by grade level and region (full-time equivalent)

Government office region	*All grades*	*SCS level*	*Level 6/7*	*SEO/HEO level*	*EO level*	*AO/AA level*	*Industrial/ other grades*
London	13,270.7	203.5	718.4	2,230.2	2,878.6	7,021.6	218.4
South East	7,475.1	12.2	110	405.2	1,193.1	5,322.4	432.2
South West	3,475.3	6	60.7	176	374	2,546.4	312.2
West Midlands	4,518.9	2	104.8	328.7	622.7	3,137.9	323.3
North West	4,607.7	4	66.9	240.7	567.2	3,401.9	327
North East	3,089.9	0	33.5	103.8	282	2,504.2	166.2
Merseyside	1,740.2	1	14.8	99.3	279.5	1,323.6	22
Yorkshire and Humberside	4,896	8	70.8	265.6	548.6	3,698.1	304.9
East Midlands	3,534.2	4	52.6	170.8	417.6	2,612.7	276.5
Eastern	4,355.4	7	78.2	245.6	587.2	3,153.1	284.3
England total	50,963.4	247.7	1,310.7	4,265.9	7,750	34,721.9	2,667.2
Wales	1,181.5	1	41.3	71.7	123.6	875.9	68
Scotland	241.6	2	4	16	58.2	161.4	0
Northern Ireland	235.3	0	2	6	25.4	200.9	1
Grand total	52,621.8	250.7	1,358	4,359.6	7,957.2	35,960.1	2,736.2
Home office overseas staff	31.6	1	—	22	8.6	—	—

Government office region	All grades	SCS level	Level 6/7	SEO/HEO level	EO level	AO/AA level	Industrial/ other grades
	Percentage of staff by grade level and region						
London	25.2	81.2	52.9	51.2	36.2	19.5	8.0
South East	14.2	4.9	8.1	9.3	15.0	14.8	15.8
South West	6.6	2.4	4.5	4.0	4.7	7.1	11.4
West Midlands	8.6	0.8	7.7	7.5	7.8	8.7	11.8
North West	8.8	1.6	4.9	5.5	7.1	9.5	12.0
North East	5.9	0.0	2.5	2.4	3.5	7.0	6.1
Merseyside	3.3	0.4	1.1	2.3	3.5	3.7	0.8
Yorkshire and Humberside	9.3	3.2	5.2	6.1	6.9	10.3	11.1
East Midlands	6.7	1.6	3.9	3.9	5.2	7.3	10.1
Eastern	8.3	2.8	5.8	5.6	7.4	8.8	10.4
England total	96.8	98.8	96.5	97.9	97.4	96.6	97.5
Wales	2.2	0.4	3.0	1.6	1.6	2.4	2.5
Scotland	0.5	0.8	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.4	0.0
Northern Ireland	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.6	0.0
Grand total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Home office overseas staff	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Airline Passengers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many passengers who have been detained by immigration officers at British airports since 11 September, have been detained for longer than 24 hours; how many remain in British custody; how many remain in the UK; how many have been returned to their country of origin or a third country; and if he will make a statement; [7430]

(2) how many passengers have been refused entry at British airports and sent back to their country of origin or a third country within 24 hours, since 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [7433]

Angela Eagle: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Tenancy Agreements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on redefining tenancy agreements to ensure antisocial tenants can be evicted promptly. [7291]

Mr. Denham: The Minister of State at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who has policy responsibility in this area—my noble Friend Lord Falconer—recently met with my hon. Friend and the Leader of Nottingham city council to discuss concerns over the time it can take a social landlord to evict antisocial tenants. To follow up this meeting officials at the DTLR are exploring ways in which the eviction process might be speeded up in cases of serious or persistent antisocial behaviour. As part of this they will be discussing possible approaches with local authorities, including Nottingham city council.

Child Abduction

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have taken place in respect of cases of child abduction in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [6740]

Mr. Denham: The information requested, taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, is shown in the following table:

Persons proceeded against for offences of child abduction[1], *England and Wales*

Year	Number
1995	98
1996	89
1997	77
1998	104
1999	111

[1] Child Abduction Act 1984 sections 1 and 2, as amended by the Children Act 1989

Data for 2000 are not yet available.

Home Detention Curfew Scheme

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for the period between the commencement of the home detention curfew scheme and 30 June inclusive *(a)* the number of prisoners released on the scheme, *(b)* the number of prisoners convicted of each offence who were released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, including offences committed by prisoners normally classified under the categories (i) other homicide and attempted homicide, (ii) other violence against the person, (iii) drug offences, (iv) assaults and (v) other offences, including a breakdown of the prisoners normally classified in the sub-category of other offences called other offences, *(c)* the average sentence (A) received and (B) served, and the average period spent on the scheme, in respect of each offence, *(d)* the number of prisoners released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, who (1) breached the conditions of the curfew, (2) disappeared and were recaptured, (3) disappeared and remain unlawfully at large and (4) had their licences revoked with reasons, *(e)* the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme while on the scheme, including offences committed, by prisoners who committed more than one offence and *(f)* the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme who committed a further offence

while on the scheme that was similar in character to that for which they were originally convicted, including offences committed by prisoners who committed more than one offence; and if he will make a statement. [5789]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested for the period up to 30 June 2001 is set out in tables which can be found in the Library. As of that date, a total of 37,105 prisoners had been placed on home detention curfew since the scheme commenced on 28 January 1999.

Table 1 shows the original offences committed by prisoners released under the scheme during the period, the number of prisoners convicted of each specific offence, the average sentence received and served for those offences, and the average period spent on the scheme in respect of prisoners convicted of each specific offence. The data are taken from the Prison Service's Inmate Information System, based on the data recorded by each prison. The table provides as detailed a breakdown as is possible from central records.

As at 30 June, a total of 1,249 prisoners placed on the scheme had breached the conditions of their curfew. A breakdown of this number showing the original offences committed by those curfewees is shown in Table 2.

Information on curfewees whose licences are revoked and who disappear before being recaptured is not held centrally. However, information is held on the number of curfewees unlawfully at large at any one time. On 30 June there were 77 curfewees who remained unlawfully at large. This represents less than 4.3 per cent. of the total number of revocations.

Details of the offences committed by those 77 curfewees who remained unlawfully at large on 30 June 2001 can be found in Table 3.

As at 30 June 2001, 1,801 curfewees had their licences revoked, using the powers available to the Secretary of State under sections 38A(1) and 39 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. The reasons for revocation were as follows: breach of the curfew (section 38A(1)(a) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991); the curfewee's whereabouts could no longer be electronically monitored (section 38A(1)(b) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991); it was necessary to protect the public from serious harm (section 38A(1)(c) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991); the curfewee had committed an offence or breached any other requirement of probation supervision (section 39 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991). Curfewees who are charged with a new offence may also be recalled on any of the preceding grounds depending upon the circumstances of the case.

Prisoners whose current sentence is in respect of an offence committed before 1 January 1999 are not liable to be recalled under section 39 of the Act. In such cases, where the curfewee has breached the requirements of probation supervision or where they have committed a further offence and it has not been possible to revoke their licence under section 38A of the Act, the breach may be referred to the courts under section 38(1) of the Act. The total number of such cases referred to the courts is not held centrally.

A breakdown of the original offences committed by the 1,801 recalled curfewees, together with a breakdown of the reasons for their recall is at Table 4.

Table 5 gives a breakdown of the cases where a prisoner placed on home detention curfew is known to have been convicted, cautioned in respect of an offence committed while on home detention curfew, or where a prisoner is known to be pending prosecution for such an offence. Where a curfewee has been charged with more than one offence, these have been shown separately.

Table 6 gives a breakdown of cases involving prisoners placed on the scheme who are known to have been convicted, cautioned or have a prosecution pending in respect of an offence committed while on home detention curfew which is similar in character to the index offence or offences for which they were originally convicted.

The scheme is designed to ensure a better transition for short term offenders between custody and the community. Prisoners are only placed on home detention curfew after a careful risk assessment and the safety of the public is paramount at all times.

Street Robberies

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he intends implementing to combat the rise in street robberies in the year ending March 2001. [6405]

Mr. Denham: We remain determined to reduce the number of robberies, and have set a challenging target of a 14 per cent. reduction in robbery in our principal cities by March 2005. The rate of increase in recorded robbery fell from 26 per cent. to 13 per cent. in the 12 months to March 2001. The five metropolitan forces have been set individual robbery reduction targets under the best value framework, and have been given an additional £20 million specifically to assist their efforts in tackling robbery and to enhance those targets. Almost three-quarters of all robberies are committed in these five metropolitan areas.

The additional funds have enabled those forces to introduce a number of new initiatives and to reinforce good practice. These include the targeting of hotspots (including transport routes) and offenders based on better intelligence, higher visibility of uniformed officers on the street, mobile closed circuit television vans, a range of publicity measures, improved recording, scene of crime management, investigation and identification techniques; youth diversion measures, the creation of safe routes into city centres, and targeted anti-mobile phone theft campaigns.

We are also working at a national level with the mobile phone industry to tackle mobile phone theft, which accounts for a significant proportion of robberies. In July we published a crime prevention leaflet distributed via police forces and retail outlets, and we are continuing to press the industry to enhance the security of their products and services.

Youth Offenders

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children aged under 18 years were received into prison custody on remand and under sentence between *(a)* April 1999 and April 2000 and *(b)* April 2000 and April 2001. [7935]

Beverley Hughes: The information is as follows:

Initial receptions into prison service establishments[2] in England and Wales of persons under the age of 18 years

Type of reception[1]	*April 1999 to March 2000*	*April 2000 to March 2001*
Untried	4,984	4,134
Convicted unsentenced	2,883	2,464
Sentenced	5,511	5,871

[1] Initial receptions only; each prisoner is only counted once under their initial custody type.
[2] The Prison Service holds most under 18s in young offender institutions or in specialist accommodation for that age range.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in each month since the introduction of the detention and training order on 1 April 2000 how many young people have received orders of *(a)* four months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* eight months, *(d)* 10 months, *(e)* 12 months, *(f)* 18 months and *(g)* 24 months broken down by age and gender. [7936]

Angela Eagle: Statistics on court proceedings and sentencing in 2000 are due for publication on 1 November. I will write to my hon. Friend at that time.

Asylum and Economic Migration

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had on seeking an internationally recognised redefinition of asylum and economic migration; and if he will make a statement. [7299]

Angela Eagle: Within the European Union, discussions are in hand on a package of measures designed to set out shared minimum standards on asylum procedures and processes. A proposal for a Council Directive on qualification as a refugee is expected to be presented by the European Commission very shortly. The United Kingdom has participated actively in European discussions on all asylum issues, opting into all the measures presented to date, and will continue to do so.

Economic migration is similarly the subject of on-going discussions at a Community level—most recently at this week's European Conference on Migration held in Brussels—in the context of the European Commission's communication on a Community immigration policy. This communication is concerned, among other things, with the management of labour migration. We have welcomed this communication, while noting that the United Kingdom's approach to specific proposals for legal instruments will be influenced by its Protocols to the Treaties.

Police Response Times

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce standards for response times from the police in answering telephone calls; and if he will make a statement. [7292]

Mr. Denham: Responsibility for answering 999 calls is an operational matter and therefore the responsibility of the chief officers of the force concerned.

The Government accept that this is an important issue for both the police and the public, and affects public confidence in the police service.

Football Banning Orders

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many football banning orders have been issued to date; and of those how many were in respect of individuals with no relevant previous criminal convictions. [7251]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The current number of extant football banning orders imposed by the courts is 716. All types of order, other than orders on complaint, were imposed following conviction of a football related offence as defined in schedule 1 of the Football Spectators Act 1989. All persons subject to orders on complaint have convictions for violence or public order offences, though not necessarily football related.

Extant football banning orders (8 October 2001)—data supplied by the Football Banning Orders Authority

Type of order	*Number*
Exclusion Orders (imposed under section 30 of the Public Order Act 1986)	53
Restriction Orders (imposed under section 15 of the Football Spectators Act 1989)	31
Domestic Football Banning Orders (imposed under Football (Offences and Disorder) Act 1999)	54
International Football Banning Orders (imposed under Football (Offences and Disorder) Act 1999)	51
Orders on Conviction (imposed under section 14A of the Football Spectators Act 1989—as amended by the Football (Disorder) Act 2000)	444
Orders on Complaint (imposed under section 14B of the Football Spectators Act 1989—as amended by the Football (Disorder) Act 2000)	83
Total	716

Child Curfew Orders

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many child curfew orders have been applied for and issued in the north-west; [7742]

(2) how many child curfew orders have been applied for and issued in Wales. [7696]

Mr. Denham: No applications have yet been received to establish local child curfew schemes under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Sections 48 and 49 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, which took effect on 1 August 2001, have recently extended the upper age limit to 15 and allowed the police, as well as local authorities, to initiate schemes.

Porton Down

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost to date of the inquiry by the Wiltshire Constabulary into events at CBD Porton Down; what proportion has been financed directly by his Department; what progress has been made; and if he will make a statement. [7377]

Mr. Denham: The cost of the inquiry was £1,333,930 as at the end of September 2001, excluding costs to the Ministry of Defence. The Home Office, in recognition of the unique and extraordinary nature of the inquiry, made a grant of £870,000.

A full inquiry has now been carried out into the death of an individual during an experiment in 1953, resulting in a report being forwarded to Her Majesty's coroner for Swindon and the county of Wiltshire. The coroner has since made recommendations to the Attorney-General.

Following a thorough investigation into the circumstances relating to a number of allegations made by volunteers who attended Porton Down and participated in experiments, between 1939 and 1989, a number of reports have now been forwarded to the Crown Prosecution Service. Investigations into other allegations continue and further files will be submitted in due course.

Crown Court Trials

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of all either-way cases where defendants elected for Crown court trial *(a)* were rejected by the judge before plea, *(b)* involved a guilty plea and involved a sentence, *(c)* involved a guilty plea but were dismissed without completing trial, *(d)* resulted in a guilty verdict by the jury and *(e)* resulted in a verdict of not guilty. [7854]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office court proceedings database does not identify either-way cases where: *(a)* defendants who elect for Crown court trial are rejected by the judge before plea.

Information from the Home Office court proceedings database shows that for England and Wales 1999, *(b)* the defendant pleaded guilty and was sentenced in 62 per cent. of either-way cases tried at the Crown court; *(c)* in a negligible percentage of cases the defendant pleaded guilty, but was not tried; *(d)* in 13 per cent. the defendant was found guilty by a jury after pleading not guilty; and *(e)* in 23 per cent. of cases the defendant was acquitted by a jury.

The remaining 3 per cent. of defendants were not tried.

Departmental Properties

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number, value and location of properties newly leased in each of the last five years by his Department, broken down by leases by the Department itself, its next step agencies and its non-departmental public bodies, differentiating between purchases made as a result of the creation of new bodies and those purchases made by established bodies. [7816]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) have acquired a total of 102 properties by lease since 1 April 1996.

The detail relating to the acquisitions is set out in the tables. It excludes both properties acquired on a short-term basis by licence and residential accommodation taken to accommodate staff members. The properties were acquired for the main Department or established bodies except where indicated.

Summary table of properties newly leased by the Home Office from 1 April 1996 to 31 March 2001

	Number of properties acquired	Total value of properties (£)
Main Department		
1996–97	8	859,150
1997–98	6	522,026
1998–99	4	500,549
1999–2000	14	2,181,890
2000–01	34	9,901,708
Total	66	13,965,323
Agencies		
1996–97	2	1,284,000
1997–98	3	106,000
1998–99	7	316,501
1999–2000	10	3,307,147
2000–01	2	31,850
Total	24	5,045,498
NDPBs		
1996–97	1	69,050
1997–98	1	119,696
1998–99	4	20,100,618
1999–2000	3	616,905
2000–01	3	427,401
Total	12	21,333,670
Total		
1996–97	11	2,212,200
1997–98	10	747,722
1998–99	15	20,917,668
1999–2000	27	6,105,942
20001–01	39	10,360,959
Total	102	40,344,491

Properties newly leased by the Home Office in 1996–97

Location	Number	Value (£)
Main Department		
Stanstead	1	63,959
Heathrow	2	654,346
Darlington	1	5,025
Dover	1	31,700
Dundee	1	58,900
Plymouth	1	18,493
Watford	1	26,730
Total	8	859,150
Agencies		
London	1	1,266,000
Reading	1	18,000
Total	2	1,284,000
NDPBs		
Birmingham	1	69,050
Total	1	69,050

Note:
The property purchased by the NDPB was for a new body

Properties newly leased by the Home Office in 1997–98

Location	Number	Value (£)
Main Department		
Cambridge	1	9,150
Solihull	1	119,472
Heathrow	2	113,529
Liverpool	1	121,500
London	1	158,375
Total	6	522,026

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Properties newly leased by the Home Office in 1997–98

Location	Number	Value (£)
Agencies		
Birmingham	1	48,000
Liverpool	2	58,000
Total	3	106,000
NDPBs		
Glasgow	1	119,696
Total	1	119,696

Properties newly leased by the Home Office in 1998–99

Location	Number	Value (£)
Main Department		
Bootle	1	311,500
Manchester	1	46,570
London	1	32,966
Glasgow	1	109,513
Total	4	500,549
Agencies		
Birmingham	1	276,000
Manchester	2	40,501
Liverpool	1	12,000
Belfast	2	76,575
West Bromwich	1	21,000
Total	7	316,501
NDPBs		
Onley	1	6,122,608
Birmingham	1	222,435
Durham	1	6,126,603
Rochester	1	7,628,972
Total	4	20,100,618

Note:
The NDPB properties at Onley, Durham and Birmingham were acquired for new bodies

Properties newly leased by the Home Office in 1999–2000

Location	Number	Value (£)
Main Department		
Manchester	1	44,930
Leicester	1	4,500
Liverpool	4	309,343
Gatwick	1	235,624
Croydon	5	1,327,306
Heathrow	1	251,992
Bristol	1	8,195
Total	14	2,181,890
Agencies		
Croydon	1	319,530
Birmingham	5	1,255,967
Peterborough	2	116,150
London	1	1,607,000
Evesham	1	8,500
Total	10	3,307,147
NDPBs		
London	2	533,480
Birmingham	1	83,425
Total	3	616,905

Note:
Two NDPBs properties were acquired for new bodies at a total cost of £368,425

Properties newly leased by the Home Office in 2000–01

Location	Number	Value (£)
Main Department		
Heathrow	2	437,224
Gatwick	3	101,698
Immingham	2	11,125
Croydon	5	2,082,242
Yeadon	1	20,344
Leeds	2	601,903
Southend	1	6,231
Hounslow	1	770,000
Birmingham	1	1,500,000
Bedford	1	405,000
Manchester	1	15,100
Rugby	1	3,732
Ch. Norton	1	1,957,500
Glasgow	1	59,996
Hayes	1	577,367
Feltham	1	300,000
London	2	539,050
Exeter	1	1,300
Dover	2	96,539
Crawley	1	117,930
Leicester	1	12,000
Southampton	1	60,430
Liverpool	1	225,000
Total	34	9,901,708
Agencies		
Warrington	1	26,250
Doncaster	1	5,600
Total	2	31,850
NDPBs		
London	1	39,813
Liverpool	1	304,512
Birmingham	1	83,076
Total	3	427,401

Note:
The three properties purchased by NDPBs were for new bodies

Animal Research

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents have been reported in each of the last five years of *(a)* assaults and *(b)* harassment against scientists and institutions involved in animal research. [7738]

Mr. Denham: The crime statistics do not distinguish between the occupations of victims, but there is no doubt that animal rights extremists have been increasingly ready to resort to criminal methods in recent years, and as a Government we are determined to take all possible steps to protect those engaged in legitimate scientific research.

Passport Office

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports were lost by the Passport Office in each of the last five years. [7314]

Angela Eagle: The United Kingdom Passport Service issues more than 5 million passports each year, the majority of which are issued via first class post.

The only records the UK Passport Service holds relating to lost passports are those for passports reported to be lost, stolen or unavailable and for those which have been recorded as missing in the post. These figures are given:

Year	Lost, stolen or unavailable[1]	Lost in post[1]
1997	31,550	[2]—
1998	31,497	[2]—
1999	62,775	2,359
2000	114,624	3,851
2001[3]	[4]36,328	[5]1,474

[1] All figures are for calendar year except where otherwise stated
[2] Not available
[3] Figures are from April to September 2001
[4] To May 2001
[5] To September 2001

Ouseley Report

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the findings of Sir Herman Ouseley's report on the impact of segregated schools on the riots in Bradford. [7120]

Mr. Denham: Lord Ouseley's report was commissioned and prepared for Bradford Vision, a partnership involving local government, police and other agencies. The Public Order Community Cohesion Ministerial Group, which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary set up following the disturbances earlier this summer in the north-west, is looking at the wider issues of segregation, including education. My colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills are contributing to the group's work. The group will be taking full account of Lord Ouseley's observations on this issue in Bradford. I would not wish to anticipate the outcome of their findings at this stage.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Departmental Staff

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) who communicated to Mr. Alun Evans the decision to move him from his duties; and when this was done; [8105]

(2) what representations have been made by Alun Evans' trade union about the circumstance surrounding the decision to remove him from his duties; [8106]

(3) if he will reinstate Alun Evans to his duties as Director of Communications of his Department; [8108]

(4) if Miss Jo Moore's contract as special adviser at his Department was her only employment contract as at 1 October; [8109]

(5) when Sir Richard Mottram was informed of the Secretary of State's verbal reprimand of Jo Moore, special adviser; [8110]

(6) what the division of responsibility and powers is between himself and the Permanent Secretary to move staff and vary duties within his Department; [8111]

(7) who, in addition to Alun Evans, Director of Information at his Department, received the recently published e-mail from Miss Jo Moore of 11 September; [8112]

(8) for what reason and at whose request Alun Evans, Director of Communication at his Department, was moved from his duties; [8113]

(9) who took the decision to move Alun Evans, Director of Communication at his Department, from his duties; and who had previously been consulted prior to the decision; [8114]

(10) what information Miss Jo Moore requested Alun Evans, Director of Communications at the Department of Transport, to release to the media during *(a)* July, *(b)* August and *(c)* September about (i) Bob Kiley, London Transport Commissioner and (ii) the manner in which the report of London Underground commissioned by Parsons Brinckerhoff had been prepared and drafted; and if he will make a statement; [8115]

(11) what the salary is of Alun Evans, until recently Director of Communications at his Department; [8116]

(12) what the salary of his adviser Miss Jo Moore is; and what are the contractual hours worked; [8117]

(13) what duties Alun Evans, the former Director of Communication at his Department, will fulfil on 17 October. [8118]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 17 October 2001]:* The Permanent Secretary is responsible to me for ensuring that the Department is effectively and efficiently organised and staffed. He does so within the framework of the rules governing civil service recruitment and promotion. The Permanent Secretary is responsible for discussing with senior staff their career development and timing of moves from one appointment to another. No representations have been made by any trade union in connection with Mr. Evans's move.

When Mr. Evans took up appointment as Director of Communication it was envisaged that he would move back into policy work in the civil service in due course. This he has now done. He has taken up post, working with Dr. Iain Anderson as head of the secretariat on his inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak.

Ms Moore had asked an information officer to make the media aware that there was a document which showed that one of Mr. Kiley's assistants had proposed changes to a draft report by consultants, Parsons Brinckerhoff, about controlling standards of workmanship and safety-related activities of infrastructure companies under the anticipated London Underground Public Private Partnership (PPP) contracts. The proposed changes were intended to make the report more critical of the PPP. The Department did not in the event release the document.

My noble and learned Friend the Minister for housing, planning and regeneration drew attention to this document in answer to a question on 24 July 2001, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns 1845–48.

Salaries of Board members were published in the 1999–2000 Resource Accounts of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Cm 5054), a copy of which is in the Library.

I informed the Permanent Secretary of my personal reprimand on 9 October. Under the Department's disciplinary procedures the Permanent Secretary has given Ms Moore an official warning as to her conduct. She has made a statement in which she has accepted responsibility for her actions and offered a sincere apology.

Ms Moore works 26 hours a week as a special adviser. This is currently her only contract of employment. It is the Government's policy that details of individual salaries for special advisers should remain confidential.

Ms Moore's e-mail of 11 September was originally addressed to Alun Evans and Robin Mortimer and copied to Dan Corry.

Railtrack

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the role of Jo Moore in the decision to apply for an administration order under section 59 of the Railways Act 1993. [8187]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Ms Moore played the normal role of a special adviser.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has appointed headhunters to advise on future appointments to the successor body to Railtrack. [8919]

Mr. Jamieson: No.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contacts he has authorised between his special advisers and the media since 7 June in relation to Railtrack. [9189]

Mr. Byers: Special advisers contact the media as necessary on issues across the range of the Department's responsibilities.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what new proposals he intends to make for the operation of the *(a)* Strategic Rail Authority and *(b)* Rail Regulator following the decision to place the subsidiary of Railtrack into administration. [8490]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 954.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings he held with Ernst and Young to discuss whether Railtrack plc should be put into administration; and when these meetings were held. [8186]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions held no such meetings.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much financial support will be made available to the successor company to Railtrack; and how much the Government expected to pay to Railtrack in 2000–01 and 2001–02 for similar purposes. [8195]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have proposed a private sector company limited by guarantee to succeed Railtrack and intend to agree a transfer scheme with the railway administrators.

In 2000–01 some 85 per cent. of Railtrack's £2,476 million income was paid to it in access charges by train operating companies, which were paid £1,130 million in revenue support grants from the Strategic Rail Authority and Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs). In 2001–02 Railtrack continued to receive indirect support via track access charges. In addition, on 1 October it received £337 million in direct grant payment from the SRA, and will receive a further £162 million in direct grant when requested by the administrators.

The direct network grant payments over the next five years, as determined by the Rail Regulator's October 2000 Periodic Review and the 2 April agreement between Government and Railtrack, will be transferred to Railtrack's successor body on emergence from administration.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on how the successor company to Railtrack will be accountable to *(a)* him and *(b)* other Government agencies. [8184]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's proposal is for the successor company to be a private sector company limited by guarantee. Such a company would not be accountable to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much capital will be made available to the successor company to Railtrack to enable it to acquire Railtrack's assets from the administrators. [8194]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Government have proposed a private sector company limited by guarantee to succeed Railtrack and intend to agree a transfer scheme with the railway administrators. We plan to structure this new company so that it would achieve at least a BBB investment grade credit rating.

Transport Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the outcome was of the Transport Council held in Brussels on 16 October; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [9362]

Mr. Byers: The Transport Council met in Luxembourg on 16 October. I represented the United Kingdom, together with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport.

This meeting of the Council was mainly focused on aviation issues, following the special session of the Transport Council on 14 September, which I attended. In addition, the special European Council of 21 September had called on this Council to adopt measures in the field of aviation security. I am very pleased that the Council succeeded in doing this. The Council put in hand preparations for Community-wide measures to enhance aviation security.

The Commission presented a draft regulation establishing a framework of aviation security measures and inspection arrangements. The Presidency reported on the work of the ad hoc group set up by the special

Transport Council, which will examine further the scope for additional measures in areas such as crew training; checking and monitoring of hold luggage; securing cockpits; sky marshals; use of video cameras, and quality control of security measures. The Council also discussed alignment of security measures with those adopted by the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC), and the need for the issues to be further pursued at the global level by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

The Council agreed conclusions, following a debate on the economic consequences for the aviation industry of the 11 September attacks, on the basis of a Communication from the Commission. The conclusions recognise that application of the Community's state aid rules is the Commission's exclusive competence, and noted the limited range of financial assistance the Commission would approve. This would include compensation for losses directly attributable to the closure of airspace in the four days following 11 September, insurance guarantees for war-related third party risk where the market has failed, and possible assistance with the costs of enhanced security measures. The conclusions called on the Commission to take a position on slot flexibility before the next winter season, and welcomed the Commission's intention to open a dialogue with the US on a code of conduct on unfair competition. On insurance guarantees the conclusions called for monthly reviews with a final cut-off date of 31 December this year.

I joined several Ministers in supporting the Commission's proposals. I also emphasised the importance of the EU airline industry restructuring itself, and circulated a paper calling for member states and the Commission to try to prevent ownership and control clauses in bilateral air service agreements being an obstacle to airline consolidation.

The Commission presented its proposals for the Single European Sky, aimed at improving co-ordination of air traffic management across the EU and reducing delays through better use of airspace. This is an initiative which the UK supports and we look forward to seeing progress on it in the coming months.

The Presidency reported on recent developments at the ICAO General Assembly in Montreal. The results on aircraft noise were generally welcomed. Council conclusions noted that Council would give priority to adopting a replacement to the current 'hushkits' Regulation in the near future.

A common position was reached on proposals to establish a European Aviation Safety Agency. There were progress reports on proposals for occurrence reporting in civil aviation and on cabin crew training, which were remitted back to COREPER for further work.

The Council noted the progress report on the ERIKA 1 and two packages of proposals on maritime safety and related measures. The outcome of the packages is now satisfactory from our point of view, and I am pleased that a number of the issues have been taken forward by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). We look forward, subject to clarification on some points, to a decision in December on establishment of a European Maritime Safety Agency.

At a debate over lunch on the Galileo global navigation satellite system, the Minister for Transport set out the UK's concerns over the proposed Joint Undertaking management structure. When the Council resumed, the Presidency reported that COREPER would be continuing work on three main areas, with a view to a decision on proceeding with the project at the December Council. The areas of work are: arrangements for private sector involvement, in particular the need to avoid conflicts of interest; the best way of involving member states, with emphasis on the roles of a supervisory board and management committee; and involvement of the European Space Agency.

The Commission confirmed that a full revision of the transport Trans European Networks (TENs) guidelines would be undertaken in 2004. An interim revision will boost Community support to 20 per cent. for major rail infrastructure projects and cross-border bottlenecks on frontiers of candidate countries.

The Commission gave a brief presentation on its recent White Paper on the common transport policy. The Presidency said that it would aim for a Council Resolution on the White Paper in December.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport was one of several Ministers who raised continuing concerns about the technical specification for digital tachographs. The Commission stated that adoption in December remained its goal.

There was a progress report on the proposal to extend the requirement to fit vehicle speed limiters to a wider range of vehicles. With a view to political agreement in December, COREPER will be continuing work on the proposal, seeking solutions on the scope of the proposal and the issue of retrofitting, on both of which the UK and some other member states have expressed concerns.

There was also a progress report on the proposal on training of professional drivers. Work on this will continue, with a view to the Council reaching agreement on it in December.

No votes were taken at this Council.

Councillor Expenses

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the timing of the publication of the DTLR document on councillor expenses on 12 September. [9140]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* As with any announcement, a range of publication dates were considered. The actual publication date for these documents, 12 September, was as planned from the week before.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he discussed the timing of announcements on councillors' expenses with the Minister for local government and the regions on *(a)* 11 and *(b)* 12 September; [9633]

(2) what conversations he has had with the Minister for local government and the regions regarding the latter's press release dated 12 September relating to councillors' expenses. [9634]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I have given today to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) (PQ 9140).

Jo Moore

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library copies of e-mail correspondence between Jo Moore and officials in his Department relating to news which they wanted to bury subsequent to the attacks on the World Trade Centre; and if he will make a statement. [9191]

Mr. Byers: The Department acted according to the planned timetable of announcements.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice he has received regarding the financial viability of the next phase of the channel tunnel rail link between Ebbsfleet and King's Cross. [8693]

Mr. Jamieson: London and Continental Railways Ltd. is responsible for financing and construction of section 2 of the CTRL. As announced on 2 July of this year, construction has started and is expected to be completed in 2007. London and Continental Railways has a viable financing structure plan for section 2 which includes raising £1.1 billion of Government Guaranteed Bonds to help finance construction.

Transport White Paper

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the recent EU Transport White Paper. [7467]

Mr. Jamieson: The European Commission published its White Paper "European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide" on 12 September 2001. The White Paper itself has no legislative or executive force at this stage but it indicates areas where the Commission intends to initiate action over the next few years.

Mayors

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions why Westminster city council has been selected for a survey on public attitudes to directly elected mayors. [8521]

Dr. Whitehead: The research was conducted in a number of locations which varied in size, which had different authority types, and which are likely to be opting for different forms of new constitutions. This was to provide a broad range of different situations to inform the survey's conclusions. The Department chose some authorities that have held or will be holding a referendum on directly elected mayors, others that intend to adopt a leader and cabinet form of executive and others who had yet to decide their preference. In addition, the Department wanted a wide geographical spread of locations to be surveyed. Based on those criteria, Westminster was a suitable candidate to be surveyed. Members of the public have also been surveyed in Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, Harrow, Middlesbrough, Preston, Plymouth, Oxford and Derby. The Department will publish the results of the research in due course.

Discretionary Services

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will work with the Local Government Association in identifying discretionary services for which the Government would be prepared to give local authorities the freedom to charge; what services are under consideration; when a decision on the services affected will be made; and what reference to these proposals will be made in a White Paper; [8450]

(2) if he will make a statement on his plans to introduce a general power to charge for discretionary services by local authorities. [8518]

Dr. Whitehead: In the Green Paper "Modernising Local Government Finance" (September 2000) we stated our intention to legislate to enable authorities to charge for discretionary services, including those provided under the Local Government Act 2000 to promote the well being of their areas. We are working with the Local Government Association in determining the scope of this new freedom to charge. The forthcoming Local Government White Paper will set out how this will be taken forward.

Bus Drivers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation to bring the working conditions of bus drivers into line with conditions for HGV and coach drivers. [8390]

Ms Keeble: We plan to implement EU Directive 2000–34, adopted last year, by 1 August 2003. As a result, all drivers in the road transport sector will be entitled to a 48 hour average working week, four weeks paid annual leave and annual health checks for night and shift workers. Drivers who wish to work longer average hours may do so, by signing an individual opt out.

We announced in the White Paper on integrated transport that we would consult on repeal of the UK drivers' hours rules—under which most bus drivers operate—in favour of the European Union rules. This consultation has subsequently been delayed by discussions, still continuing, on another draft EU Directive on working time in road transport.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will extend the proposed European Working Time Directive to local bus drivers; and if he will make a statement. [8284]

Ms Keeble: This proposal would of course require an amendment to the current exemptions from the Working Time Directive. This would be a matter for all member states subject to qualified majority voting. The UK

Government have no current plans to propose such an amendment. However, we announced in the White Paper on integrated transport that we would consult on repeal of the UK drivers' hours rules—under which most bus drivers operate—in favour of the European Union rules. This consultation has subsequently been delayed by discussions, still continuing, on another draft EU Directive on working time in road transport.

Working Time Directive

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will amend the exemption clauses of the Working Time Directive relating to urban bus drivers. [8670]

Ms Keeble: Any amendments to the exemptions from the Working Time Directive would be a matter for all member states under qualified majority voting. The UK Government have no current plans to propose such an amendment. However, we announced in the White Paper on integrated transport that we would consult on repeal of the UK drivers' hours rules—under which most bus drivers operate—in favour of the European Union rules. This consultation has subsequently been delayed by discussions, still continuing, on another draft EU Directive on working time in road transport.

Low Cost Housing

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of the proceeds of the disposal of former Commission for New Towns land is earmarked for rented and low cost housing. [8389]

Ms Keeble: The Commission for the New Towns (CNT) is now part of English Partnerships (EP). Although no specific percentage of its resources is set aside for affordable housing, EP has provided, and will continue to provide, land at nil or low cost for rented and low cost housing. Over the last three years, EP has provided nearly 20 hectares of land resulting in the construction of 597 affordable housing units. Further major schemes are in the pipeline which could give rise to another 1,000 over the next few years.

Electoral Reform

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what mechanisms he has put in place *(a)* to review recommendations under the Jenkins report and *(b)* to assess whether changes might be made to the electoral system for the House. [8283]

Dr. Whitehead: In our manifesto, which sets out our intentions for this Parliament, we said we would review our experience of the new voting systems for the devolved Administrations, the European Parliament, and the London Assembly along with the recommendations of the Jenkins report to assess whether changes might be made to the electoral system for the House of Commons. That remains our intention. The timing and structure of any review has yet to be decided.

East Coast Main Line

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the basis of the appointment by the Strategic Rail Authority of consultants to examine the future of the East Coast Line; what is the remit of the consultants; what is the deadline for their conclusions; what are the implications for the future of the franchise on the route; and if he will make a statement. [8276]

Mr. Jamieson: There has been no new appointment to examine the future of the East Coast Line. The Strategic Rail Authority announced on 24 August that W. S. Atkins Consultants Ltd. had been awarded the contract to ascertain the need for, and viability of, a new high speed line between London and Scotland. The feasibility study will also establish possible route options and is expected to take a year to complete. The need remains to press ahead with the planned upgrade of the East Coast Main Line as the high speed line, if approved, would be a project for 2010 onwards.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he has taken to ensure that Phase II of the upgrade of the West Coast Main Line will go ahead. [8503]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Work on the West Coast Main Line upgrade will continue, and we are discussing with the administrators and the Strategic Rail Authority the best way of carrying it forward, without prejudice to the outcome of the public inquiries into specific elements of the project. The Government remain committed to providing a revitalised rail network in the UK, and the upgrade of the West Coast Main Line is an integral part of that commitment. It will not be put at risk by Railtrack going into administration.

Homelessness

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of homeless people in each of the last three years. [8321]

Ms Keeble: The number of households accepted by local authorities in England under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, was as follows:

	Number
1998–99	104,150
1999–2000	106,130
2000–01	114,350

Source:
DTLR P1(E) housing return (quarterly)

National and regional information on local authorities' activity under statutory homelessness provisions is summarised in a quarterly Statistical Release published by the Department. Copies are available in the Library, and also via the Department's website. The latest edition, published on 12 September, presents statistics up to the end of June 2001.

Urban Summit

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in organising an Urban Summit in 2002; and what budget has been allocated by his Department for this event. [8162]

Ms Keeble: Planning for the Urban Summit has already begun. My officials are currently considering options for venues, speakers and partners. The Summit is to take place in the autumn of 2002, in the next financial year, for which budgets have not yet been allocated.

Urban Task Force

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the expenditure made by his Department in implementing the recommendations of the Urban Task Force. [8161]

Ms Keeble: Recommendations of the Urban Task Force are being implemented by DTLR and other Government Departments in numerous ways. This involves both new and existing programmes and initiatives as well as fiscal measures. Many recommendations are implemented through guidance to other bodies or through reorientation of existing policy. Therefore it is not possible to identify the proportion of DTLR spending specifically relevant to implementation of these recommendations.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the recommendations of the Urban Task Force which have been implemented to date. [8160]

Ms Keeble: The Annex to the Urban White Paper lists the 105 recommendations of the Urban Task Force and the Government's response to them, including how we have taken them forward.

Many of the task force recommendations were incorporated into the Urban White Paper. DTLR's website includes an "Urban White Paper Implementation Plan" which provides an account of progress to date and the key things we aim to achieve over the next two years.

Watersports (River Thames)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance the Port of London Authority issues to organisations facilitating canoeing on the River Thames; and who is the member of staff in the Authority responsible for non-powered craft using the River Thames. [8325]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that the Port of London Authority publishes a number of brochures and notices to inform commercial and recreational users of the river Thames on matters that the PLA considers important for the general safety and well being of users of the tidal river Thames. An expanded website that will include this and other relevant information is in the process of being developed for promulgation in the New Year.

The navigational byelaws are enforced for all the tideway users and no particular member of staff is charged with the responsibility for non-powered craft. The Harbour Master in the upper district and the lower district is warranted to uphold the regulations within the byelaws as appropriate.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action the Port of London Authority is taking to encourage watersports on the River Thames; and if he will make a statement. [8324]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that the Port of London Authority (PLA) is a member of the organising committees of the Thames Festival, Thames Traditional Rowing Association and the Boat Race; it is also a Thames Watermen's Cutter owner, providing its cutter for use by local youth groups in the Royal Victoria Dock under the auspices of the London borough of Newham recreation department and entering it for various cutter races.

The Port of London Authority also manages the navigational control of all of the river events and regattas in the calendar held between Gravesend and Teddington, numbering some 300 events annually. These include the Varsity Boat Race, the Heads of the River Races, the various Thames Watermen's Cutter races, the Transport on Water Barge Driving Race, Doggett's Coat and Badge Wager and the Great River Race, which takes place in September each year.

Planning Applications

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice is issued to local authorities in respect of adjudicating on planning applications in cases where different planning policy guidance notes appear to imply contradictory verdicts on a given application; and if it is his policy that some PPGs have higher priority than others. [8474]

Ms Keeble: All planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan for the area unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Local planning authorities must take account of national policy, set out in Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs), in preparing their development plans. PPGs may also be material to decisions on individual planning applications.

General advice to local planning authorities on material considerations is given in PPG1 'General Policy and Principles'. In the first instance it is for authorities, as decision-makers, to decide what considerations are material in any particular case and what weight to put on them. Ultimately, these are matters for the Courts.

Ebley Wharf, Stroud

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if his Department will call in the proposal to build on the flood plains at Ebley Wharf, Stroud. [8489]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 15 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 882W.

Park Homes Working Party

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation to give effect to the report of the Park Homes Working Party; and if he will make a statement. [8632]

Ms Keeble: The report of the Park Homes working party made recommendations for changes to the legislation relating to mobile homes. We have consulted on, and are considering, the Working Party's recommendations.

Highways and Transport SSA

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the standard spending assessment for highways and transport per mile of *(a)* principal and *(b)* non-principal road in each county of England in each of the last three years. [8511]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* A table showing the standard spending assessment for highway maintenance per mile of principal and non-principal road, in each shire county in England for each of the three years 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 has been placed in the Library. The highway maintenance SSA is determined mainly by an authority's length of roads together with the average traffic flow for that authority.

It is not possible to provide a similar table for the other transport elements (concessionary fares and bus support outside London) included in the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services block as these elements are not separately identifiable within this block.

Planning

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to improve the arrangements for declaration of interests on local authorities with specific reference to the planning process. [9135]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The new national Model Code of Conduct will clarify existing arrangements for the declaration of a member's interests. It will apply to all business conducted by members of local authorities, including planning, and is due to be laid before Parliament in the next few weeks.

High Hedges

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reintroduce measures to control high hedges. [9271]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 884W.

NATS

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Civil Aviation radar installations are in Scotland and which ones are controlled outwith Scotland; when control of the Civil Aviation radar installations moved from Scotland; where these installations are being controlled from; and what plans the *(a)* CAA and *(b)* NATS have to transfer control of other radar installations from Scotland. [8601]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS), and not the Civil Aviation Authority, owns and controls the civil aviation en-route radar installations in Scotland. These are located at Aberdeen, Allenshill, Lowther Hill, Stornoway, Sumburgh and Tiree.

Information regarding the control of these radar sites should be sought direct from the Chief Executive's Office, NATS, One Kemble Street, London, WC2B 4AP.

"Foundations"

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the management information systems used by "Foundations"; and when it is planned to be fully implemented. [9546]

Ms Keeble: My Department contracted "Foundations", the national co-ordinating body for home improvement agencies, to develop a single management information system to assist the monitoring and benchmarking of agencies' performance. The system has now been fully implemented and, on 20 September, "Foundations" distributed performance data for the year ended 31 March 2001 to all grant-funded agencies and their sponsoring local authorities.

Sheltered Accommodation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how he will ensure that sheltered accommodation tenants do not lose out financially when the care component is separated from a rent arrangement. [9544]

Ms Keeble: We are committed to providing local authorities with sufficient resources in the new Supporting People grant to enable them to keep support charges levied on existing residents of sheltered housing at the same level in real terms across the transition to Supporting People in April 2003–04. Detailed policy proposals for long term charging and means-testing arrangements under Supporting People were published in a consultation document on 3 January 2001. A further paper, carrying forward work on this issue in the light of responses to the consultation, will be published shortly.

Supporting People Initiative

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what account he has taken of the age profile and social grouping of areas as part of a mapping exercise in advance of the introduction of the Supporting People initiative. [9531]

Ms Keeble: All local authorities are currently mapping the existing supply of housing-related support in their area. This will provide the information to put in place contracts to continue existing services.

Local authorities will be asked to consider their strategic priorities for housing-related support in light of local needs, including age profile and social grouping. This will be presented as a local Shadow Supporting People Strategy in September 2002.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he has taken to ensure in advance of the introduction of the Supporting People initiatives that existing standards of provision and care will be maintained. [9532]

Ms Keeble: Supporting People will introduce consistent quality standards across the housing-related support sector. All providers of services funded by Supporting People grant will report regularly on key performance indicators, and the quality and appropriateness of the service being provided will be thoroughly evaluated at the contract review.

Warehouse, Distribution and Storage Premises

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that building regulations limit the compartment size for single storey warehouse, distribution and storage premises; [8229]

(2) if he will make it his policy to require all warehouse, distribution and storage premises to use non-combustible cores in the sandwich panels used in such buildings; [8231]

(3) what estimate he has made of the cost of requiring new warehouse, storage and distribution buildings to install sprinkler systems; [8228]

(4) if he will make it his policy to require the installation of sprinklers in warehouse, distribution and storage premises where compartment sizes exceed 2,000 sq. m. [8230]

Dr. Whitehead: I do not currently plan to adopt a policy, in either the Building Regulations or the Approved Documents that support them, to limit the compartment size in single storey warehouse, distribution and storage premises.

Nor do I currently plan to adopt a policy, in either the Building Regulations or the Approved Documents that support them, to require the installation of sprinklers in all warehouse, distribution and storage premises where there are compartment sizes in excess of 2000 square metres.

Guidance on fire safety measures that will meet the requirements of the Building Regulations is given in Approved Document B (Fire safety). The 2000 edition of Approved Document B suggests that the compartment size of an unsprinklered single storey retail premises should not exceed 2000 square metres.

The decision to limit the guidance on the use of sprinklers in the 2000 edition of Approved Document B to single storey retail buildings, as opposed to warehouse, distribution and storage premises, was based on the fact that retail buildings have the greater potential for loss of life. This is because of the large numbers of people that may be present within a retail building, the fact that they will generally be unfamiliar with their surroundings and the levels of managerial control that can be placed on members of the public is somewhat different to that which can be placed on staff in a warehouse type building. The decision to provide such guidance on single storey retail buildings was arrived at following the undertaking of a full Regulatory Impact Assessment.

Owing to the recognised fact that the level of risk to occupants and fire fighters can increase with height, the Approved Document does already suggest maximum compartment volumes, both with and without sprinklers, for multi-storey storage type buildings.

No estimate has been made of the cost of requiring the installation of sprinklers in all new warehouses, storage and distribution buildings. This would form part of a Regulatory Impact Assessment should such a proposal be considered in the future.

I do not propose to adopt the policy of requiring all warehouse, distribution and storage premises to use only non-combustible core sandwich panels as this is a matter for consideration on a case-by case-basis. The 2000 edition of Approved Document B offers guidance on the use of sandwich panels within buildings. It offers design recommendations with regard to the selection of the type of panel core and its associated jointing and fixing system. It goes on to suggest that a risk assessment approach should be adopted to identify the appropriate solution.

The Building Regulations are applicable to most building work that is undertaken in England and Wales, typically the erection or extension of a building. Fire precautions in warehouses in use are normally governed by the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, as amended, and, where the warehouse has been designated as a factory, the Fire Precautions Act 1971. Fire safety legislation is concerned with life safety, and sprinklers will be required if they are necessary for the protection of employees or other occupants of the building.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost to the public since 1990 of fighting fires in warehouse, distribution and storage premises. [8232]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not available centrally. Research into the cost of fires has been recently undertaken by the Home Office and is now being taken forward by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

However, the current model does not allow for the cost of fires in warehouse, distribution and storage premises to be separately identified from the broader category of "fires in buildings other than dwellings".

Regional Air Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will exempt UK regional air services from airport passenger duty; and if he will make a statement. [9355]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Decisions on taxation are considered annually as part of the Chancellor's overall Budget judgment.

Airport Passenger Duty

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much the Government received from air passengers in airport passenger duty in each of the last three years. [9345]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Receipts from Air Passenger Duty for the years 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are shown in HM Customs and Excise Annual Report 1999–2000 Table P.

Receipts from Air Passenger Duty for the year 2000–01 can be found in the National Statistics publication "Financial Statistics" Table 2.1D.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 23 October 2001

DEFENCE

Merlin Helicopters

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Merlin helicopters will be delivered to the Royal Navy in each of the next three years; [9696]

(2) how many pilots have been trained to fly the Merlin helicopter; [9694]

(3) when Merlin helicopters will be deployed on an operational basis with the Royal Navy; [9697]

(4) what the Royal Navy's inventory of Merlin helicopters is; and how many are operational. [9695]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans, the first squadron of Royal Navy Merlin helicopters will be fully operational and ready for deployment in May 2002 with further squadrons progressively achieving this status up to 2005.

A total of 44 Merlin HM Mark 1 helicopters has been ordered for the Royal Navy. Of the 34 aircraft already delivered, 14 are in the operational fleet. The remaining 10 aircraft are due to be delivered by the end of financial year 2002–03.

To date 31 Royal Naval pilots and eight RAF pilots have been trained to fly the Merlin helicopter, with a further five Royal Naval and two RAF pilots currently undergoing training.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Aviation Repair Agency for 2001–02. [10122]

Mr. Ingram: Key targets have been set for the chief executive of DARA for financial year 2001–02. The targets reflect the agency's move to trading fund status and are as follows:

DARA key targets for FY 2001–02

Title	*Details*	*Target*
KT 1—Quality	The Quality of Service of the DARA	To have no more attributable Customer Concerns (recorded on F760/761) than the baseline set on the average performance of FY 99–00 and FY 00–01 as a percentage of quantity.
KT 2—Financial	A measure of the Return on Capital Employed (RoCE)	To achieve a 6 per cent. Return on Capital Employed (RoCE)
KT 3—Efficiency 1	A measure of the reduction in Unit Production Price	To achieve at least an annual 2 per cent. reduction (with a target of at least a 15 per cent. reduction over five years) in unit production prices of a basket of products deemed to be representative of DARA business, baselined from the commencement of Trading Fund (1 April 2001)
KT 4—Efficiency 2	Increase in Order Intake (Non-Allocated Work)	To achieve a 100 per cent. increase in Order Intake (for the first three years of trading) from a FY 00–01 baseline
KT 5—Efficiency 3	Increase in Commercial Revenue	To achieve a 15 per cent. increase in Commercial Revenue (from non-UK Armed Forces), from a FY 00–01 baseline

Serco

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts being administered by Serco on behalf of his Department. [8575]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The following contracts are being administered by Serco Ltd. on behalf of this Department.

SATC2/031
ICSS/1042
DE32/7113
CB/STC5/5010
AARC1B/00034
CDCRBG/1253
NRTA1B/0135
DLO/MTSC/0006
MCP12B/366
STC8/009
N/ISFS/10121
CHOTS/12671
MCP12A/102
SMC41B/1917
SMC42B7421
SCSS1A/2029
SCSS1A/2016
CP21B/1236
MCP21B/0312
DEO32/7077
LC1/0031
NUW31A/0015
WS32/7052
WS31/6066
CB/STC2/189
WS32/7050
WS32/7047
CB/STC1/1003
LC1/0020
NWE22A/0114
ABRO1B2/1790

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CP11B/2006
STC1/1000
A/13B/7014
WS31/6027
NMT2B/2003
SL41A/0053
WS32/7002
NUW83A/1820
SL(WS)1/1009
SL20/SC/0583
SLS21A/211
WS12/106
NUW83A/1688
SLS21A/90
SLS32B/1911
ML32B/1462
PTC/CB/00517
CSIS/00033
CSIS/00032
DE031/6078
STRS/00012
MWABC/20052
UWS2C/0035
CASSC/0004
NWC1/004
SMC42D/5025
NLS23B/0034
SCSS1D/010
LC5/235
CB/STC2/385
LC8/380
LC5/044/2
WS22/5881
DEO33/8035
DEO32/7076
DEO32/7073
CB/STC2/284
CDCRBG/1209
NLS25A/0003
LC1/0025
WS33/8025
CSE2B/6037
LC1/0016/2
CB/STC/3041
CDCRBG/1169
WS31/6054
ABRO1A1/1901
NUW81B/1623
WS31/6040
WS31/6037
MT(N)3A/0067
CP11A/1024
WS32/7006
ESW1B/2012
SLS21A/254
SM21A/5022
SLWS2/2011
WS12/109
SL41C/100
WS12/101
CB/SL22B/2006
SL24B/1
ICS2A/113427
DE32/7114
TORPC/1001
CBC/1A/0006
ICS2A/112381
AOSIPT/588
TORPC/01004
CBCS/SC222
CP(PI)0001
NIMES/5004
NWE22B/0153
ABRO1B1/2321
DEO33/8045
NCSM2B/1550
STC5/5001
ABRO1C2/2231
SCSS2B/1112
SCSS1A/1142
DEO32/7074
DEO32/7075
NUW31A/0014
NSM61A/0019
SMC42A/5283
NUW81B/1615
LC4/0320
WS32/7043
CB/STC3/3048
LC7A/00010
NNR/512
SES2B/67
CP11A/1077
CB/STC3/3005
WS33/8002
PROC1C/44345
WS32/7029
WS32/7007
CISE21A/2066
SL41A/0027
SL41C/119
CISP2A/07
SLS21A/252
NUW83A/1746
SL22A/2237
WS12/103
CB/SL21D/0028
8194530/01M.

Further details on this list in its entirety could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Biological Detection Devices

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will open for public inspection at the Public Record Office the files located at DEFE 55/97 and DEFE 55/100 regarding tests of biological detection devices and joint US/UK biological detection experiments in 1977. [6579]

Dr. Moonie: No. The reports include details of US biological detection equipment and I am therefore withholding the information in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Biological Warfare

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many simulated exercises have been carried out in respect of biological and chemical weapon attacks on the UK in each of the last five years. [8622]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence is responsible for providing military aid to the civil authorities support to the Home Office in the event of a biological or chemical weapons terrorist attack upon the UK. On average, seven crisis response exercises are carried out by the MOD each year. In addition, a large number of low level training exercises are conducted each year at unit and sub-unit level.

The Home Office also supports a counter-terrorist exercise programme for police forces, other Government Departments and agencies. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will write to my hon. Friend with further details of that programme and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces Pension Scheme

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to amend the armed forces pension scheme to allow benefits to be paid to partners of service men and women killed on active service; and if he will make a statement. [8204]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence does not currently have any plans to amend the armed forces pension scheme (AFPS) to allow benefits to be paid to partners of service men and women killed on active service. However, following the recently completed consultation period on the review of the AFPS, representations on a range of issues, including this one, will be taken forward for further consideration.

Departmental Contracts

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those sites operated by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* contractors responsible to his Department, which are (i) required to comply with and (ii) exempt from compliance with the Radiation Emergency Preparedness and Public Information Regulations 2001. [8761]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Civilian Contractors (Insurance)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements his Department has made to provide insurance for civilian contractors deployed on operations; and if he will make a statement. [9393]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) expects contractors to provide insurance appropriate to the conduct of their business. However, there are a limited number of risks that industry is unable to insure itself against, or where the cost of obtaining such insurance is prohibitive. In such cases the MOD would consider indemnifying industry for these specific and very limited circumstances. Hitherto, consideration of an indemnity for contractors and their personnel on deployed operations has been on a case-by-case basis, but the MOD is considering, with representatives of industry, standard arrangements for these activities.

Anti-anthrax Drugs

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the supply chain, from MOD stockpile to NHS hospitals, of anti-anthrax drugs. [9541]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health have discussed the issue of availability of such treatments and arrangements are in place to allow joint access.

RAF Menwith Hill

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the memorandum of understanding between the UK and US Governments in respect of RAF Menwith Hill was signed; and what expiry date was set for this memorandum. [8772]

Mr. Ingram: The presence of the United States visiting forces in the UK is governed by the NATO Status of Forces Agreement of 1951 and additional confidential arrangements. There is no specific memorandum of understanding governing the presence of the USVF at RAF Menwith Hill.

Operation Enduring Freedom

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost to date of Operation Enduring Freedom; and how much of the total cost has been met from pre-set departmental budgets. [8769]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the hon. Member. A copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Porton Down

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the states with which reciprocal arrangements exist for the exchange of material and information relating to them held at Porton Down. [8771]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence maintains formal arrangements with a number of different countries relating to the exchange of material and information resulting from research at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down. The relevant countries are the United States of America, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. These arrangements are of the enabling type and do not commit the UK to specific exchanges. Actual exchanges are entered into only on a case-by-case basis and when it is in the UK's interest to do so. Additionally working groups which may exchange information meet under the auspices of NATO.

These arrangements prevent the unnecessary duplication of research programmes and maximise the potential of advances in protection against the use of chemical and biological agents.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

CITB Levy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason the CITB levy is imposed on tool hire companies and rental companies who are not engaged wholly or mainly in the construction industry; and if she will make a statement. [8468]

John Healey: The CITB can impose the levy only on employers who are engaged wholly or mainly in construction activities as defined in its governing legislation. This states that construction industry activities include

> "the installation, testing, inspection, maintenance or repair of contractor's plant, or the letting out on hire of such plant or scaffolding".

Contractors' plant is further defined to mean

> "machinery, plant or equipment of a kind used or intended for use in operations on the site of any building work or civil engineering work".

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason the CITB levy is not imposed on builders merchants. [8469]

John Healey: The CITB is able to impose a levy only on employers who are engaged wholly or mainly in construction activities as defined in its governing legislation. Builders merchants are wholly or mainly retailers and retailing is not a construction activity.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the Government will review the Industrial Training Act 1982 in respect of the CITB; and if she will make a statement. [8470]

John Healey: The Industrial Training Act 1982 does not relate specifically to the CITB. It gives the Secretary of State power to set up industrial training boards, which is given effect by the making of an industrial training order. The order includes a definition of the industry for which the board is to exercise its functions.

The order that set up the CITB is the Industrial Training (Construction Board) Order 1964, most recently amended by the Industrial Training (Construction Board) Order 1964 (Amendment) Order 1992. I have no plans at the present time to review that order but am, of course, always prepared to consider proposals from any sector of the industry.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will assess the case for the tool hire sector's liability to pay the CITB levy; and if she will make a statement. [8471]

John Healey: The Secretary of State does not have the power to assess the case for any sector's liability to pay the CITB levy. Only the CITB has the power to assess liability to pay the levy and this is in respect of an individual construction establishment, not a sector. There is a right of appeal against an assessment to an employment tribunal. A construction establishment is one that is engaged wholly or mainly in the construction industry as defined in the Industrial Training (Construction Board) Order 1964 (Amendment) Order 1992—the order which identifies the activities covered by the CITB.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason there is no distinction between plant hire and tool hire in respect of the CITB levy. [8472]

John Healey: The Industrial Training (Construction Board) Order 1964 (Amendment) Order 1992 sets out the activities of the construction industry, ie the industry in respect of which the CITB is required to exercise its functions. One of those activities is the hiring out of contractors' plant, which is also further defined in the order as

> "machinery, plant or equipment of a kind used or intended for use in operations on the site of any building work or civil engineering work, but does not include lorries, ready-mixed concrete vehicles or other mechanically propelled vehicles mainly used for the carriage of goods on roads".

It is this definition that determines whether or not a company falls within the scope of the CITB.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason there is no opt-out clause for the CITB levy scheme; and if she will make a statement. [8473]

John Healey: The Industrial Training Act 1982—the legislation that governs the functions and operations of industrial training boards (ITBs)—gives an ITB the power to make provision for exempting from the levy employers who make adequate arrangements for training their work force. However it does not require it to do so. The CITB, with the support of the construction industry, has decided not to have a scheme based on exemption. Instead it has opted for a levy/grant system as being the most effective way to ensure that adequate training is carried out. The board does not believe a levy exemption scheme is appropriate for an industry where employers have a mobile work force and fluctuating work loads, making it difficult for them to plan and meet their training needs individually.

Free School Meals

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children are eligible for free school meals in schools where less than 25 per cent. of the pupils achieve five or more grades A* to C at GCSE. [8842]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The percentage of children known to be eligible for free school meals in mainstream, maintained schools where fewer than 25 per cent. of the pupils achieved five or more grades A* to C at GCSE/GNVQ in January 2001 was 37 per cent.

Student Support

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on details of the remit of the Government's review of student support. [8886]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced on 3 October 2001 that she is leading a review of student funding. The reforms will build on the new arrangements for student support introduced by the Government in 1998. It will be conducted in the context of our new goal to get 50 per cent. of people under 30 into Higher Education (HE) by 2010, our ambition to expand access to HE from under-represented groups, and our

continuing concern to deliver excellence in the HE system. We are therefore reviewing the balance between state funding and the contributions made by students and their families. A wide range of options is being considered and no decision is likely to be announced on the proposals until next year.

Ministerial Visit (Brazil)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is *(a)* the itinerary for and *(b)* the cost of the visit of the Schools Minister to Brazil of 6 and 7 December. [9887]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There is no cost and no itinerary as the Schools Minister has no plans to visit Brazil.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Scottish Executive

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library minutes and details of the date and venue of meetings held with Scottish Executive *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials to discuss Scottish Executive participation in UK delegations to Council of Ministers meetings; how many times Scottish Executive Ministers have sought to lead UK delegations to EU Council of Ministers meetings; how often Scottish Ministers have led UK delegations to Council of Ministers meetings when other UK Ministers have been part of the delegation; if he will make it his policy for Scottish Executive Ministers to be lead UK Ministers at Council of Ministers meetings where the matters are largely the responsibility of Scottish Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [6952]

Peter Hain: The devolved Administrations have an important interest in European policy matters in relation to devolved matters, and their Ministers and officials have an important role to play in relevant Council meetings. Decisions on attendance are taken by the lead UK Minister on a case-by-case basis.

As yet there have been no occasions when Scottish Executive Ministers have led UK delegations when UK Ministers have been part of the delegation, but this could well be the case if appropriate in the future.

Women's Rights (Palestine)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Palestinian Administration about human rights abuses relating to women. [8070]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly raise human rights issues with the Palestinian Authority and have an active dialogue with Palestinian NGOs about human rights matters.

We funded women's rights projects worth £31,300 in financial year 2000–01.

The UK's main development programme also supports women in development projects such as providing women's training programmes and creating work opportunities and a gender law and development masters programme at the Bir Zeit University in Gaza.

Iraqi Oil

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have indicated *(a)* support for *(b)* opposition to the UK proposal to alter the interval between the price fixing of Iraqi oil from 30 days to 10 days; and if he will make a statement. [9122]

Mr. Bradshaw: Russia alone of the P5 has so far been unable to support the principle of the UK's initiative to seek fair market value for Iraqi oil exports (in line with the UN's commitment to do so), by reviewing the price set for Iraqi oil against the oil's market value every 15, instead of 30, days.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his proposal to the United Nations to alter the interval between the price fixing of Iraqi oil from 30 days to 10 days would have *(a)* positive or *(b)* negative economic and social consequences in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [9123]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK's initiative, to review the price of Iraqi oil more frequently (every 15 instead of 30 days) in order better to match its actual market value, is maximising the revenue available to the "oil for food" humanitarian programme which benefits the Iraqi people. It also limits the opportunity for the Iraqi regime to obtain funds illegally for itself. We have proposed that the UN Sanctions Committee formally adopts this procedure to meet its commitment to obtain fair market value for Iraqi oil exports.

Fundamentalist Paramilitary Groups

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts he is making to establish the number of UK citizens involved with fundamentalist paramilitary groups in *(a)* Afghanistan, *(b)* Kashmir, *(c)* Pakistan, *(d)* Chechnya, *(e)* Lebanon and *(f)* Palestinian Authority territories; and if he will make a statement. [8656]

Mr. Bradshaw: I can assure my hon. Friend that HMG are determined that this country should not be used as a base for supporting terrorism overseas, in any way. The Terrorism Act 2000 (which entered into force in February 2001) is designed to help the UK police and courts take effective action against those who seek to plan, carry out or support terrorism from or in the UK.

Natural Disasters

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Department is responsible for making applications for aid from the budget of the EU for natural disasters in the UK. [8765]

Peter Hain: Decisions to seek financing from the European Union are taken by Departments on an individual basis.

Colonel Gaddafi

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Prime Minister

of St. Kitts and Nevis sought advice from the British Government on his Government's proposed trip to Libya to meet Colonel Gaddafi. [9101]

Mr. Bradshaw: No.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for each quarter that an appeal has been available against a refusal of a visa or entry clearance to visit the United Kingdom, how many applications were made for a visa or entry clearance to visit the United Kingdom; of these how many were refused; of these refusals, how many were appealed; and of these appeals, how many succeeded, broken down in each category by *(a)* the country from which the application was made, *(b)* the gender of the applicant and *(c)* the age of the applicant (0–10, 11–20, 21–30 and 31 and above). [8730]

Mr. Bradshaw: We record details of appeals received only in respect of family visit applications. Details are given in the table of the number of appeals received between October 2000, when the right of appeal was reintroduced for family visit visa refusals, and September 2001 for the largest 114 posts.

The number of applications received and refused between October 2000 and September 2001 are as follows. The figures are based on monthly statistical reports received from the 114 largest posts. The remaining posts submit information on an annual basis, which is not broken down into months. To answer this question for all 165 posts we would have to ask those additional posts to extract the information requested. This could be done only at disproportionate cost.

We do not record the outcome of appeals, but the Lord Chancellor's Department has provided the following information:

	Received	*Appeal allowed*
October to December 2000	139	22
January to March 2001	540	156
April to June 2001	1,142	422
July to September 2001	1,655	890

We do not record the gender or the age of the applicant. To ask posts to provide this information for statistical purposes now would require them to carry out a manual search of their records. This too could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Applications received, refused and family visit applications received

	October to December 2000			*January to March 2001*		
	Applications received	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*	*Applications received*	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*
Abidjan	763	53	0	561	93	0
Abu Dhabi	2,973	52	0	3,112	48	1
Abuja	4,474	561	2	3,734	622	0
Accra	12,314	1,899	10	8,978	3,303	58
Addis Ababa	771	117	0	1,149	193	1
Algiers	—	—	—	850	—	—
Almaty	1,213	69	0	939	51	0
Amman	1,940	37	0	2,225	55	0
Amsterdam	2,268	25	0	1,708	46	2
Ankara	969	14	0	—	14	0
Bahrain	1,319	15	2	2,013	5	0
Baku	691	37	0	535	21	0
Bandar Seri Begawan	197	1	0	—	—	0
Bangkok	5,900	548	0	8,766	521	9
Banjul	1,244	140	0	1,177	159	0
Beirut	1,760	13	0	1,512	19	1
Belgrade	2,727	47	0	2,418	40	1
Bogota	3,890	486	0	3,360	384	3
Bombay	11,353	895	9	15,925	882	39
Bratislava	4,376	129	0	2,870	162	0
Brussels	960	12	1	903	11	0
Bucharest	5,415	350	1	5,059	414	4
Budapest	330	26	0	300	22	0
Cairo	5,940	205	1	5,216	251	3
Calcutta	1,242	30	0	1,713	21	1
Canberra	6,114	9	0	11,943	14	0
Casablanca	1,490	89	1	1,405	52	1
Chicago	1,148	3	0	2,414	2	0
Colombo	4,679	905	1	4,909	1,293	13
Copenhagen	751	14	0	600	22	0
Dakar	—	—	—	382	47	1
Damascus	1,370	160	0	1,561	129	6
Dar Es Salaam	1,805	350	2	1,866	388	2
Dhaka	5,415	1,215	12	5,221	1,749	39
Doha	1,069	42	0	1,413	50	1
Dubai	4,174	257	2	5,657	127	4
Dublin	1,413	9	0	1,361	9	1
Dusseldorf	6,157	39	0	5,405	39	0
Ekaterinburg	476	42	0	521	30	0

Applications received, refused and family visit applications received

	October to December 2000			*January to March 2001*		
	Applications received	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*	*Applications received*	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*
Geneva	2,197	83	1	1,551	32	0
Georgetown	358	38	1	339	26	1
Guangzhou	2,506	555	4	2,423	1,312	8
Hanoi	469	51	0	375	36	0
Harare	484	81	0	762	121	0
Havana	426	40	0	416	39	0
Hong Kong	1,027	58	0	1,179	56	1
Islamabad	14,085	3,046	35	16,090	5,203	169
Istanbul	15,974	524	6	769	744	13
Jakarta	5,354	73	1	2,121	69	2
Jeddah	2,409	70	0	3,143	88	0
Jerusalem	386	5	0	323	9	0
Kampala	3,015	770	3	2,865	508	5
Karachi	7,251	1,001	13	7,122	1,725	36
Kathmandu	1,099	295	0	1,802	526	2
Khartoum	672	172	2	674	133	2
Kiev	5,491	747	0	5,756	1,151	4
Kingston	744	115	1	748	66	0
Kuala Lumpur	638	71	0	543	74	2
Kuwait	3,730	162	2	4,693	112	1
Lagos	13,620	2,545	60	14,054	1,938	101
Lahore[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lima	844	26	1	805	18	1
Los Angeles	4,998	13	0	4,436	15	0
Luanda	402	36	0	389	17	0
Lusaka	1,359	102	0	1,043	102	4
Madras	5,770	269	3	8,716	335	5
Madrid	1,404	7	0	13,171	7	0
Manila	5,937	203	0	7,671	439	28
Mexico City	—	—	—	127	1	0
Minsk	1,164	43	0	1,137	46	0
Moscow	14,467	488	0	14,484	452	2
Muscat	1,374	20	1	1,468	33	0
Nairobi	3,904	386	2	4,016	522	8
New Delhi	11,464	1,971	23	13,811	1,298	62
New York	7,822	31	0	7,296	43	1
Nicosia	1,131	30	0	937	32	1
Oslo	756	5	0	658	1	0
Ottawa	3,899	18	0	3,854	26	0
Paris	5,478	16	0	4,801	13	0
Peking	9,098	1,102	1	8,314	—	4
Port Louis	1,811	112	4	1,730	94	2
Port of Spain	397	32	0	409	30	0
Prague	659	3	0	517	2	0
Pretoria	4,826	532	0	6,801	430	1
Quito	446	20	0	569	28	0
Riga	374	34	0	435	19	0
Riyadh	3,481	100	1	4,048	65	4
Rome	1,832	35	0	1,418	19	0
Sana'a	717	113	0	815	117	0
Santo Domingo	179	11	—	178	10	0
Sarajevo	703	10	0	611	3	0
Shanghai	2,634	136	0	2,551	73	5
Singapore	1,185	16	0	1,171	20	0
Skopje[2]	—	—	—	649	124	—
Sofia	4,884	311	2	5,083	281	1
St. Petersburg	2,684	87	0	2,249	143	0
Sto Domingo	—	—	0	—	—	2
Stockholm	1,143	19	0	901	12	0
Taipei	5,766	—	0	6,315	230	0
Tashkent	514	36	0	394	57	0
Tbilisi	489	143	0	555	33	0
Tehran	4,079	199	1	5,181	183	8
Tel Aviv	300	39	0	2,758	109	—
Tirana	443	62	0	340	53	1
Tokyo	989	37	0	1,586	387	0
Tripoli	—	—	—	—	—	1
Tunis	1,617	289	3	1,664	227	9

Applications received, refused and family visit applications received

	October to December 2000			January to March 2001		
	Applications received	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*	*Applications received*	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*
Valletta	269	8	0	1,033	—	—
Vienna	716	10	0	667	9	0
Warsaw	355	17	0	314	25	0
Washington	3,253	0	0	2,538	3	0
Wellington	42	18	0	4,043	7	0
Yaounde	408	109	0	436	56	1
Zagreb	3,263	111	0	2,525	118	4
	324,754	26,812	215	345,047	31,533	703

[1] Opened September 2001
[2] January 2001

Applications received, refused and family visit applications received

	April to June 2001			August to September 2001		
	Applications received	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*	*Applications received*	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*
Abidjan	953	60	0	907	121	0
Abu Dhabi	7,484	212	5	7,961	278	10
Abuja	5,973	571	20	8,498	1,035	18
Accra	18,690	4,607	103	18,555	5,194	70
Addis Ababa	1,197	177	3	1,748	291	5
Algiers	942	—	—	1,333	—	—
Almaty	1,333	47	0	1,119	76	0
Amman	2,748	29	0	3,847	76	1
Amsterdam	2,323	14	2	2,507	41	3
Ankara	—	19	0	1,173	12	0
Bahrain	3,715	15	1	5,353	30	0
Baku	764	30	0	851	7	0
Bandar Seri Begawan	—	—	0	—	—	0
Bangkok	8,855	487	23	7,698	648	16
Banjul	1,937	199	5	2,626	328	5
Beirut	2,148	11	0	2,420	22	0
Belgrade	3,596	45	2	3,348	43	1
Bogota	6,744	373	1	4,819	453	2
Bombay	30,135	1,599	136	20,500	1,600	126
Bratislava	6,397	116	0	6,049	151	0
Brussels	986	7	0	1,043	12	0
Bucharest	7,887	370	3	8,702	440	0
Budapest	415	15	0	422	21	0
Cairo	9,537	225	0	10,389	366	2
Calcutta	4,311	43	1	2,753	57	4
Canberra	9,912	13	0	7,885	8	0
Casablanca	1,824	38	0	2,403	75	2
Chicago	3,583	6	0	2,302	7	0
Colombo	6,342	795	28	7,152	1,385	40
Copenhagen	960	18	0	687	33	2
Dakar	129	11	0	—	—	0
Damascus	1,979	179	0	1,413	227	0
Dar Es Salaam	2,628	277	12	2,041	264	13
Dhaka	7,523	949	69	9,134	1,398	91
Doha	3,809	72	0	4,764	104	3
Dubai	11,739	72	6	10,034	104	12
Dublin	1,682	35	1	1,580	46	0
Dusseldorf	6,676	33	0	5,690	45	0
Ekaterinburg	1,257	21	0	923	27	0
Geneva	2,427	26	0	2,479	35	1
Georgetown	699	40	4	620	54	3
Guangzhou	5,336	1,234	12	6,143	396	11
Hanoi	619	48	0	246	22	0
Harare	564	73	0	—	—	0
Havana	573	31	0	481	36	0
Hong Kong	1,961	50	2	1,561	45	2
Islamabad	30,872	5,910	538	20,013	4,153	449
Istanbul	1,131	519	11	13,430	701	23
Jakarta	5,382	73	3	2,590	80	0
Jeddah	8,324	77	0	5,866	71	5
Jerusalem	643	9	0	712	14	0

Applications received, refused and family visit applications received

	April to June 2001			August to September 2001		
	Applications received	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*	*Applications received*	*Applications refused*	*FVA received*
Kampala	3,859	318	3	3,485	349	5
Karachi	16,964	2,933	29	13,411	2,554	85
Kathmandu	1,561	413	0	2,036	818	20
Khartoum	1,745	134	11	1,230	136	5
Kiev	8,493	916	3	6,226	1,070	4
Kingston	1,194	109	1	1,264	122	3
Kuala Lumpur	716	95	1	844	111	1
Kuwait	10,612	135	1	14,345	196	2
Lagos	23,197	2,261	144	26,056	2,635	174
Lahore[1]	—	—	—	1,345	271	2
Lima	1,087	26	0	1,137	24	0
Los Angeles	6,767	5	0	5,364	5	0
Luanda	499	14	0	813	30	0
Lusaka	1,433	65	6	1,218	78	1
Madras	12,272	312	7	8,150	336	6
Madrid	13,207	3	0	1,418	2	0
Manila	7,830	426	60	5,841	344	46
Mexico City	178	0	1	181	0	0
Minsk	2,968	41	0	3,045	80	0
Moscow	22,941	593	5	16,894	619	8
Muscat	4,258	41	3	3,209	40	5
Nairobi	6,582	469	7	6,872	731	17
New Delhi	28,328	1,672	167	21,719	1,525	156
New York	10,263	31	0	8,403	20	0
Nicosia	1,285	34	1	2,053	38	7
Oslo	1,063	1	1	898	2	0
Ottawa	5,582	33	0	5,192	24	1
Paris	6,946	8	0	7,689	11	1
Peking	12,568	—	2	19,175	2,237	0
Port Louis	3,823	100	7	3,050	200	9
Port of Spain	541	40	0	662	39	0
Prague	670	3	0	755	3	0
Pretoria	5,756	386	0	4,526	406	0
Quito	821	20	0	865	19	1
Riga	553	41	0	303	18	1
Riyadh	10,796	114	7	9,836	129	7
Rome	2,097	36	0	3,661	24	1
Sana'a	1,322	104	11	1,448	70	5
Santo Domingo	547	6	0	532	22	0
Sarajevo	780	6	0	684	5	0
Shanghai	4,889	61	0	6,660	702	0
Singapore	1,695	11	0	1,331	19	0
Skopje[2]	1,205	94	—	839	139	—
Sofia	6,823	555	0	5,726	899	0
St. Petersburg	3,663	129	0	3,010	134	0
Sto Domingo	—	—	0	—	—	14
Stockholm	1,333	8	0	1,119	13	0
Taipei	12,297	429	0	12,282	0	0
Tashkent	599	49	0	885	72	0
Tbilisi	530	30	0	790	33	0
Tehran	6,583	69	9	7,198	167	20
Tel Aviv	4,766	175	—	6,552	394	—
Tirana	704	40	0	853	103	0
Tokyo	1,435	242	1	1,299	81	0
Tripoli	—	—	7	—	—	0
Tunis	1,875	196	15	3,042	166	21
Valletta	1,560	—	—	—	—	—
Vienna	745	11	0	813	7	0
Warsaw	448	19	0	545	24	0
Washington	3,271	0	1	3,030	0	0
Wellington	4,240	10	0	2,026	7	0
Yaounde	710	70	0	476	44	4
Zagreb	3,945	19	1	4,346	32	0
	553,064	34,041	1,506	513,447	38,921	1,552

[1] Opened September 2001
[2] January 2001

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for each year from 1990 to 2000, how many applications were made for a visa or entry clearance to visit the United Kingdom of these, how many were repeat applications; how many applications for a visa or entry clearance to visit the United Kingdom were refused; and of these, how many were repeat applications, broken down in each category by *(a)* the country from which the application was made, *(b)* the gender of the applicant and *(c)* the age of the applicant (0–10, 11–20, 21–30 and 31 and above). [8729]

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not maintain records on the number of visa applications received for the years 1990 to 1992. Most records of applications at overseas Posts for those years will have been destroyed.

We have the following information for 1993 to 1996:

Year/region	*Received*	*Refused*
1993		
Equatorial Africa	90,123	18,749
Southern Africa	6,703	266
Near East and North Africa	73,320	4,198
Middle East	110,230	4,156
Far East	75,820	1,205
South Asia	188,453	25,224
SE Asia	98,434	2,821
Australia/South Pacific	19,349	3
Western Europe	92,748	3,074
Central Europe and FSU	103,960	4,569
Southern Europe	66,193	3,212
Northern Europe	63,634	183
West Indies and Atlantic	6,081	1,057
Latin America	4,870	88
1994		
Equatorial Africa	97,184	19,998
Southern Africa	9,662	472
Near East and North Africa	76,814	3,261
Middle East	116,940	3,876
Far East	78,798	684
South Asia	210,117	30,504
SE Asia	120,092	2,622
Australia/South Pacific	28,563	53
Western Europe	98,524	2,953
MVD, London	318	0
Central Europe and FSU	15,752	4,919
Southern Europe	54,654	3,338
Northern Europe	72,301	213
West Indies and Atlantic	7,431	1,300
Latin America	5,223	75
1995		
Equatorial Africa	89,889	19,573
Southern Africa	16,308	507
Near East and North Africa	78,127	4,509
Middle East	122,794	4,969
Far East	82,591	1,222
South Asia	222,954	35,576
SE Asia	130,246	2,362
Australia/South Pacific	35,699	77
Western Europe	96,516	2,480
MVD, London	192	0
Central Europe and FSU	187,991	7,033
Southern Europe	63,610	3,986
Northern Europe	72,434	301
West Indies and Atlantic	6,855	836
Latin America	6,314	145
1996		
Equatorial Africa	126,738	199,941
Southern Africa	19,403	844
Near East and North Africa	80,598	5,187
Middle East	199,080	4,751
Far East	88,542	1,458
South Asia	231,499	36,430
SE Asia	138,067	3,046
Australia/South Pacific	3,895	43
Western Europe	96,496	2,613
MVD, London	723	0
Central Europe and FSU	213,984	9,470
Southern Europe	81,091	3,484
Northern Europe	80,783	241
West Indies and Atlantic	7,845	721
Latin America	8,815	200

The numbers of applications received and refused between 1997 and 2000 are as follows.

We do not record for statistical purposes whether an application is a repeat application, the gender of the applicant or their age. To ask Posts to provide this information now would require them to carry out a manual search of their records, which could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Applications received/refused

	1997		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*	
	Received	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*
Abidjan	2,053	300	2,343	352	2,176	201	2,865	235
Abu Dhabi	16,532	319	[1]—	[1]—	17,663	434	18,850	333
Abuja	7,930	1,359	11,487	1,452	16,782	1,777	21,602	2,776
Accra	19,145	4,840	22,901	5,078	28,308	5,355	34,144	7,783
Addis Ababa	5,808	866	4,357	362	4,066	551	3,547	519
Algiers	2,657	0	3,499	0	3,370	0	0	0
Almaty	4,589	133	5,334	84	4,996	114	5,486	220
Amman	9,716	190	9,076	227	8,642	228	10,114	151
Amsterdam	7,095	234	7,470	256	8,198	270	8,905	172
Ankara	4,770	49	4,530	67	4,695	90	5,304	52
Antananarivo	324	6	298	8	359	25	354	31
Ascension Island	52	1	55	0	59	0	80	0
Ashgabat	296	0	335	0	710	12	1,049	6
Athens	1,157	13	991	29	1,167	112	1,273	154
Bahrain	13,338	88	[1]—	[1]—	11,026	73	12,410	98
Baku	2,358	1	3,217	16	2,755	113	2,702	171
Bandar Seri Begawan	1,097	5	912	4	1,185	18	1,238	5
Bangkok	42,592	1,406	21,906	1,503	29,278	1,950	32,253	2,100

Applications received/refused

	1997		1998		1999		2000	
	Received	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*
Banjul	3,115	654	3,137	508	3,933	915	4,579	809
Beirut	8,027	381	7,507	271	7,500	230	8,090	130
Belgrade	13,641	437	14,772	285	2,683	55	11,185	207
Belmopan	22	0	24	0	17	0	31	0
Berne	88	0	57	0	40	0	49	0
Bogota	14,734	441	20,683	1,089	17,129	1,303	19,766	1,759
Bombay	56,488	4,813	63,909	5,006	72,203	5,895	73,317	6,684
Bonn	428	0	584	0	'—	'—	'—	'—
Brasilia	90	0	97	0	95	0	164	0
Bratislava	401	36	6,082	69	22,838	773	21,070	496
Bridgetown	701	78	821	71	922	105	987	109
Brussels	6,026	120	4,443	118	4,442	94	4,574	81
Bucharest	18,830	834	23,206	1,180	22,056	1,416	22,270	1,565
Budapest	1,352	45	1,610	74	4,869	174	1,587	103
Buenos Aires	614	4	574	3	635	10	652	6
Cairo	28,869	949	29,616	904	30,602	728	30,940	612
Calcutta	9,264	118	11,629	89	9,636	173	10,087	141
Canberra	28,585	41	32,317	31	34,095	36	34,423	56
Caracas	573	3	445	12	584	10	708	13
Casablanca	7,368	862	7,084	665	7,212	453	7,763	426
Chicago	8,981	18	10,484	17	11,084	24	11,311	9
Colombo	12,288	608	14,594	622	18,449	1,281	21,288	2,480
Copenhagen	2,197	89	2,240	47	2,654	39	3,229	52
Dakar	1,410	229	1,243	189	1,430	183	1,581	160
Damascus	5,857	233	5,976	297	5,404	411	7,389	536
Dar Es Salaam	6,962	238	9,008	856	9,607	1,489	9,253	1,472
Dhaka	18,132	5,829	17,187	4,562	19,752	4,656	22,418	5,342
Doha	14,972	101	'—	'—	10,407	303	9,973	278
Dubai	26,364	897	'—	'—	27,677	953	28,408	1,130
Dublin	3,496	7	3,313	21	3,613	37	5,039	71
Dusseldorf	24,965	668	19,813	483	21,854	309	25,279	182
Ekaterinburg	423	12	2,941	65	2,083	46	2,803	97
Freetown	624	145	'—	'—	'—	'—	2,815	420
Gaborone	671	17	790	28	820	34	946	44
Geneva	8,936	129	8,266	121	8,075	148	9,384	188
Georgetown	1,589	208	1,582	190	1,521	205	1,881	163
Gibraltar	568	0	625	0	344	10	242	0
Guangzhou	'—	'—	'—	'—	4,234	206	13,453	1,373
Guatemala City	47	0	72	1	89	3	93	6
Hamilton	54	0	289	0	280	3	239	0
Hanoi	1,272	99	2,205	164	1,761	315	2,233	244
Harare	1,530	166	1,955	254	1,900	222	2,960	444
Havana	1,821	106	2,107	96	2,221	163	1,968	108
Helsinki	956	20	1,046	7	948	31	1,367	42
Hong Kong	13,365	332	11,846	380	6,390	399	5,833	290
Honiara	38	0	11	0	23	0	22	1
Houston	4,856	24	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Islamabad	33,011	5,974	49,087	7,369	50,816	11,299	64,346	11,047
Istanbul	60,286	2,625	63,338	2,817	58,870	2,240	63,334	2,274
Jakarta	31,980	164	8,855	271	18,539	356	19,340	357
Jedda	25,304	711	'—	'—	25,803	1,234	21,844	540
Jerusalem	2,234	43	2,378	88	2,021	138	2,189	43
Kampala	9,309	836	11,203	1,007	11,612	1,224	13,139	2,176
Karachi	26,678	1,832	28,063	3,124	30,286	3,915	32,450	4,942
Kathmandu	3,096	296	3,825	676	4,148	759	5,597	1,263
Khartoum	3,401	533	'—	'—	1,494	315	4,224	616
Kiev	22,469	2,626	23,727	2,580	22,693	2,843	26,145	3,121
Kigali	'—	'—	105	0	110	0	106	0
Kingston	3,217	232	3,537	230	3,475	389	3,618	408
Kinshasa	686	82	689	44	1,385	143	1,104	255
Kuala Lumpur	3,893	157	2,655	317	2,956	289	2,645	303
Kuwait	40,517	352	'—	'—	36,199	397	33,469	661
La Paz	46	2	67	1	49	2	56	0
Lagos	42,648	8,856	44,129	8,621	55,319	8,267	62,123	9,363
Lahore	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Lilongwe	337	32	374	33	456	39	437	28
Lima	3,387	91	3,884	161	3,642	190	3,678	159
Lisbon	1,107	15	1,352	27	1,213	19	1,352	27
Los Angeles	17,442	32	24,517	93	24,417	186	25,023	98
Luanda	1,497	38	1,609	30	1,744	44	1,857	138
Lusaka	4,082	251	4,488	208	4,746	225	5,289	334

Applications received/refused

	1997		1998		1999		2000	
	Received	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*
Luxembourg	477	3	397	0	400	0	340	1
Madras	18,970	651	23,868	917	27,003	954	32,531	1,316
Madrid	2,871	137	2,816	184	2,655	132	3,906	84
Managua	17	0	15	0	16	0	21	0
Manila	21,104	1,125	17,868	1,584	19,868	1,274	25,868	1,161
Maputo	652	28	792	23	717	22	933	27
Maseru	104	2	160	6	234	33	195	42
Mbabane	'—	'—	152	8	123	1	160	5
Mexico City	1,107	4	1,228	5	1,339	7	1,636	5
Minsk	7,552	90	7,131	168	7,137	120	8,081	201
Montevideo	128	0	139	0	88	0	95	0
Moscow	91,496	2,624	77,323	2,105	56,736	1,248	65,544	1,421
Muscat	8,534	76	'—	'—	10,587	124	10,004	131
MVD, London	856	0	483	0	579	0	'—	'—
Nairobi	18,060	1,041	17,194	1,578	18,796	2,082	18,949	1,545
Nassau	229	0	244	3	338	3	327	1
New Delhi	54,137	7,200	60,283	8,249	66,822	11,165	70,790	12,481
New York	28,303	170	32,786	268	34,545	169	35,012	166
Nicosia	2,911	233	8,340	422	8,006	461	7,397	325
Nuku'alofa	14	0	20	0	28	0	1	0
Oslo	3,360	62	2,745	34	2,739	39	3,265	22
Ottawa	15,586	159	18,482	111	18,744	66	18,848	61
Panama City	4	0	162	6	161	3	167	3
Paris	22,833	303	21,301	176	19,561	151	22,189	84
Peking	33,743	2,850	33,809	2,602	35,254	2,733	42,804	4,105
Port Louis	8,614	460	9,537	489	9,463	516	10,105	633
Port Moresby	626	4	609	5	676	6	567	3
Port of Spain	1,394	45	1,535	41	1,793	68	1,937	124
Port Stanley	79	0	66	1	49	0	'—	'—
Prague	1,201	55	1,642	67	2,127	90	2,181	79
Pretoria	12,700	556	19,328	657	22,437	1,162	19,950	1,718
Quito	1,689	167	3,028	201	2,020	229	2,029	188
Rabat	0	0	526	0	541	0	510	0
Rangoon	847	39	1,095	39	1,028	77	1,259	111
Reykjavik	85	0	88	2	136	2	198	0
Riga	2,393	78	2,513	174	2,173	156	1,943	147
Rio de Janeiro	616	22	735	21	720	36	806	62
Ryidah	30,269	545	'—	'—	31,108	800	29,065	569
Rome	5,576	368	6,059	460	5,422	252	7,408	171
San Jose	53	0	77	0	72	0	111	0
San Salvador	8	1	16	0	15	0	23	0
Sana'a	4,005	401	'—	'—	4,093	252	5,117	681
Santiago	480	3	543	9	507	6	343	0
Santo Domingo	434	41	1,151	84	1,408	59	1,316	48
Sarajevo	766	68	2,036	139	3,370	163	3,014	73
Seoul	1,536	16	839	15	974	27	1,166	72
Shanghai	'—	'—	5,683	'—	8,353	788	12,833	885
Singapore	3,696	35	4,096	31	4,339	19	5,384	39
Skopje	257	0	417	0	720	1	1,020	0
Sofia	14,867	636	17,241	944	21,182	1,371	22,291	1,303
St. Petersburg	16,610	393	14,382	637	11,347	655	11,981	573
Stockholm	5,890	66	5,865	100	4,582	87	4,598	78
Suva	764	14	763	20	822	14	1,340	20
Taipei	50,133	0	41,089	0	43,042	0	44,959	0
Tallinn	471	9	534	59	827	80	655	168
Tangier	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tashkent	3,115	109	2,915	208	2,581	118	1,946	173
Tbilisi	1,479	36	1,905	22	2,290	59	2,793	399
Tegucigalpa	18	0	23	0	25	0	39	2
Tehran	21,013	821	'—	'—	22,613	557	26,750	790
Tel Aviv	1,601	154	1,696	255	1,431	184	1,585	123
The Hague	207	0	118	0	'—	'—	'—	'—
Tirana	'—	'—	206	33	1,703	206	2,071	297
Tokyo	5,590	160	5,443	219	5,044	306	5,131	271
Tripoli	618	0	860	3	1,507	12	8,344	256
Tunis	7,374	1,713	7,507	1,260	7,310	1,097	7,809	1,160
Ulaan Baatar	590	11	818	79	911	130	1,084	184
Valletta	7,726	18	7,419	22	6,876	29	4,964	17
Victoria	198	1	192	3	268	0	282	3
Vienna	2,583	21	2,625	18	2,618	15	3,007	34
Vila	15	0	6	0	9	1	10	2

Applications received/refused

	1997		1998		1999		2000	
	Received	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Refused*
Vilnius	229	16	366	38	325	46	526	65
Warsaw	1,341	142	1,409	116	1,568	115	1,509	213
Washington	10,561	8	12,083	4	11,531	17	12,635	7
Wellington	12,419	20	13,050	24	13,743	43	12,807	72
Windhoek	198	6	363	7	483	15	496	50
Yaounde	1,776	171	2,084	243	2,054	225	2,177	350
Yerevan	667	34	1,022	43	969	28	1,036	101
Zagreb	841	84	342	25	2,435	34	13,490	352

[1] Posts where figures are not available

Biological Weapons Convention

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place with other Governments on the ratification of the verification protocol amendment to the Biological Weapons Convention 1972. [8621]

Mr. Bradshaw: None on the ratification of the protocol. The last meeting of the Ad Hoc Group of the States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) which had been negotiating a Protocol took place from 24 July to 17 August 2001. The meeting concluded without agreement on a Protocol text or a future negotiating process. We continue to support the strengthening of the BTWC and have regular discussions with like-minded partners about further options to achieve this objective.

Botswana

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations the Government have made to the Government of Botswana concerning their policy of resettling the nomadic San people in villages. [9065]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign Secretary called on President Mogae of Botswana when he and his Foreign Minister visited London in June. The issue of resettlement of the San people was discussed during the meeting. The British High Commissioner discussed the San when he presented his credentials to President Mogae in September.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is being done to hold President Mugabe to the Abuja Accord. [9434]

Mr. Bradshaw: Together with our EU partners, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Commonwealth and other concerned members of the international community, we continue to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to abide by the commitments it made in Abuja. My noble Friend Baroness Amos plans to visit Zimbabwe on 25–26 October with Abuja partners, to assess progress on the ground.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Zimbabwe. [8303]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are very concerned by the continuing breakdown of law and order in Zimbabwe. We are working with our Commonwealth, African, EU and other international partners to urge the Zimbabwean Government to restore the rule of law, respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and implement economic reform. We continue to urge the Zimbabwean Government to abide by the commitments it made in Abuja. My noble Friend Baroness Amos plans to visit Zimbabwe on 25–26 October to assess the situation on the ground, as part of the Abuja process, and in the company of other Commonwealth representatives.

Middle East

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the release of Israeli soldiers by the Lebanese Hizbollah. [8315]

Mr. Bradshaw: This Government condemn hostage taking under any circumstances. The Government are doing what they can to help in these cases, and continue to raise them with the relevant countries in the region pressing particularly for access to the hostages for the ICRC. We strongly support all efforts to secure the release of all hostages, particularly efforts led by the United Nations Secretary General.

Burma

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent report compiled by Earthrights International regarding the activities of Premier Oil in Burma; and if he will make a statement. [8712]

Mr. Bradshaw: The report to which the hon. Member refers, published in May 2000, criticised Premier Oil's presence in Burma on the ground that it helped prop up a military regime under which human rights abuses, including forced labour, are widespread. We share that view and have asked Premier to leave Burma as soon as, and to the fullest extent that, it legally can.

Pakistan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his Pakistani counterparts concerning the sentencing to death of Dr. Yunis Shaikh for blasphemy on 18 August. [8307]

Mr. Bradshaw: The then FCO Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Scotland, raised this with the Pakistani Minister of Law, Ms Shahida Jamil, in April. In May, the local EU Troika raised the application of the blasphemy laws with Ms Jamil. Officials in our High Commission in Islamabad most recently discussed Mr. Shaikh's case with representatives of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in August. We will continue to follow this issue closely.

Tibet

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on *(a)* the most recent talks between the EU and Chinese regarding Tibet and *(b)* the situation of Chadrel Rinpoche, Gedun Choekyi, Ngawang Sangdrol, Ngawang Choephel and the anniversary monks. [8310]

Mr. MacShane: The information is as follows:

(a) The EU raised our concerns about Tibet at the EU-China summit on 5 September. The EU-China Human Rights Dialogue on 25–26 October will provide another opportunity to discuss these concerns in detail.

(b) We regularly raise our concerns about political prisoners in Tibet. Chadrel Rinpoche, Gedun Choekyi Nyima, Ngawang Sangdrol and Ngawang Cheophel were among the individual cases raised at the last round of the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue on 12–14 February. The Chinese gave the following information:

Chadrel Rinpoche was in good health and allowed to study (i.e. watch TV and read newspapers). He was not held in solitary confinement, sharing his room with one other inmate. He was not required to carry out hard labour. We were told Chadrel was due for release on 9 January 2002.

Ngawang Sangdrol was in good health, studies in her spare time and engages in weaving as a hobby. Her release date was 2013, her sentence having been extended three times for engaging in protests.

Ngawang Choephel was in good health physically and mentally.

In response to our call for independent access to Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Chinese said that his parents wished to preserve his privacy. We continue t press the Chinese for reassurance that Gedhun Choekyi is alive and well, and for independent access to him.

We have no news of the two monks (Phuntsok Legmon and Namdrol) who were sentenced in July 1999 for protesting on 10 March 1999 in Lhasa.

Dublin and Monaghan Bombings

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has responded to requests for information from the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 17 May 1974 by the delivery of relevant documents; and if he will make a statement. [7950]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 16W.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many arms export licences for arms sales to Sri Lanka have been rejected in each of the past five years. [8732]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

Details of all export licensing decisions taken between 2 May 1997 and 31 December 2000 were set out in the Government's 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, published by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; copies are in the Library of the House.

The next Annual Report covering the period to December 2001 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the calendar year.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list how many arms export licences have been granted in each of the past five years for arms sales to Sri Lanka; if he will list the arms exported by each deal; if he will list who has received the arms in Sri Lanka; and what their end-use is. [8736]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

Details of all export licensing decisions taken between 2 May 1997 and 31 December 2000 were set out in the Government's 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, published by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; copies are in the Library of the House.

From 1 January 2001 to 8 October 2001, 19 Standard Individual Export Licences and four Open Individual Export Licences were issued covering items on the Military List destined for Sri Lanka.

In addition, goods on the Military List may have been exported to Sri Lanka under certain Open General Export Licences; copies of all Open General Export Licences valid at any time during the period are in the Library of the House.

Under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, Exemption 13—Third Party's Commercial confidences, I cannot provide the information requested on end use as it has been provided to the Government in confidence. In addition, publication of this information could reveal details of the recipient country's defence strategy, as well as being commercially damaging to the exporter.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ministerial Visits

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many overseas visits and to which destinations have been undertaken by the Minister for Science over the last three years; and how they were funded. [8175]

Ms Hewitt: Over the last three years, the Minister for Science has undertaken 43 overseas visits to the following destinations: Belgium, China, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and USA. This includes a number of formal and informal EU Research Council meetings.

The travel costs have been met from within the departmental budget.

Summer Recess

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by her Department during the summer recess. [9225]

Ms Hewitt: 158 press notices and 17 consultation documents were issued by the Department during the summer recess period. 57 of the releases issued during this period were standard statistical information notes, merger clearances and other company law announcements. Copies of all the documents are available on the DTI website. Press notices are also available from the Central Office of Information.

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment his Department has made of the implementation of the End of Vehicle Life Directive on MG Rover. [9693]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI Consultation Paper includes a partial regulatory impact assessment that addresses the costs and benefits of the Directive. My Department has had a number of meetings with MG Rover, and with other car manufacturers, about the impact of the Directive. A full assessment of the effect on individual companies cannot be made until the precise method of implementation has been decided.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the administrative budget is of each of the English regional development agencies in the current financial year. [8633]

Alan Johnson: The RDAs' administration budgets this year are as follows:

£ million

	Administration
One North East	10.653
North West Development Agency	14.044
Yorkshire Forward	9.989
East Midlands Development Agency	7.488
Advantage West Midlands	8.793
East of England Development Agency	5.836
South East Development Agency	7.143
South West Development Agency	9.099
London Development Agency	9.470
Total	82.515

Textile Industry (Climate Change Levy)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the textile industry regarding the climate change levy; and if she will make a statement. [9206]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Ministers and officials maintain contact with textile industry representatives, where issues of concern to the textile industry are discussed. Prior to the levy's implementation in April this year, the British Apparel and Textile Confederation (BATC) negotiated an Energy Efficiency Agreement with the Government for an 80 per cent. discount from the levy for eligible textile companies.

Hearing Aid Council

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will review the Code of Practice of the Hearing Aid Council relating to protection of persons who purchase a hearing aid in circumstances in which they were misled by the seller. [8679]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Code of Practice is the responsibility of the Hearing Aid Council, who keep it under review.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate total staff costs for his Department and its agencies by nation and region of the UK; and if she will make a statement. [6835]

Ms Hewitt: The pay bill costs for the DTI, excluding the Patent Office and Companies House Trading Funds, but including the Department's gross and net controlled agencies, in 1999–2000 were £222 million. A more detailed breakdown is given in the Department's Expenditure Plans Report 2001–02 to 2003–04, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House (Cm 5112). The figure is not broken down geographically, and it would incur disproportionate cost to do so, but the Department's current staff, excluding those at the agencies and in Government offices, are distributed as follows:

Based	*Number of staff*	*Percentage*
England	4,457	94.7
Scotland	167	3.5
Wales	81	1.7
Northern Ireland	0	0

I have asked the agency and Trading Fund chief executives to reply directly in respect of the expenditure and staff for which they are responsible.

Letter from Chris de Grouchy to Mr. Michael Weir, dated 23 October 2001:

Parliamentary Question—Staff Costs for DTI

I am replying on behalf of our Chief Executive David Hendon who is currently away from the office.

The total paybill costs, including Superannuation, for the Radiocommunications Agency for 2000–01 were £17.9m. The national and regional breakdown was as follows:

	£ million
England	17.2
Scotland	0.3
Wales	0.2
Northern Ireland	0.2

Letter from Claire Clancy to Mr. Michael Weir, dated 23 October 2001:

I am responding on behalf of the Patent Office, an Executive Agency of the DTI, to the Parliamentary question tabled on 23 July 2001 in which you asked the Secretary of State if she would estimate total staff costs for her Department and its agencies by nation and region of the UK.

The paybill costs for the Patent Office in 2000–2001 were £24.5 million. A more detailed breakdown is given in our Annual Report 2000–01, a copy of which is available in the library of the House. The figure is not broken down geographically but the staff are distributed as follows:

895 (98.7%) are based in Wales; and

12 (1.3%) in England; and

0 (0%) in Scotland; and

0 (0%) in Northern Ireland.

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Mr. Michael Weir, dated 23 October 2001:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply to your question about the total staff costs for The Insolvency Service.

The pay bill costs for The Service in 1999–2000 were £36,683,000 and, in 2000–2001 £36,177,000. The figures are included in The Service's annual report and accounts, published in July 2001. The figures are not broken down geographically, and it would incur disproportionate cost to do so, but The Service's current staff are distributed as follows:

1,539 (96.8%) are based in England;

9 (0.6%) in Scotland;

41 (2.6%) in Wales; and

0 (0%) in Northern Ireland.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Michael Weir, dated 23 October 2001:

I have been asked to reply to your recently tabled Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in respect of Companies House Executive Agency.

The total pay bill including pension contributions and employer's National Insurance cost for the financial year ended 31 March 2001 was £17.4 million.

These figures are not readily broken down by Region, but 94% of the workforce is based in Wales, 4% in Scotland and 2% in England. The total employed headcount on a full time equivalent basis was 954 on average for the same period.

Letter from Roger Heathcote to Mr. Michael Weir, dated 23 October 2001:

I refer to your attached Parliamentary Question of 23 July, 2001.

The contribution of the Employment Tribunals Service (ETS) to the total staff costs in question is as follows:

Total costs for 2000–2001 for Great Britain were £22,289,000.00. A more detailed breakdown of numbers of staff and costs is given in the Annual Report and Accounts of the Employment Tribunals Service 2000–2001. The report is available at the ETS website, www.ets.gov.uk. The figure is not broken down geographically, and it would incur disproportionate cost to do so, but the Agency's current staff, as at the end of September 2001, are distributed as follows:

607.9 (90.03%) are based in England

51.8 (7.67%) are based in Scotland; and

15.5 (2.30%) are based in Cardiff, Wales.

Letter from Iain MacGregor to Mr. Michael Weir, dated 23 October 2001:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply on behalf of NWML to your question regarding the staff costs for DTI and its Agencies.

The figures for NWML are as follows:

1999/2000 = £1.65 M

2000/2001 = £1.74 M

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate the number of staff employed by her Department by region and nation of the UK; and if she will make a statement. [6834]

Ms Hewitt: The total staff in post figures for the DTI, including agencies (Companies House, Employment Tribunal Service, Insolvency Service, National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Patent Office and Radiocommunications Agency) is 10,099.

This figure is broken down by nation as follows:

	Staff in post	*Percentage*
England	7,620	75.45
Northern Ireland	6	0.06
Scotland	294	2.91
Wales	2,182	21.58

This figure is further broken down by nation and region (county) as follows:

	Number
England	
Avon	102
Bedfordshire	18
Berkshire	49
Cambridgeshire	23
Cheshire	25
Cleveland	95
Cornwall	1
Devon	76
Dorset	15
East Sussex	32
Essex	25
Gloucestershire	26
Greater London	5,282
Greater Manchester	146
Hampshire	78
Hertfordshire	134
Humberside	32
Kent	59
Lancashire	33
Leicestershire	36
Merseyside	68
Middlesex	60
Norfolk	26
Northamptonshire	24
Nottinghamshire	87
Oxfordshire	28
Shropshire	28
South Yorkshire	161
Staffordshire	17
Suffolk	76
Surrey	174
Tyne and Wear	79
Unknown	46
West Midlands	348
West Yorkshire	111
Northern Ireland	
Down	5
Londonderry	1

	Number
Scotland	
Central	12
Grampian	85
Lothian	83
Strathclyde	109
Tayside	5
Wales	
Gwent	919
South Glamorgan	1,244
West Glamorgan	16

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will place in the Library for each year since 1995 the average response time for providing a substantive answer to *(a)* hon. Member's correspondence, *(b)* correspondence from members of the public and *(c)* written parliamentary questions in the (i) House of Commons and (ii) House of Lords; [7049]

(2) if she will place in the Library for each year since 1995 the total number of *(a)* letters from hon. Members, *(b)* letters from members of the Public and *(c)* parliamentary questions from (i) hon. Members and (ii) Lords dealt with by her Department: what percentage took (A) more than one month and (B) more than three months to provide a substantive answer; and if she will make a statement. [7050]

Ms Hewitt: I received almost 13,000 items of post in the last year. My Department aims to respond to all letters received within 10 working days.

General information on the volumes of correspondence received across Whitehall and on overall performance is published by the Cabinet Office. Figures for 2000 were published on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 324–28W and on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 454–56W.

My Department aims to answer all ordinary written parliamentary questions within five working days, and named day written parliamentary questions on the day named.

I have answered 378 written parliamentary questions this session, providing substantive answers for 76 per cent. of them on time.

Business Recovery Fund

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many applications for grants were made under the business recovery fund; and how many have been allocated, for each Regional Development Agency in the last three years; [7800]

(2) how much money has been made available to provide grants under the business recovery fund; and what the total value of grants made has been allocated so far under the business recovery fund, for each Regional Development Agency. [7801]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

The business recovery fund has been in existence only since May this year as part of our response to the impact of foot and mouth disease on the rural economy. Discretion was given to each Regional Development Agency to use available funds flexibly and quickly to meet the specific needs of their own region. As a consequence information on numbers of applications is not available on any consistent basis. Information on the value of grants is given in the table.

RDA allocations—direct grants to business[1]

All cash figures in £ million

	Allocation	*Approved for payment*	*Number of applications approved*	*Applications awaiting approval*
NWDA	6.6	6.0	1,906	90
SWDA	9.2	8.4	775	0
Yfwd	2.0	2.0	585	0
AWM	4.0	3.3	335	150
ONE	2.3	1.8	570	100
EEDA	0.5	1.6	23	110
SEEDA	1.0	0.6	93	88
EMDA	1.4	1.3	95	385
Total	26.9	20.54	4,382	923

[1] 17 October 2001

PRIME MINISTER

Strategic Communications Unit

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost was of running the Strategic Communications Unit in the financial year 2000–01. [8767]

The Prime Minister: The total cost of running the Strategic Communications Unit for the financial year 2000–01 was £957,302. This includes the cost of developing and running the No. 10 website which now receives over four million hits a week.

Special Envoys

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the overseas missions undertaken on his behalf since 7 June by *(a)* Lord Levy and *(b)* the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), listing in each case (i) persons and places visited, (ii) the reason for the visits and (iii) the cost to public funds. [8774]

The Prime Minister: Since 7 June, Lord Levy has travelled as my personal envoy to Israel and the Palestinian Authority from 10 to 13 July, and to Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Jordan from 30 September to 10 October. During his visits he met a range of senior figures including the Israeli Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Defence Minister, the President of the Palestinian Authority, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, King Abdullah and the Jordanian Foreign Minister. The purpose of these visits was to carry messages on my behalf to other leaders. Lord Levy received no remuneration and travels at his own expense. The FCO and diplomatic missions overseas provide him with practical support, the cost of which is not separately itemised.

I have appointed my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) as Chairman of the UK-Japan 21st Century Group. He has not undertaken any missions on my behalf.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister in respect of visits abroad undertaken on his behalf by *(a)* Lord Levy and *(b)* right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), and if it is his policy to inform the Foreign Office of such visits in advance. [8773]

The Prime Minister: When Lord Levy travels as my personal envoy, the FCO is informed and he is supported by FCO staff in London and at overseas diplomatic missions.

In respect of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have him today.

Regional Government

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the allocation of ministerial responsibilities for aspects of regional Government. [7528]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 9 July, *Official Report*, column 408W.

HEALTH

Alcohol Strategy

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish his alcohol strategy. [7386]

Ms Blears: The broad timetable for the strategy is set out in the NHS Plan, which was published in July 2000. The plan said that the Department would be implementing the strategy by 2004. The Department expects to publish a consultation paper in due course.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide a screening service for asylum seekers arriving in Kent; and what finance is being made available. [6066]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* In Kent, as in the rest of the country, health authorities are responsible for providing health services, including screening, to asylum seekers. There are also national guidelines on what screening health authorities should offer their populations for tuberculosis (TB), and interim guidance on screening refugees and asylum seekers for TB has recently been circulated. In addition, the Department has commissioned the Refugee Council to provide best practice guidance on the health and social care needs (including screening needs) of asylum seekers dispersed through the National Asylum Support Service.

More generally, there is provision in immigration legislation for immigration officers to refer any prospective entrant to the United Kingdom to a medical inspector at the port of entry for a medical examination. The Department is considering with the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, whether the current arrangements for controlling cases of imported infection need to be strengthened, and if so how.

Care Home Standards

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance the Government will provide on assessing the physical and mental fitness of *(a)* a registered provider, *(b)* a registered manager and *(c)* care home workers, as required in the Care Homes Regulations 2001; who will carry out the assessments; who will pay for these assessments; and if he will make a statement. [7993]

Jacqui Smith: The requirements for a report on the physical and mental health of registered persons and employees of care homes are set out in both the draft Care Homes Regulations and the National Care Standards Commission Registration Regulations. This is standard practice as required by many registration and inspection units throughout England currently.

Reports for registered persons should be requested from a general medical practitioner. Where a general practitioner intends to charge for such a report it will be the responsibility of the person applying for the report to pay any fee. People working or seeking employment in a care home may seek a report from a GP but if the GP is unable or unwilling to provide a report they may sign a statement as to their physical and mental health.

Chiropodists and Podiatrists

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the training places for professions allied to medicine relate to chiropodists and podiatrists in each of the years from 2001 to 2004. [7707]

Mr. Hutton: Between 1999 and 2001 around 340 chiropody/podiatry training places each year were commissioned.

As part of the NHS Plan target to provide 4,450 more therapist and other key health professional training places each year by 2004 we would expect to see an increase in the number of chiropody/podiatry training places.

Targets for the number of chiropody/podiatry training places for the remainder of the NHS Plan period will be set later in the year.

Mental Health

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which targets in the National Service Framework for Mental Health *(a)* have been met and *(b)* are yet to be met. [8177]

Jacqui Smith: The National Framework for Mental Health (NSF) is a 10 year programme to put in place new standards of care. The NSF sets out national standards for mental health, what they aim to achieve, how they should be developed, and delivered and how to measure performance in every part of the country. The NHS Plan builds on the NSF by providing extra investment to fast-forward the NSF.

So far the following targets have been achieved:

Secure beds

Almost 500 extra secure beds were in place by April 2001

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

24-hour staffed beds

320 extra 24-hour staffed beds were in place by April 2001

Assertive Outreach Services

170 new teams were established by April 2001.

Over the forthcoming years the following targets will be achieved:

Suicide and undetermined injury

Reduce mortality rate from suicide and undetermined injury by at least 20 per cent. by 2010—on target

Primary Care

1,000 new graduate primary care mental health workers employed to help general practitioners to benefit 300,000 people by 2004—on target

Community mental health staff

5,000 more community mental health staff to benefit 500,000 patients (66 per cent. by 2003, 100 per cent. by 2004)—on target

Early Intervention Teams

Establish 50 early intervention teams (45 per cent. by 2003, 100 per cent. by 2004)—on target

Early and intensive support

7,500 young people who experience a first episode of psychosis receiving early and intense support by 2004—on target

Crisis Resolution

Establish 335 crisis resolution teams (23 per cent. by 2003, 100 per cent. by 2004)—on target

All people in contact with specialist mental health services able to access crisis resolution services at any time by 2004—on target

No out of area admissions which are not clinically indicated by 2004—on target

Assertive Outreach Services

Further 50 teams by 2003—on target

All who need assertive outreach services to receive them by 2003 (estimated 20,000)

Women's Services

Women only day centres in every health authority by 2004—on target

Prison In-reach

5,000 prisoners receiving more comprehensive mental health services in prison by 2004—on target

All prisoners with severe mental illness in receipt of treatment by 2004—on target

No prisoner with serious mental illness to leave prison without a care plan and a care co-ordinator by 2004—on target

Carers

700 more staff enabling support for 165,000 carers by 2004—on target

Reform of mental health legislation

White Paper finalised—on target

Reform of Mental Health Act 1983—on target

Personality Disorder

140 additional new secure places for people with severe personality disorder by 2004—on target

75 additional specialist rehabilitation hostel places for people with severe personality disorder by 2004—on target

High secure hospitals

Up to 400 patients to move from high secure hospitals to more appropriate accommodation by 2004—on target.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of progress in implementation of the National Service Framework for Mental Health; and if he will make a statement. [9506]

Jacqui Smith: From data collected on the delivery of the National Service Framework and NHS Plan targets we are able to build a picture of progress. This is achieved specifically through mapping of services, a process of self assessment by local implementation teams, financial mapping, analysis of the service and financial framework process and analysis of common information returns on mental health. Assessment of progress and financial mapping will be an annual occurrence.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the extra money for child and adolescent mental health services announced in February 1999 has so far been spent; and where and when. [9527]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]*: Our strategy for development of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), initiated in 1999–2000, is ongoing with the aim of improving the overall quality and accessibility of local services for children and young people with mental health problems. In the three years ending 31 March 2002 we will have invested some £85 million across the national health service and local authorities, with each authority receiving funding. Health authorities will have been allocated £50 million and local authorities £35 million. The funding to local authorities includes £16 million for the 24 CAMHS innovation projects. These projects are piloting innovative approaches in the provision of mental health services for children and young people.

An additional £10 million was scheduled in 2001–02 for health authorities. However in the Spending Review last year it was decided to place as much funding as possible, including the £10 million, into main health authority allocations. This was in response to concerns from the NHS and will provide the benefit to health authorities of being able to manage the totality of resources available to them. This will allow them to determine for themselves how to implement national priorities, of which CAMHS is one.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many secure mental health beds there were *(a)* in April 1997, *(b)* in April 2001 and *(c)* at the latest available date. [9525]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]*: In April 1997 there were 2,294 secure mental health beds. In April 2001, which is the latest available date, there were 3,584 secure mental health beds.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of progress in meeting the Public Service Agreement Target of reducing nationally the emergency psychiatric readmission rate; if he will make a statement. [9521]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]*: The following assessment of progress on the number of emergency psychiatric readmissions of patients aged 16–64 within 90 days of discharge from the care of a psychiatric specialist as a percentage of such discharges is set out in the table.

	1998–99 Total	1999–2000 Total	2000–01 Total
Number of re-admissions within 90 days	15,461	14,875	14,068
Total number of discharges	113,585	114,616	110,312
Re-admission rate (percentage)	13.6	13.0	12.8

The table shows progress is being made and that the national milestone as stated in the Mental Health National Service Framework to reduce the rate of psychiatric emergency readmission's by April 2002, from 14.3 per cent. to 12.3 per cent. is on target to be achieved.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of progress in meeting his mental health target to reduce the 1997 death rate from suicide and undetermined injury; and if he will make a statement. [9526]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]*: The White Paper "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" (OHN) sets out a challenging target to reduce the death rate from suicide and undetermined injury by at least a fifth by the year 2010. OHN targets measure suicide rates using three-year pooled rates. The most recent data available are for 1998–2000 and indicate a small rise over the 1995–97 baseline. However, it is too early to assess progress in meeting the target as the most recent three-year pooled data still overlap the start of OHN, which was published in 1999.

We are currently developing, under the direction of the National Director for Mental Health, Professor Louis Appleby, a coherent, national suicide prevention strategy to ensure that we are doing all we can to prevent suicide in pursuit of the "Our Healthier Nation" target.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of young people experiencing a first episode of psychosis received early and intensive support in 2000–01; and if he will make a statement on progress against his target for 2004. [9523]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]*: Information about the proportion of young people experiencing a first episode of psychosis who received early and intensive support in 2000–01 is not available centrally. The NHS Plan set a target that, by 2004, all young people who experience a first episode of psychosis will receive the early and intensive support they need. Fifty early intervention teams will be established by 2004 to provide this support and it is expected that 7,500 young people will benefit each year. During the current financial year the onus has been on local reviews of services and the establishment of robust plans to meet NHS Plan targets. Implementation of the target for early intervention teams will follow in 2002–03 and 2003–04. Progress on the development of plans is being monitored this autumn through a comprehensive review process.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women-only mental health day centres have been established under the NHS Plan. [9522]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]*: We have a target to put in place a women-only mental health day centre in every health authority by 2004. A considerable amount of development work is under way to support the delivery of high quality mental health services for women including the production of a national women's mental health strategy. We have as yet no details with regard to services in place although we are measuring progress toward targets with our service and financial mapping.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many early intervention mental health teams have been established. [9524]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]*: The NHS Plan has set a target for 50 early intervention teams to be established by 2004 in order to provide treatment and active support in the community to young people who develop psychosis, such as schizophrenia. Child and adolescent mental health services will be participating with adult services in developing the new teams. This will help to reduce the problems that can occur at the interface between the services.

During the current financial year the onus has been on local reviews of services and the establishment of robust plans to meet NHS Plan targets. Implementation of the target for early intervention teams will follow in 2002–03 and 2003–04. Progress on the development of plans is being monitored this autumn through a comprehensive review process.

Social Services (Client Information)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require social service authorities to request transfer of information from other authorities when clients move from area to area. [8510]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is currently consulting on guidance that includes the requirement that councils should liaise over the care of service users who move from one area to another to ensure continuity of care.

Access to personal assessment information would need to be agreed with the service user, and would take account of common law confidentiality requirements and the provisions of the Data Protection Act. However, information on an individual may be shared by statutory agencies without the individual's consent where there is a sufficient public interest justification to do so, for example where failing to do so would put people at significant risk.

Community Care Assessments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require social services authorities to meet targets for the completion of community care assessments. [8509]

Jacqui Smith: In current and forthcoming guidance on assessment, the Department emphasises that people should be told how long the assessment of their needs will take. The guidance also emphasises that assessment should be timely and kept in proportion to individuals' needs.

There are no plans to set national targets on the completion of community care assessments for social services authorities.

Waiting Lists (Leicestershire)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are on waiting lists for operations in each specialty in Leicestershire. [8522]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the waiting lists for elective admission by specialty in the Leicestershire health authority area as at 30 June 2001—the latest published figures that are available:

Specialty	*Ordinary admissions*	*Day cases*
General surgery	1,745	1,267
Urology	263	678
Trauma and Orthopaedics	1,738	869
Ear, nose and Throat	1,746	262
Ophthalmology	402	1,886
Oral surgery	121	404
Neurosurgery	24	1
Plastic surgery	522	450
Cardiothoracic surgery	360	—
Paediatric surgery	66	173
Accident and emergency	—	16
Anaesthetics	221	256
Pain management	1	177
General medicine	20	253
Gastroenterology	—	39
Cardiology	239	360
Dermatology	—	9
Thoracic medicine	—	12
Nephrology	1	8
Neurology	20	—
Paediatrics	—	31
Gynaecology	569	440
Mental Illness	19	—
Total[1]	8,077	7,591

[1] All specialties

Source:
Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England

Pain Control Clinics

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that pain control clinics are in place in every primary care trust area; and if he will make a statement. [9116]

Mr. Hutton: We are committed to providing equity of access to health care and to reducing variations in the availability of National Health Service services. Patients with pain should have access to services which provide management programmes of proven effectiveness. Chronic pain services exist in 220 acute hospitals, 88 per cent. of acute hospitals in the United Kingdom. However, decisions about pain control clinics in primary care trust areas are to be made locally, based on the needs of the local population. In reviewing local provision account should be taken of the needs of both adults and children, and include patients with acute pain resulting from sudden illness or accident, as well as post-operative pain and chronic pain. A systematic review of pain relieving treatments was undertaken in 1997 through the health technology assessment programme and providers may also find this of use in planning local services.

The Clinical Standards Advisory Group report, published in April 2000, shows many NHS trusts have developed excellent services, but we recognise that in some places more needs to be done to drive up standards. We expect the NHS to take full account of this report when reviewing local provision to meet the needs of communities.

MRI Scans

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to reduce waiting times for MRI scans *(a)* in Gloucestershire and *(b)* nationally. [8570]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Investment through the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) and the NHS Plan will provide 86 magnetic resonance imaging scanners for the National Health Service by 2004. These scanners will support the accurate diagnosis and staging of cancer patients by increasing the number of scans that can be undertaken. The Gloucester Royal Infirmary has been awarded a MRI scanner under the NOF initiative. It is likely to reduce waiting times for MRI scans in Gloucestershire.

The length of time which a patient might have to wait for a MRI scan is dependent on their clinical condition with priority given to emergency cases.

Nursing and Midwifery Council

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with rank and file health visitors on the proposals not to include health visitors in the title for the new Nursing and Midwifery Council. [8572]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Government are aware of the views of health visitors from their 1,200 responses to consultation on the Government's proposals. I am due to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) with a delegation of health visitors shortly to discuss these.

National Institute for Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the budget in 2001–02 for the National Institute for Mental Health in England; and how much has been spent. [9514]

Jacqui Smith: The budget for the National Institute for Mental Health in 2001–02 is £400,000. None of this money has yet been spent.

Expenditure Statistics

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expenditure per head on health was in *(a)* Tamworth, *(b)* Telford, *(c)* Kidderminster and *(d)* Redditch in each year from April 1996 to April 2001. [8868]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not available in the format requested. Data on expenditure on health per weighted head of population are available for health authority areas, not individual towns. The relevant health authorities are South Staffordshire health authority (Tamworth), Shropshire health authority (Telford) and Worcestershire health authority (Kidderminster and Redditch) and information for these health authorities is given in the table.

Expenditure on health per weighted head of population for each relevant health authority, from 1996–97 to 2000–01, is shown in the table.

Expenditure on health per weighted head of population for each relevant health authority from 1996–97 to 2000–01

£

	South Staffordshire	Shropshire	Worcestershire
1996–97	593.40	582.08	602.45
1997–98	580.71	575.19	641.55
1998–99	606.59	610.33	678.65
1999–2000	687.05	716.70	718.87
2000–01	735.88	740.93	801.38

Note:

Expenditure is taken from health authority annual accounts or summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in each year. The expenditure is the total spent on the purchase of healthcare by the health authority. The majority of general dental services for all five years and an element of drugs expenditure for 1997–98 and 1998–99 is not included in the health authority accounts and is separately accounted for.

Source:

Health authority audited accounts 1996–97 to 1998–99

Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01

Weighted population estimates for 1996–97 to 2000–01

Mr. Barrie Such

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress made in the case of Mr. Barrie Such, pursuant to the undertaking given in the Adjournment debate on 7 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 246, that the NHS executive regional office would monitor the implementation of the care plan and funding arrangements. [8990]

Jacqui Smith: I can confirm that, following the Adjournment debate in the House on 7 December 2000, agreement was reached between Worcestershire health authority and social services on the provision and funding of a 24 hour package of care for Mr. Such following his eventual discharge from hospital.

Discussions have been taking place on viable options for providing Mr. Such and his family with a home in an appropriate setting. A decision has been reached and plans are currently being drawn up in consultation with Mrs. Such for a new property to be built. When those plans are agreed, the time scale for completion is estimated to be about four to five months

I have requested that the health authority, social services and the district council in Worcestershire continue to work together to ensure a timely and satisfactory outcome for Mr. and Mrs. Such.

Solihull Hospital

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future status of the accident and emergency facilities at Solihull Hospital. [8682]

Mr. Hutton: A service review group comprising representatives from the Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull national health service trust (teaching), primary care trust, health authority, community health council, patient carers and patient representatives is currently undertaking an options appraisal for the future of the accident and emergency department at Solihull Hospital. The group will report to Solihull health authority on its recommendations, with a view to the health authority then launching a public consultation on its preferred option. The review was originally due to report back by the end September, but this has now been extended until early in the New Year.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review processes by which public consultation is undertaken on primary care trusts, and the reorganisation of health authorities. [9129]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* It is not proposed at this stage to review the processes of consultation.

Legislation requires public consultation to be undertaken on the establishment of primary care trusts and new health authorities. The aim is that all consultation is open, transparent and inclusive, capturing the views of local stakeholders. While the regulations specify those who must be consulted, it allows for health authorities to consult a wider range of local bodies and individuals on the formation of primary care trusts.

With regard to the proposed new health authorities, consultation on their boundaries commenced in September and will be completed at the end of November.

Assertive Outreach Scheme

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health crisis resolution teams and assertive outreach teams have been established; and how many people are receiving assertive outreach services. [9515]

Jacqui Smith: The latest information held centrally indicates that there were 35 crisis resolution teams in place as at October 2000. The NHS plan has set a target of having 335 crisis resolution teams established by 2004. Progress towards meeting this target is being monitored this autumn through a comprehensive review process.

Returns received indicate that there were over 170 assertive outreach teams in place as at June 2001, and that around 9,000 people were receiving assertive outreach services. The NHS plan sets a target for a further 50 assertive outreach teams by 2004 so that everybody who requires assertive outreach, some 20,000 people, will be receiving these services.

GPs

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs there are in post in Leicestershire in the current financial year. [9085]

Mr. Hutton: The number of general medical practitioners in Leicestershire health authority as at 30 September 2000 is set out in the table. September 2000 data are the latest information available: September 2001 data will be available at the end of January 2002.

General medical practitioners in Leicestershire health authority as at 30 September 2000

	Headcount
All practitioners[1]	547
Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[2]	500

[1] All practitioners include UPEs, restricted principals, assistants, PMS others, GP registrars, salaried doctors (paragraph 52 SFA) and GP retainers.
[2] UPEs include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Weighted Capitation (Leicestershire)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the extra resources required to bring Leicestershire up to a 100 per cent. of its weighted capitation in *(a)* cash and *(b)* percentage terms [9086]

Mr. Hutton: Leicestershire health authority's distance from weighted capitation target for 2001–02 is £15 million in cash terms or 2.44 per cent. below target. For 2001–02 Leicestershire health authority received an allocation of £616 million, which is an increase of £49 million in cash terms or 8.57 per cent. The weighted capitation formula is used to set targets that inform allocations but the formula does not determine allocations.

Sexual Health

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will recommend the use in England of "Pathways to Sexual Health", published by the Lothian Health Board; [8686]

(2) if he will recommend the use of "Let's Talk About Sex" by publicly funded organisations in England; [8687]

(3) if he will recommend the use of "Taking Sex Seriously—Practical Sex Education Activities For Young People" by organisations in England which are funded by his Department. [8688]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* It is for local agencies and organisations to determine which resources or materials most effectively and appropriately support their work. If they are to be used within a school setting, then this should be in accordance with guidance on Sex and Relationship Education produced by the Department for Education and Skills. The guidance stresses the need for schools to ensure that their pupils are protected from any teaching or materials which are inappropriate, while having regard to the age and cultural background of the pupils concerned.

Mobile Telecommunications

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial provision has been made for the mobile telecommunications health research programme. [9024]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 October 2001]*: The Stewart report on mobile phones and health made a recommendation that a substantial research programme should be set up under the aegis of a demonstrably independent panel and financed by the mobile phone companies and the public sector. This programme has now been set up under the direction of an independent programme management committee. The total sum available for this programme is £7.36 million, the costs being shared 50:50 between Government and the mobile phone industry.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research projects will be undertaken by the mobile telecommunications health research programme. [9025]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 October 2001]*: The Stewart report on mobile phones and health made a recommendation that a substantial research programme should be set up under the aegis of a demonstrably independent panel and financed by the mobile phone companies and the public sector. This programme has been set up under the direction of an independent scientific management committee. The committee is currently assessing a range of research proposals including those that investigate dosimetry, physiology and epidemiology. The first group projects is expected to start in the next few weeks. When they are approved, the individual projects will be announced on the Department's web site at www.doh.gov.uk/mobilephones.

Hospital Waiting Times (Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area were waiting for inpatient treatment for *(a)* more than 18 months, *(b)* up to 18 months, *(c)* up to 15 months and *(d)* up to 12 months, in each month from 31 May until the latest available monthly figures. [8697]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The information requested is given in the table.

The number of patients waiting more than 18 months, up to 18 months, up to 15 months, and up to 12 months for in-patient treatment at Mid-Essex Hospital Services national health service trust on 31 May 2001 until the latest available monthly figures are:

2001	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*
Number waiting over 18 months for inpatient treatment	0		0	0
Number waiting less than 18 months for inpatient treatment	8,868	8,850	8,898	8,917
Number waiting less than 15 months for inpatient treatment	8,676	8,674	8,723	8,733
Number waiting less than 12 months for inpatient treatment	8,159	8,150	8,184	8,202

Source:
KHO7 quarterly return/monthly waiting list returns

Age-related Audits

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish for each NHS trust the results of the age-related audits required by the National Service Framework for Older People; and if she will list those trusts that have *(a)* submitted their audits to the regional office on time, *(b)* yet to submit and *(c)* were late to submit their accounts. [8699]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The date set by the National Service Framework for Older People for completion of the local age-related audit is October 2001. Information at regional and national level will be available later this year. Individual national health service trusts are expected to publish details of the policy reviews undertaken locally in their annual reports covering the current year.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1036W, on delayed discharges, for what reason his Department ceased to collect figures on the basis of age. [9145]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* We are continuing to collect figures on delayed discharges for over 75s as a sub-group of delays for all adult patients. The breakdown on reasons for delay are now collected for all ages to give a more comprehensive picture of the reasons for delayed discharges.

National Service Frameworks

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ensure that voluntary organisations are funded to play a full part in the preparation of National Service Frameworks; [8708]

(2) if his Department ensures that consultees who are party to drawing up an National Service Framework are also consultees in respect of any related NICE guidance; [8706]

(3) how his Department ensures that work on National Service Frameworks and NICE guidance which overlap is co-ordinated. [8705]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Each National Service Framework is developed with the assistance of an external reference group (ERG) which brings together health professionals, service users and carers, health service managers, partner agencies, and other advocates. ERGs adopt an inclusive process to engage the full range of views. The ERGs advice is informed by the evidence base, including National Institute of Clinical Excellence guidance where available, and ERGs' advice have been sought on the development of NICE guidelines. The members of the ERG are reimbursed for travelling and expenses incurred while helping in the development of the National Service Framework. The Department supports the ERGs and manages and co-ordinates the overall process including co-ordination between NICE and NSFs.

Non-residential Services (Charging Guidance)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish guidance relating to charging for non-residential services; when the closing date for consultation on the draft guidance was; and when local authorities are expected to implement the guidance. [8701]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* We published draft guidance on fairer charging policies for non-residential social services on 3 January, and consultation ran until 30 March. We plan to issue final guidance later this year. This will include a time scale for implementation.

Older People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will write to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam concerning the National Service Framework for Older People according to the undertaking given by the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), of 4 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 90WH. [8698]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 17 October 2001.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the bands set out in the guidance for free nursing care will be uprated annually. [8700]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Appendix 6 of the guide attached to HSC2001/17: LAC(2001)26 makes it clear that the amounts of the bands of nursing care will be reviewed after 12 months with a view to any changes becoming operative with effect from April 2003.

Neurology Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to establish the baseline *(a)* prevalence levels of neurological conditions and *(b)* position of services for people with neurological conditions; and if he will make a statement on the work to date on the National Service Framework on Neurological Conditions. [8707]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The Department has numerous information systems that help it to understand the picture of diseases including, for example, the Health Survey for England. This is complemented by academic research which provides more detailed prevalence information of people with neurological conditions. We have also asked voluntary organisations to submit any information they might have.

One of the key tasks of the scoping process for the National Service Framework for Neurological and other Long-term conditions will be to establish the position of services particularly concentrating on areas where the need for service improvement is identified. We have established an analytical group to begin to assess the evidence and are also working closely with users, carers, professionals and voluntary organisations.

Community Care Services Grant

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) to what extent social services departments in receipt of the community care services grant are able to commit expenditure in subsequent years; [8917]

(2) if payment of the community care services grant will be conditional on local authorities participating in care trusts. [8916]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Consultation on the conditions of the grant will end on 24 October. No decisions have been made about allocations of the grant in 2002–03, but Ministers have made the commitment that no council will receive less in 2002–03 than it does in 2001–02.

Dementia Care Services

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce plans to speed up the diagnosis of dementia sufferers needing personal care. [9033]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The National Service Framework (NSF) for Older People was published on 27 March this year. It sets, for the first time, new national standards of care for all older people, across all care settings. It focuses on those conditions that mainly affect older people, including dementia.

Standard 7 of the NSF relates to mental health and will ensure that those older people who have mental health problems have access to integrated mental health services, provided by the National Health Service and councils, to ensure effective diagnosis, treatment and support, for them and for their carers.

In particular it emphasises how an early and accurate diagnosis of dementia enables older people and those caring for them to understand what is happening to them and to access appropriate help, including treatment and personal care. This will require effective integrated specialist mental health services. The NHS Plan provides for an additional 85 old age psychiatrists to ensure a prompt and responsive diagnostic service across the country.

In addition, we are streamlining the assessment process to ensure better and more consistent assessments. The single assessment process for older people will be implemented by local health bodies and councils from April 2002.

The Department intends to issue detailed guidance on the single assessment process in November. It will ask professionals to work together to ensure assessments are centred on the views and circumstances of older people, and that they are accurate, timely, and proportionate to needs. It will ask professionals to share assessment information, subject to proper observance of confidentiality, rather than duplicate each other's assessments as often happens now.

The single assessment should therefore ensure that following a diagnosis of dementia individuals receive the prompt provision of care to meet their needs.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specialist dementia care services in Coventry have been developed recently. [9032]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Coventry Healthcare national health service trust in conjunction with Coventry health authority and local primary care groups have agreed to make £180,000 available for instigation of a community-based service specifically for early onset dementia. The team will consist of medical, psychological and nursing staff and will offer advice and support to sufferers, their carers, and agencies and professionals in Coventry.

The health authority has also confirmed its agreement to implement the National Institute for Clinical Excellence recommendations regarding anti-dementia drugs from 1 April 2001. An additional drug budget of £250,000 has been made available for 2001–02 with access to drugs controlled by the consultant psychiatric team. Agreements are also in place with regard to future funding up to 2005–06. Additionally, in August 2001 a further £180,000 was agreed to fund a health team to support and monitor treatments of patients using anti-dementia drugs.

The trust has initiated discussions with the Alzheimer's Disease Society, health and social services colleagues in Coventry and Warwickshire to further explore the potential for developing a hospital and community-residential element to the early onset dementia service.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent measures have been introduced to support the elderly suffering with dementia. [9030]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* It is important that older people with dementia have access to a full range of services that will meet their needs in whatever setting is most appropriate.

The National Service Framework (NSF) for Older People was published on 27 March this year. It sets, for the first time, new national standards of care for all older people, across all care settings. The NSF looks at conditions that mainly affect older people, including dementia.

Standard 7 of the NSF relates to mental health and will ensure that those older people who have mental health problems have access to integrated mental health services, provided by the National Health Service and councils, to ensure effective diagnosis, treatment and support, for them and for their carers.

The Care Standards Act 2000 will have a big impact on raising the quality of care for people with dementia in residential and nursing homes. From April 2002 all care homes will have to have a statement of purpose and be able to demonstrate that they can meet it. Homes catering for people with dementia will have to show that they have suitably trained staff, know, understand and apply the relevant specialist and clinical guidance, provide stimulation and leisure activities that are suited to the needs of people with dementia.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence appraisal of anti-dementia drugs published in January 2001 will ensure that effective treatments for Alzheimer's disease are available on an equitable basis across the country.

Elderly People (Charitable Support)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance he has provided to charitable providers of housing, care and support for the elderly in the last year. [9031]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* For 2000–01 and 2001–02, grants totalling £3,733,000 were paid under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 to 54 organisations for projects

concerned with housing, care, or support for older people. In some cases, the projects concern disabled people in general and are not limited to older people.

Summer Recess

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9231]

Ms Blears: During the summer recess period, 20 July to 14 October 2001, 129 press releases and 25 consultation documents were issued by the Department.

Consultants' Secretaries

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the provision of secretarial cover to hospital consultants during periods of absence by permanent secretarial staff. [9698]

Mr. Hutton: It is the responsibility of each individual national health service trust to make all necessary arrangements for secretarial and administrative support. This includes the provision of secretarial cover to hospital consultants.

Care Standards (Young Adults)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations have been made concerning the national care standards for younger adults. [9497]

Jacqui Smith: During the consultation period for the draft standards for Younger Adults and Adult placements the Department received 500 responses, which made 4,776 comments on specific issues within the standards.

Residential Homes

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make financial provision for owners of residential care homes to assist them in complying with the requirements of the Residential Care Act 2000. [8216]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Department has no evidence to suggest that large numbers of care homes will be unable to meet the national standards. Many providers already meet or exceed the proposed standards and will have no reason to be concerned about them. None of the standards will be introduced until at least April 2002 and some of the more challenging standards will not be implemented until some time after that. Providers will be given realistic timescales in which to meet any new standards.

The detail of contracting arrangements between local authorities and independent sector providers of care is a matter for local decision. The Department does not set or recommend rates at which local authorities contract with nursing and residential homes. We think it is important that local authorities are able to tailor contracts as necessary to specific local circumstances. In doing this we expect local authorities to take into account a range of provider costs such as implementing national standards.

We are providing significant additional resources for social services. We have increased social services funding by 17.8 per cent. in real terms since 1996–97 and will be providing an extra 3.7 per cent. in real terms next year. This means that local authorities have the resources they need to purchase services at realistic prices.

However, I do accept that some residential and nursing home owners are experiencing financial difficulties. That is why we established a strategic group to give greater direction to the commissioning of care for adults, in particular older people. The group has looked at the state of local commissioning arrangements and the impact they are having on both service users and providers. The members of the group include representatives of central and local government, the national health service, independent (private and voluntary) providers of health and social care, as well as housing. The group published an agreement, "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care", on 9 October, which we shall expect local social services and health authorities to adopt. It will lead to improvements in the planning and commissioning of services in ways that bring confidence and stability to the whole system. We also announced a Government commitment of £300 million over two years to tackle delayed discharge.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals have sold their homes since 1 May 1997 to fund their *(a)* residential home care and *(b)* residential nursing home care. [8923]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many residential nursing homes have closed since 1 May 1997; and how many beds have been lost; [8920]

(2) how many residential home beds *(a)* in the private sector and *(b)* owned by local authorities have been closed since 1 May 1997. [8921]

Jacqui Smith: Table 1 shows the number of residential care homes, the number of nursing homes and the number of beds within these homes in England on 31 March in each of the last four years. Table 2 shows the changes in the number of homes and places based on the information in table 1. These figures take account of new homes, those that closed and those that made changes to their registration status or extended their existing facilities. It is not possible to determine the precise number of homes that have closed, or the number of beds lost as a result of such closures, from this information.

Information collected by health and social care consultants Laing and Buisson on the number of care homes, beds and closures in the independent sector in recent years is available in the company's publication, Market Survey 2001, published in July.

Table 1: Residential and nursing homes, places and registered beds, 1997 to 2000 as at 31 March

England — *Rounded numbers*

	1997[1]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Residential care homes[2]	24,500	24,900	24,800	24,800
Residential care places in residential care homes.	338,100	347,900	345,100	345,600
Of which:				
Places in independent sector homes[3]	272,300	283,900	286,000	290,100
Places in LA staffed homes	65,800	64,000	59,000	55,500
Nursing homes[4]	5,900	6,200	6,100	5,900
Registered nursing beds in nursing homes	196,300	205,600	202,200	193,300

[1] This refers to data collected during the period 1 October 1997 to 31 March 1998 for nursing homes and registered beds. In subsequent years, data collection arrangements were changed and relate to figures pertaining to 31 March each year.
[2] Includes dual registered homes which are also included in the total number of nursing homes. The residential care homes and nursing homes should not be added together.
[3] Consists of voluntary, private, small homes and dual registered homes.
[4] General and mental nursing homes, hospitals and clinics
Source:
Department of Health annual returns

Table 2: Year-on-year change in the number of residential and nursing homes, places and registered beds, 1997 to 2000, as at 31 March

England — *Rounded differences*

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Residential care homes[1]	+400	−100	Less than 50
Residential care places in residential care homes.	+9,800	−2,800	+500
Of which:			
Places in independent sector homes[2]	+11,600	+2,100	+4,000
Places in LA staffed homes	−1,800	−4,900	−3,500
Nursing homes[3]	+300	−100	−200
Registered nursing beds in nursing homes	+9,300	−3,400	−8,800

[1] Includes dual registered homes which are also included in the total number of nursing homes. The residential care homes and nursing homes should not be added together.
[2] Consists of Voluntary, private, small homes and dual registered homes.
[3] General and mental nursing homes, hospitals and clinics
Source:
Department of Health annual returns

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals in each year since 1 May 1997 to the latest available date were living in *(a)* residential care homes and *(b)* residential nursing care homes; and in each category how many were (i) self-funding the fees, (ii) partially funding the fees and (iii) being funded wholly by the state. [8924]

Jacqui Smith: The information available centrally is in the table. The number of people who are resident in residential care homes and paying for their own care is not collected centrally. A survey conducted in June 2001 estimated that around 42,700 residents in general and mental nursing homes were paying wholly for their own care.

Number[1] *of places/registered beds in residential and nursing homes with local authority supported residents in these homes, 1997 to 2000, England (as at 31 March)*

	1997[2]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Number of places in residential care homes[3]	338,100	347,900	345,100	345,600
Number of LA supported residents in residential care homes[4]	170,300	176,500	181,200	186,800
Number of registered beds in nursing homes[5]	196,300	205,600	202,200	193,300
Number of LA supported residents in nursing homes	66,100	72,900	73,500	74,400

[1] Rounded numbers
[2] Refers to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997 for number of registered beds in nursing homes
[3] Residential places in local authority staffed, voluntary, private, small and dual registered homes
[4] Local authority supported residents in local authority staffed and independent residential care homes. A local authority supported resident is a resident whose fees are paid in part or in full by the local authority.
[5] General and mental nursing homes including private hospitals and clinics
Source:
Department of Health returns

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of stay of a resident in an *(a)* residential care home and *(b)* residential nursing care home is in the last 12 months. [8925]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Genetics and Insurance

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government will publish their response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee fifth report of Session 2000–01 on Genetics and Insurance. [10120]

Jacqui Smith: The Government's response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee fifth report on Genetics and Insurance is published today as Cm 5286 and copies have been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Waste Incineration

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reduce the proportion of waste disposed of by incineration over the next five years. [5194]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2001]:* Our priority is to meet the requirement of the landfill directive to divert biodegradable municipal waste away from landfill by maximising recycling and composting and minimising the need for incineration and landfill. In order to achieve this the Government have set tough statutory targets under best value for local authorities to double the amount of household waste recycled by 2003–04 and treble it by 2005–06, and will set further targets for later years.

Foot and Mouth

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the last case was of foot and mouth disease in the Longtown area; and when restrictions on farms in that area will be lifted. [5346]

Mr. Morley: The last confirmed case in the Longtown area of foot and mouth was 4 June. Infected Area restrictions were removed from the Longtown area with effect from midnight on 8 October.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's latest assessment is of the necessity to use vaccination in efforts to eradicate foot and mouth disease. [7845]

Mr. Morley: The current advice of the Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Veterinary Officer is that the use of vaccination is not the most appropriate measure to eradicate the disease in present circumstances. The number of new cases continues to decline, and as at 18 October there have been no cases since 30 September. The use of vaccination could be reassessed if the disease trend changed significantly.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many businesses have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* received rates relief in relation to the economic impact of foot and mouth disease. [7873]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Full information on the level of take up of hardship rate relief will not be available until local authorities submit their claims next year. However, the latest survey carried out by the Local Government Association shows that, as of 8 October, nearly 6,500 businesses have applied for hardship rate relief with nearly 3,000 of these applications being granted and just over 350 being rejected (data from the 127 local authorities that supplied all sets of information).

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the removal of toxic ash from the Hernscott Hill foot and mouth incineration site in Northumberland has been completed; and what arrangements for monitoring of the site and consultation with local residents have been made. [7446]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* All visible ash has been removed from Hernscott Hill, Widdrington. Monitoring arrangements are in hand in co-operation with Castle Morpeth borough council and the private landowner to ensure that should there be any residues these are detected and removed. Regular meetings are held between DEFRA, local authorities and residents to hear residents' concerns and to appraise them in broad terms of activity on the site. The site will be returned to its original state, following agreement between DEFRA and the private landowner.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated cost to public funds of the foot and mouth disease outbreak is so far. [7730]

Mr. Morley: Expenditure on the foot and mouth disease outbreak by my Department currently stands at some £1.531 billion. Costings are being collected from other Government Departments, and we hope to be in a position to be able to provide such information soon.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will take steps to reduce the time taken to lift the D notice restrictions; [6667]

(2) if she will take steps to ensure that restrictions in protection zones in which all blood tests have proved negative are lifted immediately following inspections. [6666]

Mr. Morley: Our primary objective is to eradicate the disease. However, every effort is made to lift the three kilometre zones (the protection zones) as soon as possible after the fieldwork has been completed and negative blood tests have been confirmed.

Where there are a number of infected premises in an area and protection zones overlap then it may be necessary to carry out all the testing required within a particular cluster of protection zones before any Form D restrictions can be lifted.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations have been made to the Governments of other countries which have suffered a foot and mouth outbreak in the last five years. [7761]

Mr. Morley: UK officials regularly discuss such matters with veterinary experts of other countries at the European Union Standing Veterinary Committee, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the Office International Des Epizootics.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the risks concerning the control of foot and mouth disease involved in permitting a resumption of hunting with hounds. [9197]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Hunting with dogs is currently prohibited throughout England and Wales as a precaution against the spread of foot and mouth disease. Hunting with dogs takes a variety of forms, all of which pose different levels of foot and mouth disease risk and which therefore require different risk management measures. A veterinary risk assessment on the possible resumption of hunting in foot and mouth disease free counties has been prepared and is currently being considered by Ministers.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's responsibilities are in relation to land use, planning and management. [7878]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* My Department has wide-ranging responsibilities to ensure that land is managed and developed sustainably. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has overall responsibility for policies on planning. DTLR consults DEFRA on environmental and rural aspects of the planning system, including on how these should be reflected in national planning policy guidance.

DEFRA advises on key planning and related issues that involve farming and wider rural economy and environmental interests. DEFRA works with Regional Planning Bodies and other stakeholders on Regional Planning Guidance and local development plan policies. Consultation with DEFRA is governed by the terms of national planning guidance and a statutory right to consultation.

Sheep Strategy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government plan to publish their sheep strategy. [6663]

Mr. Morley: The Government have no plans to publish a separate strategy for the sheep sector at this stage. The independent Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, announced on 9 August by the Prime Minister, will be advising how we create a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food chain.

Supermarkets

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with supermarkets about their relationship with suppliers; and if she will make a statement. [6611]

Mr. Morley: There are regular discussions with the supermarkets on all aspects of the food chain. The issue of relations with suppliers was considered in detail. The issue was considered in detail by the Competition Commission in their report on the supply of groceries from multiple stores. One of the recommendations of that report was that a code of practice should be introduced to put relations between supermarkets and their suppliers on a clearer and more predictable basis. A draft code has been drawn up by the Office of Fair Trading in consultation with supermarkets and representatives of suppliers. This is currently being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Incinerators

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what controls the Government have implemented on emissions from incinerators in the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [8089]

Mr. Meacher: Existing municipal solid waste incinerators (MSWIs) are regulated by the Environment Agency under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Within the last three years the Government have implemented EC Directive 96/61 on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC). All new MSWIs must now obtain an IPPC permit before they can operate. Existing MSWIs must obtain the new form of permit by 31 August 2005.

The Environment Agency has also recently varied the authorisations for existing MSWIs to reduce the dioxin emission limit (10 fold) to 0.1 ng/m3. This is ahead of the timetable required by the recently adopted Waste Incineration Directive.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of levels of dioxin emissions from incinerators in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [8088]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency's Pollution Inventory is compiled from data submitted annually by operators of IPC-processes in England and Wales, including municipal solid waste incinerators. The level of dioxins and furans emitted from municipal solid waste incinerators in the year 2000 is recorded in this inventory as 1.1g ITEQ. This compares to a level of 413g ITEQ in 1995.

Municipal Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how much municipal waste has been collected in each year since 1996; and if she will make a statement; [8084]

(2) what assessment the Government have made of the increase of annual municipal waste in the United Kingdom in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [8093]

Mr. Meacher: Data are available for England and Wales for the last four years. The total amount of municipal waste collected is as follows:

Year	*Thousand tonnes*
1996–97	25,979
1997–98	27,166
1998–99	27,912
1999–2000	29,332

The increase in municipal waste over this period is nearly 13 per cent. 2000–01 data are currently being collected from local authorities.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of UK household waste was disposed of through landfill in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [8094]

Mr. Meacher: The latest available data for England and Wales show that 81 per cent. of municipal waste was disposed of through landfill in 1999–2000. Household waste is approximately 90 per cent. of municipal waste.

Under the EU Landfill Directive, the UK must divert substantial quantities of waste away from landfill over the coming years. We have put in place a national strategy, 'Waste Strategy 2000', for managing our waste and resources more effectively and will be introducing a system of tradable landfill permits to reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste that goes to landfill. The Government have also set tough statutory performance standards for recycling and composting of household waste, requiring local authorities to double the amount recycled or composted within three years and nearly treble it within five years. The setting of these statutory targets is expected to lead to an increase in the availability of kerbside recycling.

Slaughtermen

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what are the qualifications and licensing arrangements required of *(a)* professional slaughtermen and *(b)* persons slaughtering animals in herds affected by foot and mouth disease; what training arrangements were in place for forces personnel engaged to slaughter animals during the foot and mouth crisis; and what (i) licensed and (ii) otherwise qualified professional supervision was in place for casual slaughtermen engaged during the foot and mouth crisis. [7499]

Mr. Morley: Requirements for the training and licensing of slaughterers are laid down in the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995. Everyone engaged in the slaughter or killing process must have the knowledge and skill necessary to perform the tasks humanely and efficiently in accordance with the regulations. Most slaughterers need to be licensed in accordance with Schedule 1 of the regulations, but there are a number of exemptions from this requirement.

Members of the armed forces were trained before becoming involved in the foot and mouth cull, and were supervised by qualified veterinary surgeons. Outside of licensed slaughterhouses, the legislation is enforced by Veterinary Officers of the State Veterinary Service. In addition, the RSPCA had an open invitation to visit major culling sites and visited Great Orton several times.

Recycling

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of councils in the United Kingdom have separate recycling collections; and if she will make a statement. [8082]

Mr. Meacher: The latest available data for England and Wales for 1999–2000 show that local authorities operate a variety of collection schemes, through civic amenity sites, bring sites and kerbside collection. The percentages of local authorities that operate such schemes, over some or all of their area, for different materials are as follows:

	Percentage
Paper and card	97
Glass	97
Compost[1]	43
Scrap metal/white goods	55
Textiles	90
Cans[2]	87
Plastics	31
Other[3]	74

[1] Includes organic materials (kitchen and garden waste) collected for centralised composting schemes from households via kerbside schemes or taken by householders to civic amenity sites. Home composting is not included.

[2] Includes ferrous and aluminium cans

[3] Includes oils, batteries, aluminium foil, books and co-mingled collections

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what measures the Government have taken to meet their target of recycling two thirds of all household waste by 2015; and if she will make a statement; [8080]

(2) what steps the Government have taken to encourage businesses *(a)* to recycle waste and *(b)* to use recycled materials in the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [8081]

Mr. Meacher: "Waste Strategy 2000" sets a target to recycle or compost at least 33 per cent. (one third) of household waste by 2015. It also sets out targets for doubling the recycling and composting of household waste in three years and nearly tripling it in five years. We have underpinned these targets by setting statutory performance standards for each local authority to achieve by 2003–04 and 2005–06. In due course we will consider setting further Statutory Performance Standards for later years taking account of technological advances.

In Spending Review 2000 we provided substantial financial support to local authorities to assist with delivering these targets including a substantial uplift in the relevant Standard Spending Assessment block, £140 million ring-fenced fund for waste and recycling; £40 million for the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP); and £220 million for Private Finance Initiative waste schemes. We expect that approximately £50 million of New Opportunities Fund moneys will also be available over the next two years to support community sector work on recycling.

WRAP has been set up to promote sustainable waste management by removing barriers to waste minimisation, re-use and recycling, and by working with businesses to create stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products.

We have also imposed measures under the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended), requiring certain businesses which handle packaging to recover and recycle specified amounts of packaging waste each year based on the amount of packaging handled by their business.

Packaging Regulations also include incentives for businesses to minimise the amount of packaging they use and businesses are being encouraged to look closely at the type of materials being used in the manufacture of their product and consider the benefits of using greater quantities of recyclate.

The recovery and recycling targets for 2001 under the packaging Regulations are 56 per cent. for recovering and 18 per cent. for material-specific recycling of packaging waste. We are currently consulting on recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste in 2002.

Unadopted Sewers

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research she has commissioned into the scale of and problems associated with unadopted sewers. [8849]

Mr. Meacher: A research contract will shortly be let to ascertain the extent and condition of unadopted sewers, identify any problems and produce costed solutions. It is expected to take up to 18 months.

MOX Plant

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the timing of the announcement of the approval for the MOX plant in Sellafield. [8292]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Having considered all relevant information, including the responses to our public consultation which ended on 24 August, the Secretary of State for Health and I decided on 3 October that the manufacture of mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel is justified, and announced it the same day.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase payments to contractors operating under the home energy efficiency scheme. [8297]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The home energy efficiency scheme is managed by Eastern HEES Ltd. in the East of England, and by the Eaga Partnership in the rest of England. The scheme managers are responsible for appointing contractors to work under the scheme, through open competition in accordance with UK public procurement rules and regulations.

A number of these installer contracts are coming up for re-tender. The prices paid will depend on the results of the competition and it is possible that the contracts awarded will be at a higher price.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the maximum payment is per housing unit available to contractors operating the home energy efficiency scheme in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales. [8296]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The home energy efficiency scheme (HEES) offers packages of insulation and heating improvements to those households most vulnerable to cold-related ill health in England. The maximum value of grant-funded work carried out on any single home under the scheme is £2,000. This level of grant is provided to those aged 60 years or more and in receipt of an income-related benefit.

As fuel poverty is a devolved matter, it is the responsibility of the respective Parliament and Assemblies to comment on the situation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many properties have benefited from the home energy efficiency scheme since June 2000; and what is the target number for the current year. [8298]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* During the period 1 June 2000 to 30 September 2001, 224,000 householders benefited from HEES in England. We expect 300,000 householders will benefit in the current financial year.

Agenda 21

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the impact of the introduction of Agenda 21 in the UK. [8744]

Mr. Meacher: This country has been prominent in taking action on sustainable development since Agenda 21 was agreed at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. We produced our new Sustainable Development Strategy 'A better quality of life' in 1999, and the first annual report on the strategy earlier this year. In 1999 and 2000 we published reports setting out progress on Greening Government. Almost all local authorities prepared Local Agenda 21 strategies by the end of 2000, meeting a target set by the Prime Minister in 1997.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy towards the use of short rotation coppice/forestry in renewable energy. [8536]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Energy crops and forest material have the potential to make a significant contribution to sustainable development and the Government's climate change and renewable energy targets. We support the development of short rotation coppice in England through the Energy Crops Scheme and promote the use of forest material, working closely with developers of renewable energy projects.

Milk

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will made a statement on her Department's support for the generic campaign to support milk drinking; and what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of that campaign. [8629]

Mr. Morley: We are pleased that milk producers and processors have co-operated in jointly funding and overseeing 'The White Stuff', a generic promotion of milk. It is for milk producers and processors to assess the effectiveness of 'The White Stuff' campaign and decide how to proceed.

Condensing Boilers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans he has to promote the use of environmentally efficient condensing boilers [8199]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Government currently promote the use of energy efficient condensing boilers in a number of ways. The benefits of condensing boilers are likely to be attractive to energy suppliers in meeting their requirements under the Energy Efficiency Commitment for 2002–05. Under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (part of our strategy to combat fuel poverty) the new central heating systems provided use condensing boilers wherever possible. The amendments to the energy efficiency aspects of the Building Regulations, due to come into force next year, will require energy efficient boilers to be installed, both in new build and for replacements. The Energy Saving Trust and the "Are you Doing Your Bit?" campaigns also promote the use of energy efficient boilers in the domestic sector.

Meat Imports

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list by country of origin the meat imports into the United Kingdom over the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the exposure of the animals from which such meat came to foot and mouth disease. [8063]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The table shows the amounts of meat from foot and mouth disease susceptible animals imported into the UK for the 12 month period August 2000 to July 2001.

Community legislation permits the importation of meat from certain countries where foot and mouth disease is present but only where the disease is restricted to specific areas. Imports are only permitted from parts of the country that are free of disease or under strict conditions that ensure the meat does not come from any animal that may have come in contact with foot and mouth disease before, during and after slaughter. These provisions are in line with the guidelines set out in the Office International des Epizooties International Animal Health Code 2001.

All meat imported from third countries must be accompanied by veterinary certification. This must confirm that the meat is derived from animals which have been subjected to an *ante-mortem* inspection during the 24 hours prior to slaughter at which the animal showed no signs of foot and mouth disease.

If there is an outbreak of disease likely to present a risk to human or animal health such as foot and mouth disease, Community legislation allows us to take appropriate safeguard action, which may include a ban on imports of meat from all, or parts, of that country. Recent examples include Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Swaziland, Uruguay and Zimbabwe, and within the EU, France, the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland.

UK imports of carcase meat of foot and mouth disease susceptible animals[1] August 2000-July 2001

Tonnes

Description	*Beef*	*Goat*	*Pigmeat*	*Sheepmeat*	*Total*
Irish Republic	82,098	—	28,845	1,901	112,844
Denmark	—	—	—	—	—
New Zealand	2,608	—	98,678	46	101,332
Netherlands	500	9	—	82,525	83,035
Germany	11,060	2	37,279	3,457	51,799
France	7,108	—	24,274	1,024	32,407
Australia	3,022	—	25,043	2,044	30,109
Brazil	6,375	—	0	11,043	17,418
Belgium	16,218	—	—	—	16,218
Botswana	1,548	20	11,448	481	13,496
Zimbabwe	10,172	—	—	—	10,172
Namibia	7,638	—	—	—	7,638
Spain	6,803	—	—	—	6,803
Uruguay	1,598	—	2,831	1,557	5,986
Italy	4,395	—	—	818	5,2136
USA	2,402	—	1,000	17	3,419
Argentina	18	—	2,541—	—	2,558
South Africa	1,613	—	—	254	1,867
Other	84	—	—	—	—
Grand total	646	—	2,724	270	3,724
	165,907	31	234,664	105,436	506,038

[1] Cattle, sheep, pigs goats and reindeer. There were no imports of reindeer meat in 2000–01.

Hunting with Dogs

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the views of veterinary surgeons on hunting with hounds; and if she will make a statement. [8986]

Alun Michael: No recent assessment has been made of the attitude of veterinary surgeons to hunting with dogs.

Lamb and Sheep Meat (Scotland)

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the EU Veterinary Standing Committee with regard to the lifting of the export ban on lamb and sheep meat from Scotland. [8502]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Ministers and officials from DEFRA and the Scottish Executive have had extensive discussions with Commissioner Byrne's officials on this issue. Regular reports have been made to the EU Standing Veterinary Committee on progress towards eradication of foot and mouth from Great Britain. The SVC has recently agreed that exports of pigmeat may resume from certain counties from 22 October onwards. The SVC is expected to re-examine the possibility of a resumption of sheep meat exports at its 2 October meeting.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the royal prerogative for the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9373]

Mr. Morley: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised, nor could it be practicable to do so.

Wildlife Protection

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the measures she is taking to ensure the protection of wildlife. [9017]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The protection of wildlife is fundamental to the Department's work. In the recent public consultation on a draft aim and objectives for the new Department, the proposed first objective is:

"To protect and improve the environment and conserve and enhance biodiversity, and to integrate these with other policies across Government and internationally".

The Department has targets to bring 95 per cent. of Sites of Special Scientific Interest into favourable condition by 2010 and to reverse the decline in farmland birds by 2020.

The conservation of wildlife is integral to the Department's policies across the range of its responsibilities, including the promotion of sustainable, modern and adaptable farming and the promotion of more sustainable management and use of natural resources such as energy, water, fisheries and forests. The Department is also active in a large range of specific policies and programmes to achieve its objectives including:

Support for and implementation of the relevant international conventions to which the UK is a signatory, in particular the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and the Ramsar Convention on wetlands. Bilateral assistance such as the Darwin initiative grant scheme helps developing countries implement their obligations under the Conventions.

Grant in aid to English Nature, the Government's statutory nature conservation adviser, to finance major programmes on designated nature conservation sites, species protection and recovery, and improving the wider countryside and the marine environment for wildlife.

Implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which introduced improved means of protection from Sites of Special Scientific Interest and measures to combat wildlife crime.

Management and licensing the taking, capture, killing, keeping and trade of wildlife species, including through support for the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime and Liaison with the police and HM Customs and Excise. For example commercial trade in about 850 species is currently prohibited under CITES and trade in 30,000 other species is only permitted where we are satisfied that it will not be detrimental to wild populations.

Full implementation of the European Wild Birds and Habitats Directives through the designation and conservation of special sites (Natura 2000). Implementation is being extended to include the marine environment to the 200-mile limit of national sovereignty.

Co-ordinating the UK-wide partnership for implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan including the preparation of over 400 individual Habitat and Species Action Plans and the development of a Biodiversity Strategy for England, as announced in the Rural White Paper.

Delivery of agri-environment schemes aimed at conserving and improving the landscape, wildlife and historic heritage of the countryside for which around £1 billion will be available over the seven years of the England Rural Development Programme.

Policy reviews assessing future requirements for marine nature conservation and the management and control of non-native invasive species.

Research to support and inform wildlife policies and programmes.

Public Bodies

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she plans to take to enforce the Cabinet Office Guidance on Codes of Practice for Board Members of Public Bodies. [9023]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The latest edition of the Commissioner for Public Appointments Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies was published in July 2001 and immediately circulated to all teams sponsoring non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) in my Department. It is mandatory for Government Departments to abide by this Code when making public appointments. The Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) strictly monitors the observance of the Code.

Also in July 2001, the Cabinet Office issued a best practice guide for Departments, entitled "Making Public Appointments". This provides practical and helpful advice on the process of making public appointments. It supplements the OCPA Code and the Cabinet Office's own policy requirements, but does not create rules. It has been sent to all our NDPB sponsor teams.

Haskins Report

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next plans to meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss the Haskins report. [9626]

Alun Michael: I meet my right hon. Friend frequently. The Haskins report is one item among many that we discuss.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the Haskins report, dated 2 October, was not published until 18 October. [9628]

Alun Michael: The report was published on the earliest date that was possible both for Lord Haskins to launch it and for me to respond to it.

We were able to help readers by publishing on the same day the report of the Rural Task Force, which dealt with many connected issues.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the work of Lord Haskins in assessing and making recommendations about the impact of foot and mouth disease in Cumbria. [7522]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) on 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1301.

Pollution (Warehouse Fires)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the damage to the environment through *(a)* airborne pollution and *(b)* pollution of water courses resulting from fires in warehouse, distribution and storage premises since 1990. [8227]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The responsibility for estimating any impact from such events on the local air and water environment would be a matter for local authorities or the Environment Agency. Records of assessments are not held centrally.

Airports (Landing Charges)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will list the *(a)* landing charges for airliners at the main United Kingdom and international airports and *(b)* changes in Heathrow landing charges since BAA's privatisation. [8467]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

My Department does not collect information on airport charges. Comparative information on international airport landing charges is available at BAA's website www.baa.co.uk/pdf/regulation.pdf which shows such information as one of its issues briefs. This ranks airport charges in descending order, and relative to that at Tokyo, for 40 airports. The figures are based on TRL's Index of Charges and the following is a selection from BAA's table.

Comparison of international airport charges TRL index 2000

Airport	*Rank*	*Index of airport charges*
Tokyo	1	100
New York—JFK	3	68
Frankfurt	8	41
Paris—CDG	9	41
Amsterdam	11	40
London—Heathrow	21	31
Brussels	25	28
Washington	27	27
Hong Kong	28	27
London—Gatwick	31	23
Los Angeles	39	11

Note:

BAA's commentary states that "Heathrow's charges average a little over £5 per passenger, and those at Gatwick and Stansted average just over £4 per passenger".

There are several elements to airport charges at Heathrow, of which the landing charge is only one. However, dividing the total revenue from airport charges by the total number of passengers to give the average revenue per passenger from airport charges, shows that since privatisation this has risen from £3.64 per passenger (equivalent to £6.00 at current prices) in 1986–87 to £5.23 in 2000–01 at Heathrow. In monetary terms, the change represents an increase of 44 per cent. but, after adjusting for inflation, the average revenue per passenger has fallen by 13 per cent. in real terms over the period.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to require planning permission to be sought for the erection of telecommunications masts less than 15 metres high; and if she will make a statement. [9016]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to require planning permission to be sought for the erection of telecommunications masts less than 15 metres high. Such masts do, however, require approval by local planning authorities under a simplified planning procedure known as prior approval.

We have significantly improved the planning procedures and guidance for telecommunications mast development in order to:

strengthen public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below so that they are the same as for planning applications;

increase the time for an authority to deal with prior approval applications to 56 days;

underline that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college; and

increase fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation.

These changes came into force on 22 August this year.

Water Safety

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department has tested and analysed the quality of *(a)* the holding lakes either side of Faggs Road and Princes Lake, Bedfont, *(b)* the River Crane and *(c)* drinking water supplied to London residents in the last 12 months. [8304]

Mr. Meacher: No. The Environment Agency is responsible for testing and analysing water quality in rivers and lakes; and Water Companies in England and Wales carry out daily testing of supplies to consumers for compliance with regulatory standards. In the London area this duty is fulfilled by Thames Water Utilities, Sutton and East Surrey Water Company and Three Valleys Water Company.

Milk (Packaging Waste Directive)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the implications of the EU Packaging Waste Directive for doorstep milk deliveries and the use of milk bottles. [8338]

Mr. Meacher: The EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste 94/62/EC, requires certain recovery and recycling targets to be met and encourages reuse of packaging. This includes drinks containers such as milk bottles. The UK Regulations implementing the Directive also encourage reuse by allowing obligated businesses to exclude from the calculation of their tonnage recovery and recycling obligation, tonnages of packaging that are being reused. Milk bottles are reused for between 10 and 40 trips, so this provision will apply to the proportion of milk bottles that are being reused.

We expect a proposal from the European Commission next month for new targets for 2006. We are not aware that the proposed revisions will in any way threaten the UK doorstep milk delivery service.

GM Crops

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what monitoring of glufosinate ammonium is being carried out in water courses and supplies in the vicinity of GM crop trials. [4464]

Mr. Meacher: Before glufosinate ammonium was authorised for use in GM crop trials, the Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) considered scientific data, which included data relevant to the risk of the compound entering water. The Government accepted the ACP's advice that winter use could be allowed in the trials (which are subject to a number of conditions including a limit on the treated area); the ACP did not advise that monitoring of water was needed.

The ACP noted that the data provided did not rule out that one of the metabolites of glufosinate ammonium might locally exceed the 0.1 □ g/l standard set for drinking water. Although any exceedance would be localised and short-term, the ACP recommended that winter use should not be allowed on a commercial scale until the company had provided further data.

The Pesticides Safety Directorate is working with the Environment Agency to develop arrangements that will ensure that all sites for experimental field use of pesticides are kept away from vulnerable ground waters. This is a precautionary step as existing restrictions on experimental use are designed to prevent damage to the environment irrespective of the location of the experimental site.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase the 25p addition for pensioners aged over 80. [8347]

Mr. McCartney: This Government have done much to help older pensioners since we came to office. The free television licences for those aged over 75 is worth over £100 a year. The Winter Fuel Payment is worth £200 per household and the Minimum Income Guarantee has been increased this year to £92.15 a week for a single pensioner and £140.55 for a couple. Under this Government, older pensioners are sharing in rising prosperity. The 25p addition for pensioners aged over 80 was introduced in 1971 and, like all benefits, is kept under constant review.

Disability

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to enable the Disability Rights Commission to support disabled individuals wishing to sue under the Human Rights Act 1998. [7400]

Maria Eagle: As we made clear in "Towards Inclusion", which set out our response to the Disability Rights Task Force's report, we are committed to considering giving to the Disability Rights Commission the power to assist individuals in proceedings under the Human Rights Act. This is also an issue for the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality. We therefore want to take a holistic approach and consider the matter in relation to all equality commissions, in the light of any recommendations the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights may make on whether there should be a Human Rights Commission.

Staff Training

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training was given to his Department's staff with regard to the regulations under the Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations issued on 22 November 2000 before they came into effect. [6741]

Malcolm Wicks: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Andrew George, dated 22 October 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what training was given to his Department's staff with regard to the regulations under the Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations issued on 22 November 2000 before they came into effect.

Two training events were developed to support the introduction of the Incapacity Benefit Reforms.

A three and a half day course, aimed at all staff who administer and process claims to Incapacity Benefit, was designed and developed centrally and delivered locally through the District Office Training Officer network. This event examined in detail the changes affecting the treatment of Incapacity Benefit claims and provided practice cases to consolidate trainees' learning.

A further event, a half-hour question and answer brief, again developed centrally, was delivered to all other staff by either local line management or training personnel. This product provided awareness of the Incapacity Benefit changes and was aimed at those staff without any direct involvement in the administration of Incapacity Benefit.

In addition to the training events outlined above, the detailed changes to Incapacity Benefits were also conveyed to staff through benefit specific circulars.

I hope this is helpful.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what consultations he has had with groups representing people with disabilities regarding the proposed changes to the eligibility criteria for the payment of the lower rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance; and if he will make a statement; [8975]

(2) what plans he has to reform the eligibility criteria for the payment of the lower rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance; and if he will make a statement; [8974]

(3) what research his Department has examined relating to fear and anxiety in connection with the eligibility criteria for the payment of the lower rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance; and if he will place copies of such research in the Library. [8976]

Maria Eagle: Proposed regulations to clarify the circumstances in which fear or anxiety about walking out of doors without guidance or supervision from another person may satisfy the conditions of entitlement to the lower rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance are currently being considered by the Social Security Advisory Committee. The Committee recently consulted publicly and asked for comments on the draft regulations by 14 September. The Committee is considering the responses it has received and we await its report.

A SSAC press release that included a copy of the draft regulations and an explanatory memorandum are available in the Library.

The proposed regulations do not alter the basic qualifying criteria for the lower rate mobility component. People with severe physical and mental disabilities will still be able to qualify on the basis of those disabilities alone.

The intention of the proposed regulations is to ensure that people who experience fear or anxiety when walking out of doors on unfamiliar routes without supervision or guidance are entitled to lower rate mobility component only if their ability to walk independently is directly affected by a severe mental disability. This is to ensure that the scope of the lower rate mobility component remains within the parameters set out when the component was first introduced.

We are not aware of any available research which considers fear or anxiety in the context of eligibility for the lower rate mobility component.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to change the rules that exclude disabled people from protection under the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act 1995 if they have been dismissed from a company employing less than 15 employees; and if he will make a statement; [8969]

(2) what plans he has to update the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [8968]

Maria Eagle: Our proposals to amend the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) are set out in our response to the Disability Rights Task Force, "Towards Inclusion—civil rights for disabled people", which was published on 5 March. Copies are held in the Library.

We will end the exemption of small employers from the DDA's employment provisions in 2004.

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9221]

Mr. Nick Brown: The number of press notices issued during the summer recess is in the table.

	July	*August*	*September*	*October*
National	15	35	37	11
Regional	12	44	29	4

Eight consultation documents were issued.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what action has been taken since 8 October against employers who have not made a stakeholder pension scheme available to their employees; [9706]

(2) against how many employers action has been taken since 8 October for failure to make a stakeholder pension available to their employees; [9708]

(3) what estimate he has made of the proportion of employers required to make stakeholder pensions available to their staff who have not yet done so. [9707]

Mr. McCartney: We estimate that there are between 350,000 and 400,000 employers who need to designate a stakeholder pension scheme for their employees. The latest available figures show that around 147,000 employers had designated a scheme by the end of August 2001. Reports from the pensions industry indicate a late surge of designation activity in September and early October leading up to the 8 October designation deadline.

The regulation of compliance with the stakeholder pension terms and conditions is a matter for the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra). At 19 October Opra had received 211 reports of alleged non-compliance with the requirement on employers to offer their work force access to a stakeholder pension scheme. It will make contact with each employer to provide education material and guidance, and to establish the facts of the case.

If Opra's inquiries indicate that the employer has failed to comply, Opra will send out a statement of facts to which the employer can add any relevant mitigating factors. An agreed statement of facts will then be placed for determination before a committee of the Opra board. The board will then decide if a breach of the legislation has occurred, and if so, what penalty is to be imposed.

Social Security Legislation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to what extent discretion may be exercised by those charged with taking decisions on the application of the social security legislation such that not only the facts of a particular case may be taken into account, but general circumstances; and under what powers he grants such discretion. [9218]

Malcolm Wicks: In the application of social security legislation to social security benefits, decision makers make their decision by considering all the evidence and applying the law, including any relevant case law, to the facts of the case. Discretion does not feature in the decision making process in determining claims and applications for benefit other than in relation to the discretionary social fund. The powers for that Scheme are found in the Social Security Contribution and Benefits Act 1992, the Social Security Administration Act 1992, and in the directions issued by the Secretary of State.

Decisions affecting the administration of benefit, such as suspending payment of benefit where a doubt as to entitlement arises and the making of interim payments where administrative processes are delayed are subject to a certain degree of discretion, but only within the constraints of the legislation. The powers are to be found in the Social Security Administration Act 1992 and the Social Security Act 1998 respectively.

Child Support

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment he has made of the

efficiency of the service offered to child support claimants by the Office of the Independent Case Examiner; and if he will made a statement; [9704]

(2) what the backlog of child support cases to be examined by the Independent Case Examiner is; [9702]

(3) what the budget is for the office of the Independent Case Examiner for child support cases in the current financial year; [9700]

(4) what the average waiting time was before a child support case is examined by the Independent Case Examiner in the last three months; [9703]

(5) if he will make a statement on the delays experienced by child support claimants in having cases examined by the Independent Care Examiner; [9699]

(6) what plans he has to recruit staff to the office of the Independent Case Examiner for child support cases. [9701]

Malcolm Wicks: The budget for the Independent Case Examiner (ICE) was increased in the current financial year to £1,684,311.00.

Recently, the number of investigative staff has increased from 25 to 42 and there are plans to appoint two further staff to support the new ICE.

The time between a case being received by the ICE and bringing it into action was, on average, 23 weeks for the three-month period ending in September 2001. There are currently 114 such cases awaiting action.

The ICE shares our concerns about the length of time it has taken to deal with cases in the past. A recent review of working practices has led to changes in case processing methods. This, together with the additional staff and financial resources already made available, will enable cases to be dealt with more efficiently. The delays currently experienced by parents awaiting action on their case will be reduced.

Cold Weather Payments Scheme

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will announce the outcome of the annual review of the cold weather payments scheme; and if he will make a statement. [10167]

Malcolm Wicks: Following advice from the Meteorological Office, the annual review of the cold weather payments scheme has now been completed. Amending regulations were laid on 11 October and will come into force on 1 November, in time for the beginning of the winter period.

In addition to the amendments necessary due to Royal Mail postcode changes, a new weather station, Cassley, has been introduced to provide data for the scheme following Meteorological Office advice.

Cold Weather Payments are separate from, and in addition to, Winter Fuel Payments, which are paid to eligible people from age 60.

Elderly People's Homes

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many local authority elderly people's homes have closed since the introduction of the Care Standards Act 2000. [9587]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The Care Standards Act will require the National Care Standards Commission to register and inspect local authority care homes for the first time from 1 April 2002. As this legislation has not yet been implemented there should not have been any impact on local authority homes. The Care Standards Act will regard local authority homes as "existing homes" for purposes of compliance with national minimum standards. This means that local authorities will have until 2007 to comply with the room size and shared room standards. This longer lead in time was set in order to avoid any closures in care homes once the National Care Standards Commission begins to apply the standards. It allows local authorities sufficient time to comply with the standards.

WALES

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9222]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Following is the information requested:

(a) 20

(b) None.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the royal prerogative for the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9371]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised, nor would it be practicable to do so.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Devolved Administrations

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is with regard to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly Committees; and to what categories of document she gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (1) Scottish Parliament, (2) Welsh Assembly, (3) Northern Ireland Assembly and (4) House of Commons Select Committees. [7039]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1003–04W.

Sports Tests

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many unannounced tests taken on premises not owned by a professional football club have been undertaken in each of the last five years. [8258]

Mr. Caborn: All tests for sports in the UK are unannounced tests, that are collected at short or no-notice to the individual athlete, whether collected in competition or out of competition. For team sports such as football, testing is arranged by collecting samples at squad training sessions or after a match which ensures that players are subject to the same procedures as they would be for an out of competition test.

Testing will always take place on football premises, whether a club ground, training venue, or academy. Because of the ease of access to football players it has not been necessary to instigate testing at players' homes.

Number of tests

	In competition	*Out of competition*
1996–97	63	415
1997–98	57	460
1998–99	69	470
1999–2000	133	928
2000–01	97	919

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many erythropoietin and human growth hormone tests have been undertaken in the last three years by Sport England; if the method of conducting such tests in England is the same as that used by Fina in Sydney; and if she will make a statement. [8260]

Mr. Caborn: As testing for erythropoietin and growth hormone is very much at its infancy the level of testing for these substances has been confined to research and limited screening, making the data regarding test numbers of limited value. Methods have been refined since the protocols introduced at the Sydney Olympics, different methods and protocols are adopted by different sports and the purpose of testing can vary. UK Sport is closely monitoring the different testing systems in order that any national testing programme that would include erythropoietin and growth hormone, particularly if it will be based on blood testing, has integrity and is legally robust.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many tests for banned substances have been undertaken on footballers playing in the *(a)* Premier League and *(b)* Football League in each of the last five years. [8257]

Mr. Caborn: The anti-doping programmes for the football governing bodies in the UK are delivered through the national anti-doping organisation UK Sport. UK Sport monitors the type and level of testing.

For the Football Association, the nature of promotion and relegation within the Football League and Premiership means that it is difficult to present meaningful and accurate figures that separate the Premier League and the Football League testing over the last five years. Teams may have been in numerous different divisions during that period, individual players may have moved clubs or been included in testing of international competitions or squads. Furthermore, it is not in the interests of an effective testing programme to reveal the testing plan for any sport and therefore the figures are represented below as a total.

Year	*Total number of tests for the FA*
1996–97	478
1997–98	517
1998–99	539
1999–2000	1,061
2000–01	1,016

The above totals include testing across all divisions of the Football League and Premiership and include testing at women's football and FA Conference football as well as FA Vase testing. Also included in the programme is the testing of national squads (male and female) and target testing through punitive action and that performed at the request of clubs. The programme covers all possible periods of training and competition for an athlete, as testing can take place on any day of the week.

To explain the significant level of testing for the Football Association programmes, it may be helpful to point out that for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 they comprise over one sixth of the total tests conducted within the UK Sport testing programme.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she commissioned a review of blood tests for the drugs erythropoietin and human growth hormone; and if she will make a statement. [8259]

Mr. Caborn: UK Sport conducts the testing programme for sports in the UK, presently the body fluid used for testing is urine. No formal review of blood testing has been commissioned for the detection of erythropoietin or human growth hormone. The introduction of blood testing to sport is quite recent. The testing protocols are still being revised to ensure that they are effective.

Blood testing took place at the World Cycling Championships in Manchester in 2000, this testing was part of the medical check on the cyclist and measured haematocrit. Blood screening was also carried out at the London Marathon this year as part of a research project to consider the operational issues and effectiveness of EPO testing, more recently blood tests were also carried out at the World Half Marathon in Bristol. As research into detection continues it is possible that blood tests may be replaced by urine tests for the detection to erythropoietin. Presently research into growth hormone has been limited, although Professor Peter Sonkson at St. Thomas' Hospital had made significant advances, this work is on-going in other countries with financial support from the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Rowing

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to meet representatives of the Amateur Rowing Association to discuss their plans for the new training centre at Caversham. [8757]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to meet representatives of the Amateur Rowing Association to discuss plans for the new training centre at Caversham.

Sport England

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the funds available to Sport England to support voluntary sector sports clubs over the next five years. [8756]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England estimates that it will distribute approximately £1 billion over the next five years from the Lottery Sports Fund, of which over two thirds will go to community projects, many of which involve voluntary sector sports clubs. The amount distributed will be dependent on the amount generated by the National Lottery.

Exchequer funding for Sport England has been set at £43.025 million in 2001–2002, £53.275 million in 2002–2003, and £78.275 million in 2003–2004. Sport England will allocate grants from its exchequer income to governing bodies of sport, who can invest in the development of clubs, community sports programmes and volunteers.

In addition, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget Statement, the Government will shortly be consulting on proposals to introduce relief from some taxes for those amateur sports clubs which play a role in their community. This will give further assistance to the volunteers who are the backbone of these clubs and encourage more young people to volunteer their services in support of such clubs.

Athletics Funding

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Sports Aid Foundation grant responsible for the funding of elite athletics is to be curtailed by Sport England. [8690]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Sport England is continuing to provide funding to the Sports Aid Foundation for this financial year with an award of up to £250,000. Future funding is under discussion.

Media Ownership

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to reform the existing rules on media ownership. [9874]

Tessa Jowell: I will announce later today that my Department will be engaging in a consultation exercise to determine the best way to regulate media ownership. A paper will be published shortly for two months formal consultation. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament and will be available on the Department's website at www.culture.gov.uk. Having considered the responses, we will publish our proposals in the draft Communications Bill next year. There will then be a further, three month period of consultation.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Regional Government

14. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss proposals for the reform of regional government. [5582]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State frequently meets my right hon Friend the Chancellor, and other ministerial colleagues, to discuss a range of issues, including regional government.

London Underground

15. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will indicate the expected annual rate of return for investment of the infrastructure companies in London Underground over the next 15 years. [5583]

Mr. Spellar: The Government's plans for a publicly run, privately built London Underground will deliver £13 billion of investment over the next 15 years.

London Underground is currently negotiating the contracts to deliver this investment. To estimate what the private sector's rate of return might be while these negotiations are still ongoing would undermine London Underground's commercial position and jeopardise its ability to deliver best value.

Biofuels

17. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will allocate substantial resources over the next two years to develop clean renewable biofuels for road transport. [5585]

Mr. Jamieson: Budget 2001 announced a new duty rate for biodiesel from Budget 2002 of 20p per litre below the rate for ultra low sulphur diesel. It also announced duty exemptions or reductions for pilot projects, lasting up to five years, to establish and assess the benefits of novel road fuels, including ethanol and biogas. The Chancellor will announce the first pilot projects granted duty concessions in the pre-Budget report.

West Coast Main Line

18. **Mr. Stevenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the latest estimate by Railtrack of the upgrade of the west coast main line; and if he will make a statement. [5587]

Mr. Spellar: First, I would like to reassure my hon. Friend that the west coast main line upgrade will not be put at risk by Railtrack going into administration. The Government remain committed to providing a revitalised rail network in the UK, and the upgrade of the west coast main line is an integral part of that commitment. Work on the west coast main line upgrade will continue, and we are discussing with the administrators and the Strategic

Rail Authority the best way of carrying it forward, without prejudice to the outcome of the public inquiries into specific elements of the project.

Local Government

19. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the recent discussions he has had with representatives of local government on improving local services. [5588]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department has frequent discussions with representatives of local government about improving local services and other matters. Such discussions will be particularly useful in helping us develop the forthcoming local government White Paper.

25. **Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with local authority associations on the formula for allocating local government finance. [5594]

Dr. Whitehead: I have not had any recent discussions with the Local Government Association on this issue. However, I have met representatives of local government special interest groups, and the LGA attend regular working groups with my officials on formula reform. The most recent of these was on the 4 October this year.

35. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the discussions he has had with representatives of local government on improving local services. [5606]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department has frequent discussions with representatives of local government about improving local services and other matters. Such discussions will be particularly useful in helping us develop the forthcoming local government White Paper.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

20. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of people in local authority paid bed-and-breakfast accommodation. [5589]

Ms Keeble: We have significantly increased money for housing and targeted new affordable housing in areas of shortage. We have also established a bed-and-breakfast unit. Over the next two years the unit will work with partners to introduce measures to reduce the need to place families in B and B.

Bus Services

21. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve bus services to disadvantaged communities in rural areas. [5590]

22. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve bus services to disadvantaged communities in urban areas. [5591]

29. **Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve bus services to disadvantaged communities in rural areas. [5598]

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve bus services to disadvantaged communities in urban areas. [5586]

Ms Keeble: The new powers in the Transport Act 2000 will improve bus services throughout the country by raising standards and improving access to services. Furthermore, increased funding for our rural bus grant schemes and the new Urban Bus Challenge will directly assist disadvantaged communities by improving transport links.

28. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much subsidy is provided to bus services in west Kent. [5597]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities are responsible for decisions on bus subsidy within their area. However, I understand Kent county council's subsidy on bus services in west Kent is currently £2.88 million (gross) per year. This includes services supported under the Government's Rural Bus Grant Subsidy scheme. All local bus services also receive fuel duty rebate from my Department.

Road Safety

23. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on speed management on the roads. [5592]

Mr. Jamieson: The Road Safety Strategy, published last year, set challenging new targets to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on our roads and the measures required to achieve them. These include better speed management through engineering, education and enforcement.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to improve road safety. [5577]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government published a comprehensive road safety strategy, "Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone", in March 2001 and, at the same time, set challenging targets for reducing road deaths and serious injuries in Great Britain by 2010. We are making solid progress on all fronts. Our latest quarterly report will be posted on the Department's website soon.

As part of the ongoing implementation of the Road Safety Strategy, the following are examples of recent activities:

The THINK! road safety publicity campaign has included action on speed, drink-drive, seat-belts, and child safety, including the successful "Hedgehogs" advertisements.

A national scheme for child pedestrian training in schools has been launched and the first tranche of 38 authorities to receive funding was announced in September.

The pilot safety camera funding arrangement which started in eight partnership areas has been extended nationally and seven new partnerships have recently been set up. We expect the scheme to cover most areas over the next two years.

Road Safety Good Practice Guidelines were published in June to assist local highway authorities in their efforts to reduce casualties and meet their local target.

The Government will be consulting on various measures to improve the safety of novice drivers through a more structured approach to learning to drive.

Passenger Rail Franchising

24. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on passenger rail franchising. [5593]

Mr. Jamieson: On 16 July we issued a draft statement of franchising policy for consultation with key stakeholders. Over 60 responses were received. We will publish a final statement in due course.

Rent Restructuring

26. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his proposals for rent restructuring. [5595]

Ms Keeble: We are committed to the reforms to social rents that are set out in the December 2000 policy statement, "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—the way forward for housing".

Unlike the current structure of social rents, which is confusing and unfair to tenants, the reforms will lead to all social tenants facing rents that reflect size, location and condition. Tenants will have a choice between paying a lower rent on a less attractive property or a higher rent on a more attractive property. Rents will be based upon a coherent approach and remain affordable, at well below market levels.

Social landlords should aim to begin reforming their rents in 2002–03 and to complete the process over a 10-year period. Landlords are expected to ensure that the changes in rents as a result of the reforms are no more than £2 per week in any one year above the normal inflation-linked increase.

Local Transport

27. **Mr. Mike Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on local transport plans. [5596]

Ms Keeble: Local transport plans are a major step forward for integrated planning of transport improvements at local level. We have doubled the amount of money available to support the very wide range of schemes that authorities have proposed. We are currently looking at authorities' reports on their progress and will make further announcements in December.

Road Noise

30. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the introduction of quieter motorway surfaces. [5599]

Mr. Jamieson: Last week we announced criteria for prioritising the surfacing of concrete trunk roads with quieter material. The four criteria that have been adopted are:

Wherever possible the application of quieter surfaces will fit in with normal maintenance needs;

Priority will be given to those sites where treatment would benefit the greatest number of people;

Works will be carried out in such a way as to minimise disruption to general public and users of network;

Priority will be given to roads, opened since June 1988, where actual noise levels have turned out to be significantly higher than predicted at the time of the Public Inquiry.

The list of schemes that satisfy the first criterion and are planned for the following three years (2002–03, 2003–04 and 2004–05) together with those that are planned for 2001–02 were announced on 17 October 2001.

The Highways Agency is currently identifying additional schemes that satisfy the second and third criteria and could be added to this list. The Agency has also identified 17 roads with concrete surfaces that have been opened since June 1988 and has instigated a programme of noise surveys to identify those that satisfy the fourth criterion. The list of these 17 roads was also given in the announcement of 17 October.

Automatic Train Protection

31. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress towards installing automatic train protection across the rail network. [5602]

Mr. Jamieson: Automatic train protection is already installed on the Great Western main line (London to Bristol), Heathrow Express and the Chiltern line. It is being installed as part of the upgrade of the west coast main line and the channel tunnel rail link. Installation of the train protection and warning system across the rail network will be completed by the end of 2003.

The Government expect to receive advice next spring from the Health and Safety Commission on taking forward the recommendations from the joint inquiry on train protection chaired by Professor Uff and Lord Cullen.

Rail Franchise (Wales)

32. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the implementation of the single rail franchise for Wales. [5603]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has proposed the creation of a single franchise for Wales. It is considering this alongside the other options for delivering benefits to rail passengers on Welsh routes. An announcement will be made in due course.

Key Worker Homes

33. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the provision of homes for key workers. [5604]

16. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are being taken to provide homes for key workers. [5584]

Ms Keeble: Our Starter Home Initiative and the Housing Corporation's programme will help 11,000 key workers to buy homes in high cost areas over the next three years. We are also reviewing planning guidance on affordable housing, including the scope for providing more key worker housing within new developments.

London Underground (Northern Line)

34. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans there are to improve services on the Northern line. [5605]

Mr. Jamieson: Over recent years there has been enormous improvement on the Northern line. In the last five years, £330 million has been invested in the Northern line stations, tunnels and service, plus a further £400 million of private investment to provide 106 new trains. This investment has already delivered a faster, more reliable train service, eight station modernisations (with three more in progress), 6km of new track, increased security, and more Customer Care Assistants. The percentage of schedule operated reached a record of 97 per cent. in 2000–01—well above the network-wide performance. As a result the Northern line is now one of London Underground's (LU) top three performing lines.

Customers are noticing the improvements: Customer Satisfaction Surveys (CSS) show increases in the last five years in overall satisfaction with the Northern line service from 75 per cent. to 78 per cent. However, LU is continually looking to improve customer experience further. The plans for a publicly run, privately built Tube will ensure millions of pounds of substantial investment on the Northern line. Central to these improvements will be the installation of a brand new signalling system. This will allow over 25 per cent. more trains to run in the central area. In addition over 25 miles of track will be replaced in the first seven years of the modernisation contracts. This investment will build on the improvements already made and guarantee better services for years to come.

East Coast Main Line

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on how many occasions in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 1999 services on the east coast main line have been disrupted owing to collapse or other failure of the overhead power cables; and what average length of delay has been caused to passenger services as a result. [6652]

Mr. Jamieson: The following lists from Railtrack show the number of overhead line failures attributable to Railtrack and the train operators respectively in 1999, 2000 and 2001:

Minutes delay to ECML passenger services due to overhead line problems period 11 (January) 1999 to end of period 6 (mid September 2001

Overhead line (excluding emergency speed restrictions)
Overhead line emergency speed restrictions

Railtrack attributable	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Total minutes delay	15,812	20,037	16,445
Number of incidents	143	111	80
Average delay	111	181	206
Percentage of all delays on ECML	5.4	3.0	2.9
Total minutes delay	3,516	4,000	1,352
Number of incidents	14	23	20
Average delay	251	174	68

Pantograph

TOC attributable	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Total minutes delay	[1]—	387	16,445
Number of incidents	[1]—	5	80
Average delay	[1]—	77	206
Percentage of delays on ECML	[1]—	0.2	2.9

[1] Data relating to these were not collected until 2000.

Elected Mayors

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on introducing directly elected mayors in London boroughs. [8520]

Dr. Whitehead: Our policy for London boroughs, as for other local authorities, is that local people should be able to elect a Mayor to lead their council where they so choose, and that people should not be denied the opportunity to make that choice. As stated in the Government's Urban White Paper "Our towns and cities: the future"—Cm. 4911, November 2000—our belief is that international experience suggests that directly elected mayors are often the best option to provide the leadership that larger towns and cities need.

Railway Interoperability

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* timetable for and *(b)* cost implications of meeting European regulations on railway interoperability. [8331]

Mr. Jamieson: Following consultation in May-July this year, we are revising the draft Regulations to implement directive 96/48/EC of 23 July 1996 on the interoperability of the trans-European high-speed rail system. We currently expect that the final regulations will be made and then come into force by early next year. The draft Regulatory Impact Assessment included in the consultation document indicated that the estimated cost to UK businesses was £45 million (net present value at 2000 prices) of which £15 million would be incurred in the next three years, plus some smaller-scale costs for conformity assessment. There are also potential benefits, which are difficult to quantify, in terms of the provision of more competitive rail services which would benefit freight customers and passengers and attract more traffic to rail, yielding environmental benefits.

Directive 2001/16/EC of 19 March 2001 on the interoperability of the trans-European Conventional rail system is required to be implemented by 20 April 2003. An assessment of the costs and benefits of the implementation of this directive is not yet available.

Speed Signs

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the rules which prevent repeater 30 mph signs from being used in 30 mph zones. [8340]

Mr. Jamieson: Repeater signs are prohibited on roads with the urban 30mph national speed limit (restricted roads). Here the presence of street lighting is used to indicate the limit. The prohibition is the result of case law which makes it difficult to gain convictions for speeding if some restricted roads and not others have repeater signs.

The DTLR is due to review speed limit signing early next year. This will look at the question of repeaters on restricted roads.

Detrunking

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to allocate specific funds for North Yorkshire county council to detrunk the roads; and if he will make a statement. [8145]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency has been and is having regular liaison meetings with North Yorkshire county council, most recently on 11 October, to discuss detrunking. At present, negotiations are progressing well and my Department has offered to make over £1.1 million available to the council for maintenance of those trunk roads to be detrunked in the county. Orders are currently being drafted and the majority should be published before the end of the calendar year.

Local Government Funding

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's review of local government funding. [8165]

Dr. Whitehead: Following last year's consultation on local government finance we have been working with local government and other stakeholders in developing proposals for reform. The Local Government White Paper is due to be published later this year and will include a daughter document detailing our financial proposals. We have already announced that changes following the review of the revenue grant distribution system will take effect in April 2003.

PFI Road Schemes

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 18 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 203W, on PFI road schemes, what the total points awarded is as a percentage of total that could be awarded; what percentage of projects had points awarded; and what the five main reasons were for awarding of points. [8174]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no limit to the number of penalty points that can be awarded on the Department's PFI trunk road projects. Penalty points are issued when it is appropriate to do so. Points have been awarded on 87.5 per cent. (7 of 8) of the projects. The five main reasons for the award of penalty points on the Department's DBFO contracts are: testing of construction materials, traffic management, public safety during construction, management of the construction process and road maintenance.

Night Flights

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the adequacy of controls on night noise at UK airports. [8524]

Mr. Jamieson: Controls on aircraft noise at night may be imposed voluntarily by the airport operator, in consultation with those affected. They may be subject of informal agreement, for example, with the relevant airport consultative committee, or of enforceable obligations under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or they may be the subject of planning conditions. At airports designated for the purposes of section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, controls may be set under that power: at present, only Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted are so designated.

In the consultation paper, "Control of noise from civil aircraft", published last year, we also proposed that the Secretary of State be given a new power to require a noise amelioration scheme to be made and agreed with an appropriate local authority to address particular local issues. Responses to that consultation are being analysed and I hope to announce the outcome shortly.

Airport Security

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funding his Department has made available for research into improving airport security in the last year; and what criteria are used to assess bids for such funding. [8139]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1366W.

Mobile Phones (Motorists)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on motoring offences and the use of hand-held mobile phones. [8588]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* As the Highway Code makes clear, drivers should never use hand-held mobile phones while driving. Using a hands-free phone is also distracting and drivers should always find a safe place to stop when using any type of phone. Drivers who use phones irresponsibly may be prosecuted for failing to have proper control of their vehicle. This offence carries a maximum fine of £2,500. It can also be an offence for employers to require employees to use mobile phones while driving.

Drivers may also be prosecuted for careless or inconsiderate driving or even dangerous driving. The penalties for these offences include endorsement and possible disqualification from driving. We therefore share the view of the police that current legislation provides sufficient powers to prosecute drivers who use mobile phones or any other in-vehicle devices, or carry out other activities that may distract their attention from the

road. However, as stated in the Road Safety Strategy "Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone", the Government will keep under review the need for new legislation.

Railtrack

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings he held to discuss alternatives to putting Railtrack plc into administration with *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* financial institutions. [8185]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* My right hon. Friend had a number of meetings with advisers and others before taking his decision to petition for Railway administration.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library his assessment of the financial position of Railtrack plc which led to the application for an administration order under section 59 of the Railways Act 1993. [8193]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Copies of the bundle of High court documents relating to the railway administration order of 7 October have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the structure and funding of the company limited by guarantee which he will propose should take over Railtrack plc's role as network operator. [10123]

Mr. Byers: It is ultimately for the administrator to assess and make recommendations on proposals for how Railtrack's railway assets are transferred out of administration as a going concern. I will have to approve any such transfer under schedule 7 to the Railways Act 1993. As recent press coverage has made clear, there is every possibility that there may be more than one proposal before the administrator. The Government welcome this. At the same time however, it would be irresponsible of us to do nothing and leave it to others to work up a viable successor company to Railtrack plc. We are therefore developing what we would regard as an attractive successor vehicle. We will put a proposal to the administrator for a company limited by guarantee (CLG) to take over Railtrack plc's railway assets and its role as Network Operator.

A CLG would be a private sector company run on purely commercial lines but without shareholders and consequently without the need to pay dividends in return for equity funding. Profits from the company would be re-invested in the network. The CLG structure could do much to address the current problems of the industry and could be one way of facilitating increased vertical integration with the possibility of individual TOCs playing a greater role in the maintenance of specific areas of infrastructure, where this was advantageous and appropriate. Any such vertical integration would need to include measures to protect the interests of other infrastructure users.

We anticipate that the board of the CLG would comprise 12 to 15 executive and non-executive directors. The executive directors would include a CEO, and engineering, finance, safety and commercial directors. The non-executive directors could include a chairman, one director nominated by the SRA, one director appointed after consultation with both the TOCs and FOCs, and up to seven other independent non-executive directors. As is the case with all companies, the directors would owe their first duty to the CLG itself.

This would be a highly professional board, tightly focused on delivering a quality rail network fit for the 21st century, remunerated and incentivised accordingly, and with corporate governance structures comparable to that of a traditional plc. In its early years the company would clearly face a number of key challenges: maintaining very high standards of safety on the railway; retaining the confidence of customers, employees and contractors; diagnosing the cultural and structural problems of the company and planning the best way of overcoming them.

We are confident that incentive packages can be devised which would be comparable with those for similar roles elsewhere in the private sector and which would ensure that the CLG recruited and retained the very best people. Incentives would be based initially on safety, meeting financial and efficiency targets, and providing a quality service to customers.

Instead of shareholders, a CLG has members. The SRA would be the founder member of this CLG and we anticipate that the majority of the other members would come from the private sector. Individuals drawn from private sector companies with a direct stake in the railways, other interests including passenger groups and employees, and the SRA (or its successor) could all be possible members. Financial interests and construction companies could also be included.

Under this structure the members would have a governance role equivalent to that of shareholders but would have no additional powers. They would be well placed to ensure the high performance and full accountability of the board.

For funding purposes the CLG would have the same sources of revenue as Railtrack had: property income, track access charges and grant. Some 90 per cent. of the company's income would therefore be covered by stable long-term contracts. Revisions to these contracts, for example to reflect any changes to the regulatory regime, would be subject to independent regulation in respect of the fair price to be paid for the outputs Government wish to purchase.

The CLG would not need equity to raise debt finance. The company would have the existing debt from Railtrack transferred to it and would be able to borrow further from the debt markets to the extent necessary. The cost of this borrowing would depend on the company's credit rating and under the proposals we are currently developing we would expect the CLG to have a solid investment-grade (ie at least BBB) credit rating. We anticipate that in practice lenders would view the company as a very low credit risk and a sound basis for their investment.

The 'cushion' between the risk of poor financial performance and debt providers that equity would provide under the standard plc model would come from two main sources. First, we would expect to put in place an arrangement by which the company could access a

standby, subordinated loan facility. This facility would be enshrined in a contract, providing explicit support in specified circumstances up to a predetermined limit. It would be capped. It would not amount to a Government guarantee of debt, but the repayment of this facility would be 'last in the queue' of creditors for repayment. The possible value of this facility would be determined once the administrator has a better understanding of Railtrack plc's true financial position.

Secondly, although the company would not be distributing profits in the form of dividends, it would earn a surplus over direct costs. This would be sufficient over time to build up a significant reserve. Together, the company's reserves and the explicit loan facility, would mean that the CLG would have access to sufficient funds to cover foreseeable circumstances.

Under the CLG structure revenues would go further than they would have done with Railtrack. The cost of capital would be lower, there would be no dividends and the company would be able to prioritise cashflows in favour of lenders. In addition the company would operate with much lower risks than Railtrack, concentrating on operating and maintaining the infrastructure as well as undertaking small-scale renewals. The CLG would not undertake major new projects with all their attendant risks of cost overrun. As we announced in April this year, we anticipate that projects such as these, like the east coast main line upgrade, will henceforward be undertaken by special purpose vehicles. These are likely to be bespoke joint venture companies financed by a combination of Government grant and private sector debt and equity.

A CLG company structure could be combined with a different, more streamlined, regulatory regime than the one under which the industry has had to labour to date and this would help to underpin its credit rating. As stated, transparent independent economic regulation would continue to be an element in the regulatory regime.

There may well be other viable options for the administrator to consider, and we will give any transfer scheme put to us full consideration. Nevertheless, we are confident that the CLG structure we are proposing, along with the associated regulatory changes, would:

- produce a focused, professional, private sector company committed to maintaining and improving the rail network;
- retain the ability to raise significant private sector investment in the railways at reasonable cost;
- rid the industry of the previous tensions between the need to generate short-term increases in share price and the long-term needs of the network;
- give those with a stake in our railway infrastructure an input into how that infrastructure is operated and maintained;
- allow us to deliver our 10-year plan commitment of some £30 billion of public expenditure on the railways but with much improved value for money;
- play its role in levering in the matching £34 billion of private sector investment identified in the 10-year plan;
- put an end, once and for all, to the divisions all too apparent in the industry when the network was under Railtrack's stewardship.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice he has received regarding the value of the first phase of CTRL to Railtrack Group plc. [8692]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* We will be working with Railtrack and London and Continental Railways Ltd. over the next few weeks to consider valuation issues.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his review of policies relating to abandoned vehicles is expected to report. [8900]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1318W.

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9224]

Dr. Whitehead: The total number of *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents issued by DTLR (C) during the summer recess (20 July 2001 to 15 October 2001) is as follows:

(a) 110

(b) 15.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the standard spending assessment for highways and transport per kilometre of *(a)* principal and *(b)* non-principal road in each shire county in England in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [7963]

Dr. Whitehead: A table showing the standard spending assessment for highway maintenance per kilometre of principal and non-principal road in each shire county in England is as follows. The highway maintenance SSA is determined mainly by an authority's length of roads together with the average traffic flow for that authority.

	Highway Maintenance SSA per km	
Local authority	*Principal roads*	*Non-principal roads*
Cornwall	4,319	3,308
Cumbria	4,690	3,446
Gloucestershire	5,054	3,950
Hertfordshire	12,007	8,548
Lincolnshire	4,774	3,260
Norfolk	5,177	3,848
Northamptonshire	8,253	6,536
Northumberland	5,084	3,563
Oxfordshire	6,533	5,499
Somerset	4,759	3,502
Suffolk	5,564	3,999
Surrey	12,318	9,105
Warwickshire	6,392	4,807
West Sussex	8,444	6,513
North Yorkshire	5,226	3,598
Bedfordshire	8,301	6,612
Buckinghamshire	7,478	5,992
Derbyshire	7,542	5,101
Dorset	4,621	3,827
Durham	6,866	5,197
East Sussex	7,381	5,384
Hampshire	7,339	5,718

Local authority	Highway Maintenance SSA per km	
	Principal roads	Non-principal roads
Leicestershire	6,811	5,683
Staffordshire	7,419	5,137
Wiltshire	5,337	4,269
Cambridgeshire	6,483	5,412
Cheshire	6,636	5,109
Devon	4,387	3,142
Essex	9,739	7,685
Kent	8,053	5,661
Lancashire	8,386	6,010
Nottinghamshire	7,999	6,308
Shropshire	4,663	3,265
Worcestershire	6,441	4,930
Isle of Wight Council	6,840	4,718

It is not possible to provide a similar table for the other transport elements (concessionary fares and bus support outside London) included in the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services block as these elements are not separately identifiable within this block.

Terminal 5

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what studies have been made in the last five years of the effect of the proposed Terminal 5 at Heathrow on flooding in the area. [8305]

Ms Keeble: The Terminal 5 Inquiry Inspector heard and received evidence during the inquiry on drainage and flooding issues, including the potential flood risk from Terminal 5. The Inspector's report is currently being considered together with the results of the recent consultation on BAA's revised proposals for the diversion of two rivers around the proposed Terminal 5 site and other post-inquiry representations.

Civil Aviation Authority

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has appointed a new chairman to the Civil Aviation Authority; and if he will make a statement. [10064]

Mr. Spellar: Following an open competition in accordance with the Commissioner for Public Appointment's guidance, the Government have appointed Sir Roy McNulty to the post of Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority. Sir Roy succeeds Sir Malcolm Field, who retired from the authority on 16 September.

Sir Roy's appointment is for three years. For the first six months, he will work three days per week at a salary of £90,640 per year. Thereafter, he will work two days per week at a salary of £60,427 per year. The appointment is pensionable and, with the consent of the Treasury, an employer contribution will be made to Sir Roy's personal pension of up to 20 per cent. of his actual salary in respect of this appointment. Additional member contributions of 4 per cent. of actual salary will also be payable. As this is a personal pension, the details of the arrangement are a matter for Sir Roy and his pension provider.

Sir Malcolm Field made a substantial contribution to the CAA during his term of office, not least in taking the CAA through the establishment of the public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services Ltd. and the subsequent reorganisation of the CAA itself into a specialist regulatory body. Sir Roy faces the future challenges of establishing the CAA as the UK's aviation regulator; of ensuring that the CAA continues to promote, in an efficient and cost-effective way, high standards of safety in all aspects of civil aviation; of bedding in the regulatory framework for the provision of air traffic services, and of maintaining good communications with Parliament, the aviation sector both in the UK and abroad, and the public. The Government are confident of Sir Roy's ability and commitment to fulfilling these expectations.

I have written to Sir Roy, giving him guidance on the aims and strategic direction which the Government wish him to pursue during his term of office. A copy of that letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Central Railway Project

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the Strategic Rail Authority's report on the Central Railway project. [9198]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The Strategic Rail Authority does not intend to publish its high level review or the consultants' report which informed that review on Central Railways' proposals. It will, however, be advising Ministers and is giving consideration to publishing an Executive Summary of the consultants' report.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to announce the successor to Sir Alistair Morton as Chairman of the SRA. [8695]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* We expect to make an announcement shortly.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Libel Laws

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the compatibility of the libel laws and Articles 6 and 10 of the Human Rights Convention. [9104]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government believe that the law of libel is consistent with Article 6 (right to a fair trial) and Article 10 (right to freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

It is the task of the courts to apply and develop the law of libel in a manner consistent with the convention rights. They are also under a duty themselves to act compatibly with these rights, as public authorities under the Human Rights Act 1988, which was introduced by this Government. Additionally, they are under a duty, under section 12 of the Act, to have particular regard to the importance of the convention right of freedom of expression, if they are considering whether to grant any relief which would affect the exercise of that right.

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by her Department during the summer recess. [9228]

Ms Rosie Winterton: During the summer recess period (21 July to 15 October 2001 inclusive) my Department issued 83 press notices and six consultation papers. All press notices and public consultation papers are published on the Lord Chancellor's Department website:www.lcd.gov.uk.

Children Act

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will review the Children Act 1989 to grant automatic parental responsibility status to unmarried fathers; and if she will make a statement. [8683]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government recognise the wide range of relationships outside marriage and that increasing numbers of children are being born to unmarried couples. The Adoption and Children Bill, as drafted, introduced on 19 October 2001, will have the effect of amending the Children Act to allow unmarried fathers who jointly register a child's birth with the mother to acquire parental responsibility without further formality. The new provisions will not apply retrospectively. Information will be made available to assist parents to understand the implications of joint registration.

Sarwar *v.* Alam

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the implications of Sarwar *v.* Alam for funding arrangements of accident cases. [8664]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The findings of the Court of Appeal in Sarwar *v.* Alam are consistent with the Government's policy that reasonable after the event insurance premiums reasonably incurred are recoverable items.

HMS Thetis

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will place in the Library a copy of the Admiralty and Secretariat case papers relating to the loss of HM Submarine Thetis, reference 3817, 1939, Appointment of Public Tribunal of Inquiry: various papers as brief for Treasury Solicitor including findings of Board of Inquiry under Commander in Chief 5488 vol. 1; 3818, 1939, reports of salvage and life saving services by Rear Admiral (Submarines) and others, 5488, vol. 2; 3819, 1939, Tribunal of Inquiry: minutes days 1–5, 5488; vol. 3; 3820, 1939, Tribunal of Inquiry: minutes days 6–10, 5488; vol. 3; 3821, 1939, Tribunal of Inquiry: minutes days 11–16, 5488, vol 5 and 3822, 1939, Tribunal of Inquiry: minutes days 17–20, 5488, vol 6. [8608]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The papers in question form part of the national archive and are held by the Public Record Office at Kew. They are freely available for inspection there. Details of opening hours, catalogue references and copying services are given on the PRO website at http://www.pro.gov.uk. Because of the substantial nature of the documents in question, placing copies in the Library of the House would incur disproportionate cost.

TREASURY

Impounded Goods

Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the operation of the appeals procedure used by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in respect of the impounding of goods and transport vehicles deemed by customs officials to be in breach of the law governing imports into the United Kingdom; and how many staff are available to HM Customs and Excise to review appeals made against seizure of property and vehicles. [8872]

Mr. Boateng: All of Customs enforcement action is subject to legal appeal and challenge. The legality of any seizure can be challenged in the magistrates court. In addition, customs decisions not to restore vehicles or goods which have been seized can be appealed in the first instance to a customs review officer and then to the independent VAT and Duties Tribunal. Customs deploy approximately 60 staff years to deal with appeals and reviews.

Institutional Property Market

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to develop the securitisation of the institutional property market. [5999]

Ruth Kelly: Securitisation is used to raise capital for a variety of sectors. Its development is led by market practitioners and their customers. The Government's objectives include securing an innovative, fair dealing, competitive and efficient market in financial services, as described in the Treasury's most recent departmental report (Cm 5116).

Money Laundering

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which London banks were found by the FSA to have handled funds stolen from Nigeria by General Sami Abacha; and which banks were criticised for lax money laundering controls. [7995]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The Banking Act 1987 restricts the FSA's ability to make its findings public. Under the new Financial Services and Markets Act, which comes into force on 1 December, the FSA will have wider powers to disclose this information.

Pension Policies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the implications of the Equitable Life situation on his policy towards the regulation of with-profits pension policies. [8336]

Ruth Kelly: This is an issue which the inquiry being undertaken by Lord Penrose may wish to look at.

Suspicious Financial Transactions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many referrals relating to suspicious financial transactions have been referred to NCIS in each year since 1997; and how many prosecutions have resulted from these referrals in each year. [8134]

Ruth Kelly: Since 1997 the Economic Crime Unit at NCIS has received the following numbers of suspicious transaction reports:

	Number
1997	14,148
1998	14,129
1999	14,500
2000	18,408
January to September 2001	19,981

Suspicious transaction reports are a vital part of NCIS and other law enforcement agencies intelligence gathering operations and the broader fight against financial crime. However, suspicious transaction reports may be only one small part of a complex investigation that ultimately leads to the arrest and conviction of individuals and the confiscation of assets. Suspicious transaction reports can provide new information and intelligence that can substantially move an investigation forward as well as providing an invaluable insight into the presence or whereabouts of assets for later confiscation. On occasions they may also simply provide confirmation of information already known to the investigators. This means, therefore, that isolating prosecutions that were the result of suspicious transaction reports from those that were not could not be achieved without disproportionate costs.

Article IV Reports

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is the policy of the Government to publish the UK's article IV reports to the IMF in future. [8136]

Ruth Kelly: As we said in our Annual Report to Parliament, "The UK and the IMF 1999–2000", the Government are committed to publishing IMF Article IV reports on the UK.

In August 2000, following a successful pilot project, the Executive Board of the IMF adopted a policy of voluntary publication of Article IV staff reports. The UK had participated in the pilot project, authorising publication of our 1999 Article IV report at the earliest opportunity. The UK's 2000 Article IV was published in February 2001, shortly after its conclusion. The Government believe that publication is an important step in enhancing the transparency and credibility of IMF surveillance and will continue to publish the UK's reports in the future. We will also continue to encourage other IMF member countries to do likewise.

Bank Disclosures

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he will take to ensure disclosure by the banking sector of their lending patterns in under-invested communities; and if he will make a statement. [8262]

Ruth Kelly: In the November 2000 Pre-Budget Report and the Budget 2001 the Government stated that they were encouraging banks to disclose details of their individual lending activities in disadvantaged communities on a voluntary basis, and that this improved flow of information should help to identify barriers to and opportunities for growth. The Government also said that they would look at the obligations on banks in the contents of requirements placed on the sector more widely.

Working Hours

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress his Department made towards achieving a declining trend in excessive hours worked over the years 1999 and 2000. [8133]

Ruth Kelly: Information for 1999 and 2000 shows a small reduction in the number of hours worked in excess of conditioned hours for those staff working the most hours, measured against the baseline for the Public Service Agreement target. The information for the period January to August 2001 shows a marked reduction in the numbers of staff working in excess of conditioned hours in general.

Sudden Death Syndrome

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the number of people who die each year from sudden death syndrome. [8862]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Michael Foster, dated 23 October 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking for the latest estimate of the number of people who die each year from sudden death syndrome (8862)

In 2000, there were 34 instantaneous deaths with cause unknown, code 798.1 in the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision (ICD-9) for people aged 1 and over in England and Wales.

For those aged under 1, an analysis of figures on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) for 1996–2000 was published in *Health Statistics Quarterly* 11 in August 2001. This analysis showed a provisional number of 243 deaths mentioning SIDS in 2000.

Aid (Natural Disasters)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications for financial aid for natural disasters in the UK have been made to the EU in each of the last five years. [8766]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested is not held centrally. Decisions to seek financing from the European Union are taken by Departments on an individual basis.

Abu Qatada

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what countries have sought the freezing of assets in the UK held by Abu Qatada; and if he will make a statement. [8661]

Ruth Kelly: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 requires states to freeze the assets of entities and individuals who are suspected of committing, or posing a significant risk of committing, or providing material support for, acts of terrorism. In accordance with the resolution the Bank of England issued a press notice on Friday 12 October 2001 listing individuals and entities suspected of being involved in terrorist activities. The name Abu Qatada appears on this list.

General Abacha

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures the Government are taking in response to the allegations of money laundering by General Abacha, relating to the use of banks for which the UK has responsibility; and if he will make a statement. [9124]

Ruth Kelly: Following the Divisional Court's ruling of 18 October, the SFO will be able to provide evidence answering the Nigerian and Swiss requests for assistance.

An FSA task force is now monitoring seven banks' actions to remedy inadequate money laundering controls. Under the Financial Services and Markets Act the FSA will have wider powers to disclose information and to prosecute breaches of the money laundering regulations.

The Proceeds of Crime Bill, introduced on 18 November, will further strengthen the UK's anti-money laundering defences.

Guaranteed Annuities

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken to ensure that the full record of exchanges between the Government Auditor, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury on the subject of guaranteed annuities, and particularly in relation to Equitable Life, are being made available for examination by the Penrose public inquiry. [8481]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Lord Penrose will have full access to all the information he requires.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much VAT he forecasts will be raised by the imposition of the aggregates tax in the first full year of its operation. [8859]

Mr. Boateng: No such estimate is available.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of how much is forecast to be raised by the aggregates tax in its first full year from *(a)* low specification aggregates, *(b)* virgin aggregates and *(c)* recycled aggregates. [8852]

Mr. Boateng: Forecasts of tax revenues are published each March in the Financial Statement and Budget Report (FSBR) and in the autumn in the pre-Budget report. Forecasts of aggregates levy revenues are not broken down by type of aggregate. Recycled aggregates are exempt from the levy.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the impact which the aggregates tax will have on the cost of housing construction; [8850]

(2) what will be the cost of the aggregates tax to the rail industry in its first full year of operation. [8853]

Mr. Boateng: No such estimates have been made.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total impact so far on UK carbon dioxide emissions of the reduction in VAT on domestic supplies of fuel and power from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. [8851]

Mr. Boateng: The annual figure was set out in Table 6.2 of the Government's Financial Statement and Budget Report published in March 2001, which shows the latest estimates of the environmental impact of measures introduced in recent Budgets.

EU Tax Companies

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those EU countries which operate taxes broadly comparable to *(a)* the aggregates tax and *(b)* the climate change levy. [8858]

Mr. Boateng: There are energy taxes in Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden.

There are aggregates taxes in Denmark, France and Sweden and the Netherlands is in the process of introducing a tax.

Disabled Person's Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the Disabled Person's Tax Credit to people who work less than 16 hours per week; and if he will make a statement. [8977]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There are no current plans to extend the Disabled Person's Tax Credit to people who work less than 16 hours per week.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the royal prerogative in the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9375]

Ruth Kelly: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised nor would it be practicable to do so.

European Court of Justice Judgments

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for *(a)* UK tax law and *(b)* Government revenue of the 9 October Judgment of the European Court of Justice in Case C-108/99, Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise *v.* Cantor Fitzgerald International; and if he will make a statement. [9169]

Mr. Boateng: No change in UK tax legislation is needed as a result of this judgment. Subject to the final decision of the UK courts, this European Court of Justice decision is expected to have prevented a potential tax loss.

Helpline

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress made towards the establishment of a virtual call centre structure to support the proposed national helpline for VAT, excise and freight. [9178]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise introduced a new National Advice Service on 2 April 2001 that deals with all general telephone inquiries from businesses and the public about taxes and duties they are responsible for.

Pension Fund Surpluses

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review legislation governing pension fund surpluses; and if he will make a statement. [9757]

Ruth Kelly: The pension fund surpluses legislation is kept under regular review and an announcement will be made if it is decided to change the current rules.

Savings

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what constraints will be placed upon parents' investment decisions on behalf of their children in respect of money made available through the Child Trust Fund; [9753]

(2) if people without bank accounts will be able to access the *(a)* Savings Gateway and *(b)* the Child Trust Fund, through the Universal bank; [9737]

(3) what plans he has to encourage saving among families on low incomes; [9745]

(4) what recent representations he has received from UK financial institutions on the Child Trust Fund; and of these how many have expressed concern about the implications of the fund for competition in the retail savings sector; [9755]

(5) what will be the estimated cost of policing the Child Trust Fund to ensure that funds are invested in ways permissible under the associated regulations; [9752]

(6) how many additional families he estimates will be subject to means-testing as a result of *(a)* the Child Trust Fund and *(b)* Savings Gateway; [9749]

(7) if lump sums made available as part of the Child Trust Fund will be increased annually in relation to *(a)* average earnings and *(b)* inflation; [9746]

(8) if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the Child Trust Fund; [9748]

(9) what the cost will be to the Government of the *(a)* Child Trust Fund and *(b)* Savings Gateway in their first full year of operation. [9750]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's strategy towards saving and the measures they have taken, including the introduction of Individual Saving Accounts and Stakeholder Pensions, is set out in "Helping People to Save", published by HM Treasury in November 2000.

The Government launched consultation on further proposals to encourage saving and asset-building, especially among households with low incomes, in "Saving and Assets for All" published by HM Treasury in April 2001. The consultation is focused on proposals for the Child Trust Fund and the Saving Gateway. As the consultation paper describes, decisions on the design and operation of the proposed initiatives have not been taken. The potential cost of the initiatives would depend on such decisions. Many financial service providers have responded to the consultation. The Government intend to report back on the results from the consultation and on its further intentions for these initiatives around the time of the pre-Budget report in autumn 2001.

Taxpayers

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many UK taxpayers were subject to an income tax rate of 40 per cent. or more on the first day of tax years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 2001–02. [9763]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to "The Survey of Personal Incomes 1979–80", table 16 and "Inland Revenue Statistics", table 2.1. Both of these publications are available in the Library of the House. The latest data on Inland Revenue Statistics can also be accessed on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats.

Tax Returns (Penalties)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many incorrect penalties were issued to taxable persons

who had completed and sent off tax returns on time for the tax years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01 by (i) the Inland Revenue and (ii) HM Customs and Excise. [9758]

Ruth Kelly: The information is not available.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Collins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the continuation of deferred tax collection from businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak in Cumbria. [7521]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The Government keep all taxes under review and decisions will be made as part of the normal Budget process. Throughout the outbreak the Inland Revenue and Customs have been working constructively with businesses and their representatives to reschedule payments where possible. Deferment of payments is just one of the ways in which this can be achieved. Their approach has been to develop solutions that match the needs of individual businesses, rather than adopt a blanket approach.

The Inland Revenue and Customs will continue to take a sympathetic approach to businesses which have been affected by FMD, and are aware that some businesses will continue to suffer problems throughout the autumn and winter.

VAT (Small Firms)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which organisations have responded to HM Customs and Excise's consultation on a flat-rate VAT scheme for small firms. [9774]

Mr. Boateng: Responses have been received from:

Chartered Institute of Taxation
Confederation of British Industry
Federation of Small Businesses
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland
Institute of Company Accountants
Institute of Directors
Institute of Indirect Taxation
Law Society of England and Wales
Law Society of Scotland
Small Business Service
The Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Birmingham, London, Manchester, and Milton Keynes and North Bucks
VAT Practitioners' Group
Alliance of Independence Retailers
Association of Convenience Stores
Association of Pensioner Trustees
British Association of Removers
British Decorator's Association
British Holiday and Home Parks Association
Construction Confederation
National Federation of Fish Friers
National Hairdressers' Federation
Professional Contractors' Group
Retail Motor Industry Federation.

Replies were also received from 25 individuals, firms or companies.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the responses to HM Customs and Excise's consultations on a flat-rate VAT scheme for small firms. [9775]

Mr. Boateng: Apart from those which consultees have asked should not be made public, responses will be placed in the Library when Ministers announce the outcome of the consultation. At that time Customs will also publish a summary of the responses received.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change Government policy following HM Customs and Excise's consultation on a flat-rate VAT scheme for small firms. [9777]

Mr. Boateng: Customs are currently analysing responses to the recent consultation exercise and will be making recommendations to Treasury Ministers in due course.

Scottish Bus Group

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had since June relating to Scottish Bus Group pensioners. [9215]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Scottish Executive is taking forward matters regarding the Scottish Bus Group pension funds, following its announcement in December 2000 on the pension fund surplus.

Excise Duties

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase excise duties. [9217]

Mr. Boateng: Decisions on taxation are considered on an annual basis as part of the Chancellor's overall Budget judgment.

Equitable Life

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Baird report on Equitable Life was made available by the Treasury to Lord Penrose. [R] [9216]

Ruth Kelly: A letter was sent to Lord Penrose on 16 October which enclosed a copy of the report as evidence for his inquiry.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mrs. Sally Clark

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to refer the case of Sally Clark to the Court of Appeal. [8337]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Home Secretary's powers to consider alleged miscarriages of justice came to an end on 31 March 1997, and were replaced by new powers vested in an independent body called the Criminal Cases Review Commission. I understand that, to date, Mrs. Clark has not

submitted an application to the Commission. It remains open to her, or anyone acting on her behalf, to apply to the Commission for a review of her case.

Absence

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many days on average were lost per employee in his Department because of sickness; and how many officials retired early from his Department in each of the past 10 years. [R] [5050]

Mr. Blunkett: Available comparable information on working days lost due to sickness is given in table 1. Available information on the number of staff having retired early from the Department is given in Tables 2 and 3.

Information on sickness absence data for the Civil Service between 1995 and 1998 was published in a British Medical Institute (BMI) Health Services Report, "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service", produced on behalf of the Cabinet Office. These figures were based on staff years and are not therefore comparable with later figures based on the approved method using working days.

The Home Office and its agencies have introduced new guidelines, policies and procedures with a view to reducing sickness absence. The Department's service delivery targets for April 2001 to March 2004, which include a target for sickness absence, were published on Friday 3 November 2000 and are available on the Home Office website. The targets are to reduce sickness absence, and sustain this improvement thereafter in the:

Home Office and its agencies (excluding the Prison Service) to an average of 6.9 days by end of March 2003.

Prison Service to an average of 9.0 days per member of staff by 2004.

Table 1: Average working days recorded as lost due to sickness in the Home Office 1999–2001

Area/year[1]	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Home Office and non-Prison Service agencies[2]	10	7.5	7.2
Prison Service	12.6	13.4	13.9

[1] Data for Home Office and non-Prison Service agencies are given by financial year. Prison Service data are given by calendar year (to August). Comparable data for earlier years are not available.
[2] United Kingdom Passport Agency, Forensic Science Service and Fire Service College.
Note:
Responsibility for the Fire Service College passed from the Home Office to DTLR in the 2001 machinery of Government changes.

Table 2: Annual early retirements of staff within the Home Office and non-Prison Service agencies between 1 January 1992 and 20 September 2001

Leaving reason	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Retirement—ill health	36	61	77	82	97	69	59	41	33	9
Retirement—actuarially reduced	2	3	7	7	3	4	9	6	4	3
Early Retirement/severance on structural grounds or grounds of limited efficiency/postability	7	29	48	36	72	25	22	24	13	17
Compulsory early retirement/severance on redundancy/voluntary redundancy	75	48	57	30	33	60	3	3	2	2
Total	120	141	189	155	205	158	93	74	52	31

Table 3: Early retirements of staff within the Prison Service

Leaving reason	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Retirement—ill health	356	321	285	105
Retirement—approved early	25	32	43	25
Retirement—actuarially reduced	11	6	8	4
Retirement—compulsory early	11	13	12	6
Total	403	372	348	140

Special Advisers

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the special advisers in his Department and *(a)* their date of appointment and *(b)* their responsibilities; if any of them are authorised to speak to the media; and if he will make a statement. [9485]

Mr. Blunkett: The number of special advisers working for me had been increased by 0.5 of a full-time post compared with the number working for me in the pre-election period. This, as with the arrangements between 1997 and 2001, reflects the particular circumstances of my position and also the extent of written work associated with my present post. Nick Pearce, Katharine Raymond and Sophie Linden (part-time) took up their appointments as special advisers on 8 June. Huw Evens took up his appointment on 2 July. As part of their duties they will brief the media as appropriate.

With the transfer of the United Kingdom Anti-Drug Co-ordination Unit from the Cabinet Office, Keith Hellawell is joining the Home Office, on special adviser terms, in an advisory role on international drug issues.

Prisoners (Purposeful Activity)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time per week spent by prisoners in purposeful activity in each category of prison. [9477]

Beverley Hughes: The average time per week spent by prisoners in purposeful activity in each category of prison between April and August 2001 is set out in the table.

Category	*Time spent in purposeful activity (hours)*
Category B	25.4
Category C	26.4
Female closed	27.3
Female local	22.4
Female open	35.6
High Security	19.3
Male closed Young Offenders Institute (YOI)	23.1
Male juvenile	28.0
Male local	19.6
Male open	42.7
Male open YOI	40.3
Male remand centre	21.5

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

These data are provisional and subject to validation by establishments. Establishments are categorised by their main role only. Establishments that have more than one role have been placed in the category that represents the primary or predominant function of the prison.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy to consider the availability of appropriate training courses in allocating prisoners to particular institutions. [8825]

Beverley Hughes: Yes. The main factor which is considered in determining a prisoner's allocation is the security category of the prisoner. But allocation to a prison within that constraint will take account, among other things, of any need for identified offence-related behavioural programmes to confront assessed risk and the prisoner's educational or training needs or potential.

Coroners Court

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the workings and practices of coroners courts; and if he will make a statement. [9020]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on 5 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 250W. The chair and members of the review team were subsequently announced on 26 July.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will reply to the letter dated 14 September from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding his constituents, Mr. and Mrs. G Chernov. [8226]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in replying to his letters. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Department, Lord Rooker, has agreed to meet the hon. Member as requested in his correspondence and his office is currently arranging this.

Victim Support

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what help his Department makes available to victim support. [8558]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Home Office grant to the organisation Victim Support in the current financial year will be £25 million. This is over £6 million more than last year, and more than twice the grant paid in 1997. The extra money this year will enable Victim Support to complete the provision of witness support services in all magistrates courts and further enhance their service delivery to victims of crime.

Prisoner Rehabilitation

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he has set HM prisons for the rehabilitation of offenders; and if he will make a statement. [7295]

Beverley Hughes: The targets set by the Home Secretary for the rehabilitation of offenders are contained in the Public Service Agreement (PSA) between the Chancellor and the Home Secretary, in a Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) between the Home Secretary and the Prison Service, and in Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Prison Service.

The PSA targets that relate to prisoner rehabilitation are:

to reduce the rate of reconvictions:

of all offenders punished by imprisonment or by community supervision by 5 per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate; and

of all young offenders by 5 per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate;

to reduce the levels of repeat offending among problem drug misusing offenders by 25 per cent. by 2005 (and by 50 per cent. by 2008).

The targets contained in the SDA that relate to the rehabilitation of offenders are:

to increase the educational and vocational qualifications of offenders to 23,400 accredited educational/vocational qualifications in 2001–02 and 36,200 in 2003–04, including an increase in the number of level 2 basic skill awards from 18,000 to 21,000;

to increase the number of offenders going through accredited offending behaviour programmes to 8,900 by 2003–04, including 1,240 through sex offender treatment programmes;

to double the number of prisoners getting jobs on release by April 2004;

to reduce the rate of positive results from random drug tests from 20 per cent. in 1998–99 to 10 per cent. by 31 March 2004;

to increase the number of prisoners entering treatment between 2001–02 and 2003–04 in the following categories:

CARATS (Counselling, Assessment Referral, Advice and Throughcare, Services) from 20,000 to 25,000;

detoxification-from 23,000 to 27,000;

drug rehabilitation programmes and therapeutic communities—from 5,000 to 5,700;

to establish, by December 2000, a baseline and targets for the Spending Review period, for increasing the caseload of prisoners on a voluntary drug testing compact.

The four current KPI targets that relate to prisoner rehabilitation are:

to deliver 23,400 accredited educational or vocational qualifications in 2001–02, including 18,000 level 2 basic skills awards;

to ensure that prisoners spend on average at least 24 hours per week engaged in purposeful activity;

to deliver 6,100 accredited offending behaviour programme completions in 2001–02, including 1,160 completions of sex offender treatment programmes;

to ensure the rate of positive results from random mandatory drug tests is lower than 12 per cent. by April 2002.

Special Constables

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there were in the West Midlands Police Force in *(a)* 1971, *(b)* 1981, *(c)* 1991 and *(d)* 2000, respectively; how many of these were from minority ethnic communities; and how many special constables were deployed in the Dudley North OCU in 2001. [7088]

Mr. Denham: The number of serving special constables at force level have only been recorded centrally from 1991 onwards. Figures for the years prior to this are not available. The total number of special constables, including the numbers of those from minority ethnic communities in West Midlands Police for 1991 and 2000 are set out in the table.

Year	*Total number of special constables*	*Special constables from minority ethnic backgrounds*
31 March 1991	843	115
31 March 2000	680	75

I am informed by West Midlands Police that in 2001, there was an average of 34 serving special constables deployed in the Dudley North Operational Command Unit (OCU).

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and we are looking at radical improvements in their management, welfare and deployment as part of the police reform process.

Police Marksmen (Civilian Casualities)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been shot by police in each of the last 10 years; how many *(a)* died and *(b)* were seriously injured; and how many of these were found not to have been carrying firearms at the time they were shot. [7414]

Mr. Denham: Figures available are as follows:

	Persons shot by police	*Died*	*Injured*[1]	*Unarmed*[2]
1991	5	3	2	—
1992	11	3	8	—
1993	5	3	2	—
1994	6	2	4	—
1995	5	2	3	2
1996	4	2	2	2
1997	1	—	1	—
1998	5	2	3	2
1999	7	3	4	1
2000	6	2	4	—
2001	2	2	—	—

[1] Includes all injuries

[2] Excludes incidents where the person was subsequently found to be in possession of a replica or imitation firearm or in possession of other dangerous weapons (knives, air weapon etc.)

Departmental Staff

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate total annual staff costs for his Department and its agencies by nation and region of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [6853]

Mr. Blunkett: Information on Home Office staff cost estimates for 2001–02 (including the Prison Service Agency, the Passport and Records Agency and the Forensic Science Service) by nation and region of the United Kingdom is provided in the table shown.

£000

Region	*Total*
Scotland	8,886
North East	86,484
Yorkshire and Humberside	131,821
North West	142,348
Merseyside	28,672
West Midlands	109,463
East Midlands	104,497
Eastern	110,802
Wales	30,052
Northern Ireland	2,177
London	469,024
South East	215,910
South West	98,661
Total	1,538,797

Asylum Seekers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number and proportion of asylum seekers to the UK who *(a)* are educated to (i) degree level, (ii) higher A-Level or equivalent level and (iii) Standard/GCSE or equivalent level, *(b)* are qualified as (i) doctors, (ii) nurses and (iii) teachers, and *(c)* have skills in high technology and IT related sectors; and if he will make a statement. [7002]

Angela Eagle: The information available is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only by examining individual case records and by consulting the asylum seekers themselves.

Departmental Spending

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the total annual running costs for buildings used, owned or rented by his Department for each nation and region of the UK, and estimate the average cost per sq m for properties used by his Department as a whole, and by region and nation of the UK. [6855]

Mr. Blunkett: The estimated running costs and average running cost per sq m for the Home Office (non-prison) estate by region and nation of the United Kingdom are as follows:

Region	*Estimated running costs*[1] *(£000)*	*Estimated average running cost per sq m*[2] *(£)*
England		
North East	6,414	234
North West	12,217	264
Yorkshire	5,003	280
East Midlands	6,385	376
West Midlands	7,495	115
East England	2,688	105
London	45,227	257
South East	38,537	220
South West	352	156
England total	124,319	225
Scotland	3,734	343
Wales	2,366	123
Northern Ireland	486	239
UK total	130,906	224

[1] Running Costs include the annual rental charge, rates, utility costs, cleaning, maintenance and security guarding

[2] The floor area figures used are net internal area

These figures do not include the Probation Estate, which became part of the Home Office estate on 1 April 2001. I will write to the hon. Member with these figures shortly.The figures for the Prison Service are collated by the 15 Prison Service Areas, 13 of which are regional. The other two areas are Female and High Security establishments.

Area[1]	*Estimated running costs*[2] *(£000)*	*Estimated average running cost per sq m*[3] *(£)*
East Midlands North	2,753	20
West Midlands	3,293	14
Manchester, Mersey and Cheshire	3,681	15
North East	2,775	21
Lancashire and Cumbria	3,996	21
Yorkshire and Humberside	4,677	16
East Midlands South	3,280	20
Thames Valley and Hampshire	5,356	26
Eastern	4,758	20
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	6,430	22
London	3,847	21
South West	7,743	28
Female Prisons	4,088	23
High Security Prisons	5,500	17
England total	52,589	20
Wales	1,277	14
UK total	53,866	20

[1] The figures relate to the Operational Directorate of the Prison Service and cover prison establishments. The Prison Service headquarters figures are included in the main Home Office figures.
[2] Running costs relate to rents, council tax, utilities and maintenance. Security guarding and cleaning are not identified separately on the Prison Service finance system. The figures do not include rates.
[3] Figures for the floor area are gross.

The difference in the running cost between the main Home Office and the Prison estates is due to the fact that most of the Prison Service estate is freehold, whereas most of the main Home Office estate is leasehold. Rent accounts for the major running cost expenditure in the figures for the main Home Office estate.

Crown Court Trials

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of *(a)* either-way cases and *(b)* all cases heard in magistrates courts were sent to Crown court for sentencing in each of the last three years. [7852]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The available information, taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, is shown in the table.

Numbers and percentages of defendants committed to the Crown Court for sentence by offence type—England and Wales 1999

	Triable either way	*All offences*
Number of defendants proceeded against	479,917	1,881,765
Number of defendants committed to the Crown Court for sentence	19,324	20,417
Percentage of defendants proceeded against who are committed to the Crown Court for sentence	4	1

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those who elected for trial in Crown court in either-way cases, including those found not guilty, had previous convictions. [7853]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Data from a sample of offenders sentenced during four weeks in 1999 show that 68 per cent. of those found guilty for a standard list offence at the Crown court had one or more previous convictions for a standard list offence. No data are available on whether those acquitted had previous convictions.

Refurbishment Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* building and *(b)* refurbishment projects are planned by his Department in (i) the current year and (ii) the next financial year; and what the costs will be of each project. [6586]

Mr. Blunkett: The Department does not maintain central records of every building and refurbishment project. The following table lists currently planned Home Office, including Prison Service capital construction projects (individual projects estimated to cost over £2 million) split between private finance initiative (PFI) and non-PFI which covers the projects on-site or expected to be on-site in 2001–02 and 2002–03. The figures given are total costs, previous expenditure, and estimated expenditure in the current year and future years. The Department is not directly responsible for the construction costs of PFI projects and these costs have not been shown. Projects for non-departmental public bodies are not included.

	Project £000 at 2001–02 prices			*Total anticipated expenditure*	
Projects costing over £2 million	*FY 2001–02*	*FY 2002–03*	*Future years*		*Comments (figures include for fees, VAT and contingencies*
Collection Summary:					
Prison Service (capital)	27,714	77,978	60,993	166,685	
Immigration Service	136,000	3,100	0	139,100	
National Police Training	13,300	15,332	20,000	48,632	
United Kingdom Passport Agency	85	—	—	—	Planned expenditure not yet known
Total anticipated expenditure	177,099	96,410	80,993	354,417	
PFI Projects:					
Home Office Marsham Street	—	—	—	—	PFI contract not yet signed
Ashford Prison	—	—	—	—	PFI contract not yet signed
Peterborough Prison	—	—	—	—	PFI contract not yet signed

Projects costing over £2 million	Project £000 at 2001–02 prices FY 2001–02	FY 2002–03	Future years	Total anticipated expenditure	Comments (figures include for fees, VAT and contingencies
Home Office Prison Service					
Aylesbury	2,131	2,182	2,581	6,894	
Birmingham	800	1,711	64	2,575	
Brockhill/Hewell G	352	2,475	56	2,883	
Buckley Hall	0	2,000	0	2,000	
Camp Hill	1,357	2,485	521	4,363	
Cardiff	0	1,744	365	2,109	
Dorchester	498	1,932	62	2,492	
Downview	3,000	7,000	0	10,000	
Drake Hall	0	2,000	500	2,500	
Durham	2,728	1,928	4,773	0	
Durham	0	2,032	7,634	9,666	
Eastwood Park	0	2,600	300	2,900	
Everthorpe	210	2,052	55	2,317	
Feltham	0	700	2,000	2,700	
Feltham	0	1,300	1,300	2,600	
Gartree	2,352	2,594	8,359	0	
Gartree	0	0	2,225	2,225	
Hull	2,124	11,008	336	13,468	
Kirkham	200	3,567	60	3,827	
Leeds	500	2,223	300	3,023	
Lincoln	0	1,909	2,178	4,087	
Long Lartin	520	2,089	2,744	5,353	
National Programme	8,775	225	0	9,000	
Onley	92	1,391	4,257	5,740	
Pentonville	0	3,000	7,000	10,000	
Portland	0	2,750	7,888	10,638	
Preston	0	3,540	2,831	6,371	
Wakefield	0	5,015	1,808	6,823	
Wakesfield	—	—	7,500	7,500	
Wandsworth	1,771	2,917	116	4,804	
Wandsworth		1,500	1,500	3,000	
Wealstun	—	5,060	1,320	6,380	
Winchester	304	1,609	680	2,593	
Winchester	—	1,088	1,148	2,236	
Ashford (PFI)	—	—	—	—	Contract not yet signed
Peterborough (PFI)	—	—	—	—	Contract not yet signed
Prison Service total	27,714	77,978	60,993	143,951	
Immigration Service[1]					
Immigration Service	136,000	3,100	0	139,100	
Immigration Services total	136,000	3,100	0	139,100	
National Police Training					
Redevelopment Harrogate	1,000	15,000	20,000	36,000	
Cmbran	3,350	91	—	3,441	
Ryton	8,950	241	—	9,191	
National Police Training Total	13,300	15,332	20,000	48,632	
Home Office					
Marsham Street PFI	—	—	—	—	Contract not signed
United Kingdom Passport Agency					
Relocation	85	—	—	—	Future expenditure not yet known
United Kingdom Passport Agency	85	0	0	0	

[1] Information on the capital costs of individual projects is not divulged as it is commercially sensitive. The table sets out the total contractually committed expenditure for projects let by this office and relates to the Yarl's Wood, Harmondsworth, Dungavel and Oakington projects. (On both Harmondsworth and Yarl's Wood, there was significant expenditure during 2000–01 which is included in the figure shown in the 2001–02 column).

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 24 October 2001

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Business (E-mail)

Dr. Cable: To ask the President of the Council if he will propose that the House should accept motions relating to parliamentary business by e-mail; and if he will make a statement. [8466]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have no immediate plans to make such a proposal, but it is worthy of consideration. Any switch to a new system would need to take account of its wider impact and ensure that any security implications are properly addressed.

The Hon. Member may wish to ask the Procedure Committee to consider the proposal.

New Members (Induction)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the activities for the induction of new hon. Members in this Parliament. [9068]

Mrs. Roe: After the 2001 general election, House departments provided a fuller and more co-ordinated induction process for newly elected Members than at any previous election. It is known that virtually all newly elected Members attended the Reception Area and associated activities. There is a good deal of anecdotal evidence that these activities were well received, but in addition the Board of Management has agreed that there should be a small survey of newly elected Members in order to seek their opinions in a more systematic way. The group of House officials who oversaw the process has made its own assessment, including points for consideration when preparations are being made for the induction process after the next general election.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ensure that existing investment and maintenance programmes planned by Railtrack will take place. [8391]

Mr. Jamieson: The Administrator has been funded so as to permit him to continue work on Railtrack's projects. Contractors have been asked to continue normal working; and Railtrack in administration will continue to place orders and let contracts.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has held with financial institutions about the future investment needs of the rail industry since the decision to put Railtrack into administration. [8994]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department's advisers have held regular meetings with financial creditors and others.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has discussed future funding of rail investment with Railtrack bondholders. [9003]

Mr. Jamieson: Future funding of the proposed company limited by guarantee has been discussed between my officials, my Department's advisers and the financial markets and we intend to continue to consult widely before detailed proposals are put to the Administrator.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of Railtrack's shareholders hold less than *(a)* 5,000 and *(b)* 1,000 shares. [8780]

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has on the number of railway employees who hold shares in Railtrack. [8945]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not hold such information.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has held with the Credit Rating Agency in relation to Railtrack. [9001]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend has held no such discussions.

Planning

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will create a right of appeal against the grant of planning consent in respect of large-scale schemes of local concern; and if he will make a statement. [8666]

Ms Keeble: Local people already have the opportunity to comment on proposals for large-scale and other schemes before the local planning authority decides whether or not to grant planning permission. Our forthcoming Planning Green Paper will look at ways of improving community engagement in the planning process.

Thameslink 2000

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of Thameslink 2000. [8665]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are keen to ensure that the Thameslink 2000 project should not be put at risk by Railtrack being taken into administration. We are discussing with the administrators and the Strategic Rail Authority the best way of ensuring that the project can be carried forward if the enabling powers are granted under the Transport and Works Act 1992. A public inquiry into Railtrack's application for an order under the 1992 Act

finished earlier this year and the inspector's report is expected next spring. My hon. Friend will understand that I cannot pre-judge the outcome of the inquiry.

Housing

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was *(a)* the number of homeless priority acceptances, *(b)* the number of those living in temporary accommodation, *(c)* the number of those living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and *(d)* the number of children living in homeless households, by region, in each year since 1997. [8956]

Mr. Byers: Summary information on activity under statutory homelessness provisions is reported to the Department by local authorities in England. This includes the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, and the number of those households resident in various types of temporary accommodation at the end of each quarter.

National and some regional information on local authorities' activity is provided in a quarterly Statistical Release published by the Department. Copies are available in the Library, and also via the Department's website. The latest edition, published on 12 September, presents statistics up to the end of June 2001.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish figures for the level of empty council housing, by local authority in England, in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001 to date; and if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to reduce the level of empty council housing. [8959]

Mr. Byers: I have placed the information requested in the Library. It presents data showing the level of empty council housing by local authority as at 1 April 1997 and 1 April 2000 (the latest available) respectively.

We expect those housing authorities with high levels of vacant properties to set challenging targets for reductions through improved management performance or action to improve or dispose of unpopular stock in the Business Plans they are now required to produce.

Executive Agencies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to reduce the *(a)* number and *(b)* scope of executive agencies affiliated to his Department. [9126]

Mr. Byers: We have no current plans to reduce the number or scope of this Department's executive agencies. All agencies are subject to review, including five yearly reviews in accordance with Cabinet Office guidelines, which examine their status and work. The outcome of such reviews are announced to Parliament.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to decentralise non-departmental public bodies and devolve their responsibilities to local authorities. [8958]

Mr. Byers: We have no current plans to reduce the number or scope of the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by this Department. All such bodies are subject to review, including to five yearly reviews in accordance with Cabinet Office guidelines, which examine their status and work. The outcome of such reviews are announced to Parliament.

Thames Riverboats

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to increase safety on riverboats travelling on the River Thames; and if he will make a statement. [8961]

Mr. Byers: Inquiries chaired by Lord Justice Clarke have produced 74 wide-ranging recommendations for improving safety on the tidal Thames. The recommendations are being pursued through a mixture of primary and secondary legislation, administrative action and voluntary agreement. I shall shortly be placing in the Libraries of both Houses an updated summary of the action taken on each recommendation.

Railways (Wales)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact of the change in administration at Railtrack on the future of rail investment in Wales. [8779]

Mr. Jamieson: The Administrator has been funded so as to permit him to continue work on Railtrack's projects. Contractors have been asked to continue normal working; and Railtrack in administration will continue to place orders and let contracts.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which organisations will be included to represent Welsh interests in the company which is being considered as a replacement for Railtrack. [8778]

Mr. Jamieson: It is too early to be precise about representation in the proposed company limited by guarantee. The Government have indicated their desire that the membership of the proposed company should be predominantly private sector and that it should also reflect stakeholder interests as far as possible. We will consult on our proposals.

Press Notices

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the press notices issued by his Department on each day between 10 September and 10 October. [8950]

Dr. Whitehead: I have arranged for a list to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Thirty eight press releases were issued by Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions between 10 September and 10 October 2001.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the press notices issued by his predecessors on each day between 10 September and 10 October 2000 on subjects which are the responsibility of his Department. [8951]

Dr. Whitehead: I have arranged for a list to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Thirty two press releases on subjects for which DTLR is currently responsible were issued by Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions between 10 September and 10 October 2000.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to list the press releases authorised by each Minister in his Department. [9141]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I have arranged for a list to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Fifty nine press releases were issued by Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions since 11 September 2001.

Railways (Capital Projects)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the capital projects which will be inherited from Railtrack plc by its successor company, stating when each will be completed. [8953]

Mr. Jamieson: The Administrator has been funded so as to permit him to continue work on Railtrack's projects. Contractors have been asked to continue normal working; and Railtrack in administration will continue to place orders and let contracts.

Jo Moore

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he authorised the publication of the DTLR press release on *(a)* councillor allowances and *(b)* councillor pensions and the regional planning internal advice guidance for the south-west on 12 September; and what conversations he had with his special adviser, Jo Moore, concerning the publication of those press notices. [9192]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 98W, and to the answer I have given today.

Air Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ensure that if any UK carrier in receipt of state aid following 11 September has withdrawn services to a UK regional airport from either Heathrow or Gatwick, the slots used for such services will be given to an operator that is prepared to operate the route; and if he will make a statement. [9354]

Mr. Spellar: No UK airline has received direct Government subsidies. Short-term assistance was provided to UK airlines only when the insurance market summarily limited third party war risks insurance. Without the temporary Government cover all airlines would have effectively been grounded. Slot allocation is the responsibility of an independent co-ordinator, Airport Co-ordination Ltd. (ACL) and is subject to EU Regulation 95/93.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will meet the cost of security charges at UK airports; if the Government will continue to provide UK airlines with war risk insurance cover beyond the original 30 day period; and if he will make a statement. [9347]

Mr. Spellar: The question of meeting the cost of security charges is under consideration. The Government will provide UK airlines with war risk insurance cover for a further 30 day period and will review the position towards the end of that period. This was announced in a press release by HM Treasury on 22 October.

Planning Guidance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when the Government office for the south-west completed the final draft of the final Regional Planning Guidance for the south-west; [9139]

(2) if he will make a statement on the timing of the publication of the final Regional Planning Guidance for the south-west. [9138]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I agreed the final text of the Regional Planning Guidance for the south-west on 1 August and at the same time agreed the proposed publication date of 5 September. As a result of production delays in the Stationery Office it became clear before the end of August that printed copies would not be ready in time. As a consequence it was agreed at that point to delay publication until 12 September. Copies were finally received in the Government office for the south-west on 10 September; these were posted to all participants in the Public Examination and other key regional stakeholders on the morning of 11 September in advance of the formal publication on the next day.

Transport Assistance and Subsidies

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in each year since 1995 what the total value of Government assistance and subsidy was for *(a)* London Underground running costs, *(b)* London Underground capital costs, *(c)* London Transport, *(d)* each of the rail operators and *(e)* Railtrack; and if he will make a statement. [6950]

Mr. Jamieson: With regard to *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)*, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by the then Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 24W.

With regard to *(d)*, I refer my hon. Friend to pages 102–103 of the Strategic Rail Authority Report 2000–01.

With regard to *(e)*, I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 9 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1315W.

Departmental Staff

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate total staff costs for his Department and its agencies by nation and region of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [6799]

Dr. Whitehead: I should like to refer to the existing publication "Civil Service Statistics 2000", published on 31 August 2001, specifically to Table G (page 46). This gives an overall figure of staff, by salary band as at 1 April 2000, for the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR(C)) and its agencies before the machinery of Government changes. A copy of this already resides in the House of Commons Library. I am unable to give a more detailed breakdown by region as the information is not held in this form. Following the machinery of Government changes we are budgeting for approximately £336.2m expenditure on staff costs for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR(C)) and its Agencies.

Area Cost Adjustment

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has for changing the area cost adjustment formula for local authorities. [8164]

Dr. Whitehead: We are looking at a range of options for the area cost adjustment as part of our current review of the grant distribution formulae. We are actively involving local government in this process. We have not yet reached conclusions on the best way forward, and the Government will consult widely before taking final decisions. Any change to the area cost adjustment would be implemented in the 2003–04 local government finance settlement.

Private Finance Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 19W, on PFI, what the average saving is under PFI contracts awarded; and in which projects his Department has identified mistakes in the calculation of the public sector comparator after a PFI contract has been signed. [8141]

Mr. Jamieson: PPP/PFI deals go ahead only where they demonstrate clear value for money against a public sector comparator. The last survey, which was carried out by Arthur Andersen and the LSE, identified 17 per cent. savings by PPPs against a conventional public sector procurement. However, specific information about savings in PFI contracts can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

London Underground

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects all London Underground trains to have air conditioning. [9115]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for London Underground Ltd. Installing air conditioning on the Underground would be highly challenging, as most of the network is over 100 years old and was not designed to accommodate the bulky equipment necessary. As well as work on trains, air conditioning would require equipping many stations. However, new technology is being explored and the case for air conditioning, or for other means to provide a better travelling environment, is being reviewed by London Underground. Until this work is completed it is not possible to announce a time scale for equipping trains with air conditioning. In the meantime, the modernisation contracts require all new and refurbished trains to have improved airflow and ventilation.

Best Value

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the number of building and maintenance departments of local authorities which have been externalised since the introduction of best value; if he will list the local authorities concerned and indicate *(a)* how many employees are involved (i) in each case and (ii) overall and *(b)* the name of the contractor who has taken over the delivery of those services in each case; and if he will make a statement. [9113]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not held centrally. Local authorities have to report the outcome of best value reviews in their Best Value Performance Plans, but no co-ordination of these references has taken place, either on building maintenance or on any other work. The Best Value Inspectorate of the Audit Commission will consider whether the outcome of any particular review is likely to represent best value.

Rail Projects

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects *(a)* Crossrail, *(b)* Thameslink 2000 and *(c)* the west coast main line to be completed. [8993]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government, with the Mayor and the Strategic Rail Authority, have commissioned project definition work on an east-west London rail link, often known as Crossrail. This is looking into possible routes and service patterns. At this stage it is too early to say when such a scheme, if it were to receive the necessary approvals, could be completed; the earliest date is late 2010.

The Thameslink 2000 proposal is dependent on powers being granted under the Transport and Works Act 1992. The public inquiry into the scheme finished earlier this year, and the Inspector's report is expected next spring. If the scheme is approved, the earliest date that it could be operational is late 2007.

At present, phase 1 of the west coast main line project is expected to be completed in 2002–3. Some elements of phase 2 of the project are dependent on powers being granted under the Transport and Works Act and are the subject of public inquiries. If powers are given for these elements of the project, the principal outputs of phase 2 could be completed in 2005, and the work could be fully completed by 2007. However, in recent discussions with Railtrack about its financial position, the company indicated that these dates are subject to some uncertainty.

Rail Modernisation

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recommendations he has received from the Strategic Rail Authority about the level of investment needed to modernise the rail network. [8995]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority are due to publish their Strategic Plan by the end of November. The Strategic Plan will set out their priorities for enhancement to the network.

Working Time Directive (Bus Drivers)

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he has issued to transport authorities regarding the safe number of hours for urban bus drivers to work without a break. [8671]

Mr. Jamieson: Most urban bus drivers are subject to the UK drivers' hours rules. These rules, including the break requirements, are explained in a guide book issued by my Department entitled "Drivers' Hours and Tachograph Rules for Road Passenger Vehicles in the UK and Europe (PSV375)" which can be obtained free of charge from the Area Offices of the Vehicle Inspectorate or downloaded from the Departmental website.

Central Trains

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the reliability and punctuality of train services between Worcester and Birmingham via Droitwich Spa; and if he will make a statement. [8985]

Mr. Jamieson: Performance statistics published by the Strategic Rail Authority show that 76.3 per cent. of Central Trains services arrived on time during the period 24 June to 21 July. This is a combined punctuality and reliability assessment. Services are deemed punctual if they arrived at their destination within five minutes of the timetable.

Greater London Authority

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with the Greater London Authority in the last six months regarding *(a)* the financial settlement for London and *(b)* the GLA precept on council tax; and if he will make a statement. [8954]

Mr. Byers: I and my ministerial colleagues have regular meetings with the Mayor to discuss many issues about London, including the financial settlement for the capital. The level of precept levied by the Greater London Authority is a matter for the Mayor and Assembly to discuss in their budget setting process.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation to license houses in multiple occupation. [8717]

Ms Keeble: The Government have a long-established commitment to legislate for the licensing of houses in multiple occupation. Our plans for legislation are well in hand following consultations on HMO licensing and a new Housing Health and Safety Rating System to replace the current fitness regime. We envisage that the proposed legislation will extend to the Selective Licensing of Landlords in areas of low housing demand—on which we have just issued a consultation document.

Local Government (Graduate Recruitment)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to encourage graduate recruitment in local government. [8637]

Dr. Whitehead: Local government plays a key role in delivering our public services, and the quality of its staff is critical to successful outcomes.

The DTLR provides funding and support for the Local Government Employers' Organisation (EO) and the Local Government National Training Organisation (LGNTO). These organisations provide a number of products aimed at recruiting graduates, including:

LG careers—a website which profiles many career areas, including those open to graduates;

LG jobs—a website advertising vacancies at over 60 per cent. of councils in the UK. The site has a dedicated graduate section;

LG graduates—a service generally promoting local government employment to students, and includes a popular TOP scheme which provides short summer term placements to undergraduates.

We will continue to work with local government to identify key skill shortages and ways of addressing them. The Government's forthcoming White Paper on local government will reflect our conclusions.

Public Drinking

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those local authorities which have byelaws which prohibit public drinking; how many interventions there have been by the police; and how many successful prosecutions arising from these interventions have been recorded in each of these local authority areas in each year since the introduction of the byelaw. [9108]

Dr. Whitehead: The local authorities that have bye-laws to regulate the consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated places are listed. Information as to police interventions or prosecutions is not held centrally.

Byelaws—consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated places (118 authorities have adopted the alcohol byelaw as at 8 August 2001)

Local authority	*Operative date of bye-law*
Alnwick district council	27 June 1998
Amber Valley borough council	11 May 2000
Barrow-in-Furness borough council	8 July 1998
Basingstoke and Deane borough council	1 October 1996
Bath city council	15 March 1991
Bedford borough council	15 July 1994
Berwick-upon-Tweed borough council	10 June 2000
Bodmin town council	5 May 1999
Bolton metropolitan borough council	2 August 1993
Bournemouth borough council	23 November 1995

Byelaws—consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated places (118 authorities have adopted the alcohol byelaw as at 8 August 2001)

Local authority	Operative date of bye-law
Blackpool borough council	1 June 1998
Blaenau Gwent county borough	6 June 1997
Breckland district council	14 January 2000
Brighton and Hove council	23 August 2001
Calderdale borough council	22 June 2001
Canterbury city council	1 February 1998
Caradon district council	4 August 1995
Caerphilly county borough council	9 November 1998
Carrick district council	30 December 1995
Cheltenham borough council	1 August 1994
Chester city council	26 April 1991
Conwy county borough council	28 June 1999
Corby district council	20 July 1992
Coventry city council	1 November 1990
Derby city council	7 August 1995
Devizes town council	14 February 1998
Dover district council	26 September 1999
Dunstable town council	20 October 1997
Easington district council	27 January 1998
	10 August 2001
East Devon district council	9 March 2000
	22 June 2001
Eden district council	31 August 2000
Edmundsbury borough council	22 December 1997
Exeter city council	1 April 1995
Falmouth town council	30 December 1995
Farringdon town council	6 March 2000
Gloucester city council	4 August 2000
Guildford borough council	9 April 2000
Halton borough council	1 March 2001
Hastings borough council	25 August 2000
Harlow district council	6 March 2000
Hart district council	2 March 1998
Hartlepool borough council	14 August 1995
Hereford city council	22 June 1992
Kennet district council	1 November 1996
Kerrier district council	30 October 2000
Kettering borough council	13 August 1999
Lancaster city council	12 May 2000
Leeds city council	18 May 2001
Liverpool city council	27 March 2000
	14 July 2000
London borough of Lambeth	1 February 1999
Ludlow town council	1 August 1994
Luton borough council	21 January 1999
Malvern Hills district council	26 March 1998
Manchester city council	4 August 2000
Market Lavington parish council	20 April 2000
Market Raisen town council	30 September 1996
Maulden parish council	19 June 1997
Melbourne parish council	8 July 1998
Mendip district council	24 August 1992
Newbury district council	5 February 1997
Newcastle city council	9 August 2001
Newport county borough council	3 November 1997
Nottingham city council	8 January 2000
North Cornwall district council	5 May 1999
North Devon district council	19 May 1997
North East Lincolnshire district council	6 October 1997
North Somerset council	29 October 1998
North Tyneside borough council	24 May 1993
North West Leicestershire district council	2 January 1998
North Yorkshire county council	7 August 1995
Norwich city council	16 December 1996
Pembury parish council	26 February 1998
Penwith district council	1 February 1994
Peterborough city council	15 January 1997
Plymouth, City of	1 December 1997
	13 June 2001
Pulloxhill parish council	18 November 2000

Byelaws—consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated places (118 authorities have adopted the alcohol byelaw as at 8 August 2001)

Local authority	Operative date of bye-law
Redcar and Cleveland borough council	18 December 1996
Redditch borough council	23 April 1997
Restormel borough council	18 March 1991
Rhondda Cynon Taf county borough council	21 January 1997
Rushmoor borough council	14 November 1991
Salisbury district council	1 July 1993
Scarborough borough council	12 March 1991
Sevenoaks town council	25 October 1993
Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council	16 February 2001
Somerton parish council	14 May 1999
South Bedfordshire district council	20 October 1997
South Derbyshire district council	1 August 1997
South Shropshire district council	29 July 1998
South Tyneside metropolitan borough council	29 July 1998
Southend-on-Sea borough council	26 June 1997
South Hams district council	24 August 1996
South Herefordshire district council	1 January 1998
South Shropshire district council	1 August 1994
South Lakeland district council	1 December 1996
Slough borough council	16 October 1999
Stockton-on-Tees borough council	30 May 1991
Stotfold town council	15 January 1998
St. Albans city council	30 May 1998
Suffolk coastal district	1 October 1997
Sunderland, City of	24 March 1997
Tameside metropolitan borough council	16 April 1999
Tamworth borough council	10 July 1998
Taunton Dean borough council	4 January 2000
Teignbridge district council	7 September 1992
Torbay district council	10 April 1995
Truro city council	30 December 1995
Tynedale district council	5 August 1999
Vale of White Horse district council	4 February 2000
Warwick district council	1 June 1995
West Wiltshire district council	17 December 1999
Weymouth and Portland borough council	5 June 2000
Windsor and Maidenhead, Royal Borough of	20 March 2001
Wirral, metropolitan borough of	3 December 1999
Woking borough council	29 May 1998
Worcester city council	17 May 1998
Wychavon district council	1 February 1997
Yarm town council	1 December 1995

Where two dates are shown against an authority's name, two separate alcohol byelaws are in operation in that authority's area.

Construction Industry Safety

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the impact on safety in the construction industry of the Safety Summit; if she will make a statement on progress and plans in this area; what priority the Government accords to improving construction safety; and if she will make a statement. [9114]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government remain committed to ensuring that the construction industry achieves a step change in its health and safety performance. At the Summit in February the industry adopted challenging targets to achieve this improvement, and through its various representative organisations published action plans to deliver those targets. At the Revitalising Heath and Safety in Construction Conference in London on 18 October the industry reviewed progress, and debated how to maintain the momentum of turning concern into

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

positive action. The Summit was always recognised as the start of a long process and this recent conference was one step along the way. It is too early to judge whether the undoubted activity taking place with action plans will achieve results in terms of the targets industry has set itself, but Ministers maintain an active interest and have asked to be kept informed of developments.

Antisocial Tenants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions officials have had with Nottingham city council to discuss the speeding up of the process for eviction of antisocial tenants; and if he will make a statement. [9473]

Ms Keeble: My officials met Nottingham city council on 11 October to discuss possible approaches for speeding up the process of eviction of antisocial tenants. As part of taking this area of work forward they are setting up similar discussions with other local authorities.

Heathrow

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department will publish the decision on the planning inquiry for Terminal 5 at Heathrow; and if he will make a statement. [9359]

Ms Keeble: The decision on the planning inquiry for Terminal 5 at Heathrow will be published as soon as possible, consistent with full and careful consideration of the Inquiry Inspector's Report, the results of the recent consultation on BAA's revised proposals for the diversion of two rivers around the proposed Terminal 5 site and other post-inquiry representations.

Local Government Ombudsman

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will extend the remit of the Local Government Ombudsman to cover parish and town councils. [9251]

Dr. Whitehead: We have no plans to bring parish councils within the jurisdiction of the Local Government Ombudsman. In the case of parish councils there is a direct line of accountability provided by the right of local electors to raise any concerns about the business or conduct of their parish council at the annual public meeting.

Cotswold Line

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the re-franchising of railway services operating on the Cotswold line between Oxford and Worcester. [9503]

Mr. Jamieson: Oxford-Worcester services are predominantly provided by Thames Trains. The current franchise is not due to expire until April 2004. On 16 July the Secretary of State asked the Strategic Rail Authority to consider how improvements for passengers could be secured within existing franchises, or by negotiating short extensions. The Strategic Rail Authority has reviewed its franchise replacement programme in light of that statement and will announce its plans as agreed with Ministers in due course.

Private Sector Housing Stock

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what initiatives he has taken to *(a)* renovate and *(b)* clear decaying private sector housing stock in (i) England and (ii) east Lancashire since 1997. [9388]

Ms Keeble: The responsibility for renovating or clearing decaying private sector housing lies primarily with local housing authorities. But in our Housing Policy Statement "The Way Forward for Housing", published last April, we set out a number of ways in which local housing authorities may make better use of their powers.

"The Way Forward for Housing" announced relaxations to the rules governing the declaration of renewal areas and group repair schemes. These came into force immediately. The Housing Policy Statement also set out major new changes to allow authorities far greater freedom in renovating or clearing private sector stock. Subject to parliamentary approval of an order under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001, local authorities will be given a new general power replacing the present detailed grant regimes. These reforms, planned to come into force in 2002, will broaden authorities' present loan-giving powers, enable payments to be made to third parties to lever in private finance, and enable help to be offered to people to move to a new home as an option to renovating their existing one.

These reforms are in addition to a wide range of regeneration programmes pursued by this Government, including the Single Regeneration Budget, the New Deal for Communities and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund which can be used for decaying private sector housing.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the royal prerogative for the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9372]

Dr. Whitehead: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised nor could it be practicable to do so.

South Central Rail Franchise

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects GoVia to take over the South Central rail franchise. [9066]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority announced the transfer of the South Central franchise to GoVia on 24 August. Negotiations are continuing between the two parties to put in place a new 20 year franchise as soon as possible.

GoVia

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what

assessment he made of the impact on the timetable and content of GoVia's recently awarded franchise and the timetable and content of GoVia's proposed new franchise of his decision on Railtrack before the announcements on its future. [9895]

Mr. Jamieson: The current condition of the rail network and the need for investment are clearly relevant to the future of the South Central franchise, and my right hon. Friend's announcement was intended to pave the way for those issues to be better addressed.

Airport Security

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the promotional material relating to airport security prepared by his Department, its predecessors or agencies offered for potential broadcast on TV, radio or in cinemas since 11 September, indicating which have been broadcast by whom and when and *(b)* programmes, companies and organisations which have refused to broadcast such material; and if he will make a statement. [9467]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* No such material has been offered for potential broadcast on TV, radio or in cinemas.

Area-based Initiatives

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the report he commissioned on the impact of the Government's area-based initiatives. [9856]

Ms Keeble: I anticipate the report on "Collaboration and co-ordination in area-based initiatives" will be published in mid to late December 2001.

Flight Paths (London)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the decision made after the events of 11 September to re-route flights away from central London. [8306]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* Following the tragic events in USA on 11 September, the Government took immediate steps to restrict flying over the United Kingdom as a precautionary measure while the new terrorist threat was evaluated. Two Restriction of Flying Orders were put in place. These measures were kept under constant review and as a consequence there was a gradual relaxation of restrictions. The first order banning all general aviation flying was lifted at midnight on Wednesday 12 September. The second order banning flights over central London was amended at midnight on 13 September to reduce the amount of London airspace restricted and enable London City airport to reopen (while still protecting central London including Canary wharf). Although this order lapsed at midnight on Saturday 16 September the Government continue to monitor the situation and stand ready to impose further restrictions should they become necessary.

Housing Capital Resources

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the responses to the consultation paper on development of the needs indices, used in the allocation of housing capital resources to local authorities and registered social landlords, will be published. [9903]

Mr. Byers: The responses received, which total around 80, are currently being analysed. They will be available for MPs and others to see when the announcement is made on how the proposals for changes to the needs indices will be taken forward. This announcement will be made shortly.

West Quay Road, Southampton

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many sets of traffic lights there were on West Quay road, Southampton, between Mountbatten way and Weston Esplanade in *(a)* October 2001 and *(b)* 1997 for (i) westbound and (ii) eastbound traffic; [9783]

(2) what the average journey time was for *(a)* westbound and *(b)* eastbound traffic on West Quay road, Southampton, between the Westen Docks entrance and Town Quay in *(a)* October 2001 and *(b)* October 1997; [9785]

(3) what assessment has been made of how the additional traffic lights in West Quay road, Southampton have contributed to improve traffic flows to and from destinations *(a)* in Southampton and *(b)* on the Isle of Wight; [9786]

(4) what volume of traffic was carried by West Quay road, Southampton *(a)* westbound and *(b)* eastbound in (i) October 2001 and in (ii) October 1997; [9784]

(5) what consultations took place with the Isle of Wight council before the *(a)* improvements to West Quay road, Southampton, and *(b)* approval by his predecessors of the most recent local plan for Southampton. [9907]

Ms Keeble: These are issues for Southampton city council to answer, as local planning authority and local transport authority. I have asked the council to write to the hon. Member. The Secretary of State does not approve local plans. They are adopted by the local planning authority, following a public inquiry. It is for local authorities preparing development plans to ensure they consult all those with an interest in the plan.

DEFENCE

RAF Personnel Management Agency

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive, RAF Personnel Management Agency for financial year 2001–02. [10240]

Mr. Ingram: Key Targets have been set for the RAF Personnel Management Agency for the financial year 2001–02 and are as follows.

Performance indicator	*Percentage Target*
Key Target 1: Peacetime Manning The percentage of available trained personnel either filling established posts or on diversions for which there is an approved Manning and Training Margin	93.0
Key Target 2: War, Crisis and MOD Authorised Unestablished Commitments The Percentage manning level of war, crisis and MOD authorised unestablished tasks	more than or equal to 98
Key Target 3: Career Management The percentage of PMA's customers who are either satisfied or not dissatisfied with the service provided by the PMA	80
Key Target 4: Manpower Planning Percentage variation between actual trained strength and the authorised trained strength taken as an average over the financial year	No greater than ±1
Key Target 5: Finance, Efficiency and Business Practice Containment of operating costs within resources allocated	Resource allocation not exceeded

Training Group Defence Agency

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the chief executive, Training Group Defence Agency for financial year 2001–02. [10241]

Mr. Ingram: Key Targets have been set for the chief executive of the Training Group Defence Agency for the financial year 2001–02 and are as follows.

	Target
Key Target 1: Training Output[1]	
KT1a: Quantity of Output (ab initio flying training)	
Fast Jet Pilots	65
Multi-Engine Pilots	57
Rotary Wing Pilots	33
Fast Jet Navigators	28
Multi-Engine Navigators	9
Rotary Wing Navigators	10
Airman Aircrew	104
KT1b: Quantity of Output (ab initio ground training)	
Officer Initial Specialist Training	273
RAF Tradesman Training	2,167
RAF Regiment Gunner Training	282
Key Target 2: Training Places[2]	
KT2a: Training Places (Flying)	
Flying Training Courses—RN	202
Flying Training Courses—Army	374
RAF Flying Instructor Courses	150
RAF Refresher and Orientation Courses	170
RAF Specialist and Operational Courses	240
Flying Training (F&C)	92
KT2b: Training Places (Ground)	
Pre-Employment Training	18,791
Career Development Training	7,106
Key Target 3: Quality of Output Satisfaction with the quality of graduate trainees as measured by the Agency's customer satisfaction matrix:	
Reports from the Aircrew Training Standards Sub-Committees Quantitative reports from the Owners' Customer Advisory Committee Quantitative reports on the satisfaction level of graduate trainees	Satisfactory rating
Key Target 4: Cost Management Output based management	Deliver an Agency wide prototype of the planned financial management and accounting system
Key Target 5: Efficiency	
KT5a—Efficiency Index	Deliver an Agency wide prototype of the planned financial management and accounting system to include efficiency
KT5b—Efficiency Savings	Deliver the savings (£4.399 million) that accrue from planned efficiencies

[1] The number of RAF trainees who graduate

[2] The number of training course places provided

Nuclear Waste

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantities of intermediate and low level nuclear waste are stored at *(a)* HMNB Clyde Faslane, *(b)* the Rosyth Royal Naval Base, *(c)* Dounreay and *(d)* the Chapelcross Tritium Processing Plant. [9199]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Quantities of intermediate and low level radioactive waste currently stored at HMNB Clyde; Rosyth Dockyard (a nuclear licensed site operated by Babcock Rosyth Defence Ltd.); the Vulcan Naval Reactor Test Establishment, Dounreay; and the Chapel Cross Tritium Processing Plant are as follows:

	Quantity
Intermediate level waste	
HMNB Clyde	nil
Rosyth Dockyard	38.86m³
Vulcan NRTE, Dounreay	5.06m³
Chapel Cross Tritium Process Plant	11.14m³
Low level waste	
HMNB Clyde	16m³
Rosyth Dockyard	74m³
Vulcan NRTE, Dounreay	nil
Chapel Cross Tritium Processing Plant	32.26m³

Full details of MOD radioactive waste are published in the NIREX United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory which is available through their website www.nirex.co.uk. The 2001 inventory is currently being compiled and is expected to be published in spring next year.

Chemical and Biological Attacks (Contingency Plans)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what recent representations he has received regarding the availability and adequacy of assistance being afforded to the NHS by his Department in respect of preparations to deal with a chemical or biological attack; [9539]

(2) what recent assistance has been sought by the NHS from his Department in order to prepare for a chemical or biological attack; [9542]

(3) what assistance and expertise is being afforded to the NHS concerning preparations to treat victims of chemical and biological attack. [9540]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* I am not aware of any representations specifically on the issue of availability and adequacy of assistance being afforded to the NHS by my Department regarding preparations to deal with a chemical or biological attack.

To date, there have been no chemical or biological attacks on the UK although a number of suspect packages have been identified. The Department of Health (DoH) has responsibility for the effect on public health of any attack, should it occur. The Ministry of Defence continues to work closely with the DoH and other Government Departments and agencies, all of whom would contribute advice and expertise to any response to a chemical or biological attack or the consequent management of such an attack.

The DoH is fully aware of the capabilities and resources on which it could draw, from within the MOD and other Government Departments, should it be necessary. The exact nature of the Ministry of Defence contribution in response to a chemical or biological attack would be dependent upon the particular situation at the time.

Territorial Army

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* strength is of each Territorial Infantry Battalion; and if he will make a statement. [R] [9673]

Dr. Moonie: The latest available official figures as at 1 July show the establishment and strength of each Territorial Army Infantry Battalion as follows:

Territorial Army Infantry Battalion	*Establishment*	*Strength*
51 Highland Regiment	637	724
52 Lowland Regiment	454	436
3 Prince of Wales Royal Regiment	358	345
Royal Rifle Volunteers	455	462
London Regiment	612	606
Lancastrian and Cumbrian Volunteers	422	421
Tyne Tees Regiment	553	632
West Midlands Regiment	550	499
Kings and Cheshire Regiment	454	464
East of England Regiment	549	649
Rifle Volunteers	550	548
East and West Riding Regiment	519	538
Royal Welsh Regiment	457	413
Rangers	240	230
4 Parachute Regiment	324	454

The hon. Member will note that the strength figures are healthy—matching or exceeding the establishment in more than half of the battalions.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if soldiers in the Territorial Army are designated casual workers in respect of pension entitlement. [R] [9391]

Dr. Moonie: The term "casual workers" is not used by the armed forces, and soldiers in the Territorial Army (TA) have not been formally designated as such. However, members of the TA are not eligible for membership of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme because of the terms of their employment. In the part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 service in the TA (as set out under sections 22 and 27 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996) is specifically excluded.

None the less, since 8 October 2001 members of the TA have had the option of joining the Armed Forces Stakeholder Pension Plan. The Ministry of Defence has designated Scottish Widows plc to provide this facility to all eligible members of the armed forces. MOD and Scottish Widows are involved in an exercise to inform all members of the armed forces of this new facility.

Armed Forces (Overstretch)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support he will provide to the armed forces so that they do not suffer from overstretch. [8423]

Mr. Ingram: We remain determined to balance operational commitments. We will commit personnel to operations for no longer than is necessary to achieve the military aim. Recent operations in Macedonia demonstrated this well. We are introducing systems to monitor the amount of separated service undertaken by each individual in the armed forces which will help us to target our efforts on the most hard-pressed branches and trades. For operations overseas, a new and comprehensive package of welfare support was introduced worldwide in April 2001.

Biological Warfare

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the threat from the use of genetically modified organisms for biological warfare purposes. [8623]

Mr. Hoon: We continuously monitor all threats to the UK and our armed forces. We judge there is currently no specific threat from biological warfare using genetically modified organisms. We are, of course, aware that biological warfare agents can be modified by methods such as genetic manipulation; such factors are taken into account in formulating our approach to biological defence.

Otterburn

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Otterburn public inquiry report; and when the approvals for the future development of the training area will be given. [9269]

Mr. Ingram: I welcome the announcement of 4 October 2001 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) that he is minded to agree the development of Otterburn Training Area.

We have now examined the detail of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's letter and the report and are content with them. We have therefore responded accordingly to the Government Office for the North East.

Retirement Ages

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce the outcome of the review of his Department's retirement age policy. [9648]

Dr. Moonie: We expect to conclude our review and make an announcement about its outcome before Christmas.

Afghanistan

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the possible uses of depleted uranium in respect of British Forces' engagements in the conflict in Afghanistan. [8238]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* No British forces currently engaged in operations around Afghanistan are armed with depleted uranium ammunition. However, we do not rule out the use of depleted uranium ammunition in Afghanistan, should its penetrative capability be judged necessary in the future.

US Domestic Preparedness Programme

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with US counterparts regarding the implementation and capability of the US Domestic Preparedness Programme. [R] [9670]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence has, for a number of years, actively engaged with the US Administration on all aspects of homeland security. Following the events of September 11, we have continued our regular dialogue and have made clear that we stand ready to assist should the US require our help.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Integrated Inquiry Service

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the future of the integrated inquiry service; how much has been spent on the system; and if he will make a statement. [7475]

Malcolm Wicks: The integrated inquiry service project was established to examine the feasibility of providing local authorities which administer housing benefit with wider access to the Department's benefit data. This would build on the existing data available through remote access terminals linking local authorities to the Department systems. Our aim is to speed up the processing of claims and improve customer service by reducing authorities' dependence on clerical processes.

A software application was developed by the project and tested in seven local authorities at an estimated cost of £800,000. An evaluation of these trials showed that there remained substantial technical problems to overcome before the tested application could satisfy the Department's and local authorities' business requirements. No assured solutions to these problems could be identified and we have therefore closed the project.

We have commissioned a study to explore the feasibility of an alternative solution.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the relative sales of *(a)* stakeholder pensions and *(b)* personal pensions in the first quarter of this financial year; and if he will make a statement. [8965]

Mr. McCartney: Figures from the Association of British Insurers show that 535,000 single premium and regular premium pensions were sold in the April-June quarter of 2001, of which over 200,000 were stakeholder pensions. The volume of regular premium pensions sold represented an increase of 55 per cent. over the same period last year, and the volume of single premium pensions sold represented an increase of 192 per cent. over the same period last year.

Initial indications are that stakeholder pensions have made an encouraging start and that they are also helping to increase the overall coverage of private pensions provision, but it will be some time before the impact becomes clear.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the royal prerogative for the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9365]

Mr. Darling: Records are not kept of individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised nor could it be practicable to do so.

Pension Funds

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the comparative values of pension funds of typical 60-year-old males each year since 1997, in cash and real terms. [9950]

Mr. McCartney: There are no available data on comparative values of pension funds of 'typical' 60-year-old males.

Benefit Fraud

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Blyth Valley district council. [10553]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report was published today in respect of Blyth Valley district council and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The BFI first inspected Blyth Valley district council in October 1999 and found significant weaknesses in the administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefit and counter fraud work. At its follow-up inspection, in April 2001, inspectors confirmed substantial improvements, with progress and developments in the vast majority of areas.

The report notes that through the commitment and enthusiasm of members, managers and staff, the council has achieved a significant improvement in performance in combating fraud and error. This is highlighted by the fact that 42 of the 44 recommendations from the first report have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented.

Inspectors consider that benefits administration and overpayment recovery now has the necessary resources and management information in place to enable the council to deliver an effective service, while the implementation of a comprehensive checking regime has enabled the council to identify and focus on priority issues and proactively manage its operations.

The council has addressed the main issues identified in BFI's first report concerning its counter fraud activities. However, BFI considers it has focused too heavily on claiming Weekly Benefit Savings. It is now moving to a more sanction and deterrence based operation. As its Weekly Benefit Savings claims are fairly accurate, inspectors conclude there is a sound basis for this move, which will ensure the council provides a value-for-money deterrent to fraud.

Blyth Valley is an excellent example of an authority responding positively and effectively to weaknesses identified by the BFI and thus providing a more secure and accurate benefits service to its community

The report makes recommendations to help the council address remaining weaknesses and to further improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as its counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Kerrier district council. [10552]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report was published today in respect of Kerrier district council and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

During the inspection the council was implementing a new management structure and inspectors found a positive improvement in performance as a result. At the time of inspection, BFI found the longstanding backlog of work was significantly reduced.

The report notes the standard of evidence in support of claims was variable. The council has now introduced the Verification Framework, which should address some of the previous weaknesses but inspectors consider management checking needs to be improved to underpin this.

Inspectors report that the council failed to make payments of benefit on account where this was required and consider that improvements need to be made in the risk management of Housing Benefit claims, including the use of shorter benefit periods.

BFI found evidence of improved performance in the work being carried out by fraud staff including tighter systems and management controls of investigation work. Inspectors found the council had implemented new procedures and set up a dedicated team resulting in high levels of overpayment recovery.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as its counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of the Royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea. [10554]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report in respect of the Royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea was published on 21 August 2001 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

BFI inspectors consider the standard of customer service provided by the council to those claiming benefit to be very good. Efforts are made to ensure that those

who may be able to claim are identified and the council deals quickly with benefit callers. A customer satisfaction survey in July 2000 revealed an overall level of satisfaction of 82 per cent.

Inspectors found no backlogs of work with 95 per cent. of claims paid within the timescale required by legislation. The BFI report notes that there is a high level of payment accuracy. The council is introducing the Verification Framework in stages to avoid a negative impact on performance.

The report notes that the effectiveness of the management checks could be further improved if extended to cover all aspects of benefit processing.

A number of weaknesses in the management and investigation of fraud work were identified by inspectors, but the report notes the council has recently taken steps to address these and has a good record of applying sanctions to those committing fraud.

The BFI's report includes recommendations to help the council further improve its administration and counter fraud activity for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of the borough of Broxbourne. [10555]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report in respect of the borough of Broxbourne was published on 26 July 2001 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

BFI's first inspection of the borough of Broxbourne in March 1998 found significant weaknesses in the administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefit and counter fraud work. The follow-up inspection, in October 2000, confirmed substantial progress and developments in many areas of work, although inspectors also found scope for further improvement.

Inspectors consider the council's implementation of the Verification Framework has been comprehensive. BFI found the council improved public access to benefits information and assistance, and now has effective joint working with BA. The report notes, however, that the previous problems of backlogs of work and slow processing were still in evidence.

Inspectors found that the council's IT system did not provide adequate information on the management of overpayments; however, the report does note that the council has made substantial progress in its administration of overpayments since the first BFI inspection.

The report makes particular mention of the council's strong focus of counter fraud work on the quality of investigation and sanctions.

Inspectors consider that the council has sufficient systems in place to ensure the effectiveness and quality of the housing benefit and council tax benefit administration and counter fraud work. The previous lack of monitoring of the contractor has improved and inspectors conclude the council now has effective monitoring mechanisms in place.

The report notes that since the BFI's last inspection, Members have been taking a close interest in the progress of the Housing Benefit section.

The BFI's report includes recommendations to help the council further improve its administration and counter fraud activity for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Three Rivers district council. [10551]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report in respect of Three Rivers district council was published on 23 August 2001 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The BFI report notes the council has been working towards meeting the standards of the Verification Framework since February 2000. BFI found that some areas of verification of claims were good, although inspectors identified other areas that needed improvement.

The BFI report notes the council's counter fraud activity is effective, with a well-resourced fraud team. As a result, it is able to produce high quality investigations. In contrast, the housing benefit team does not have enough staff to meet customer expectations.

Inspectors consider that the introduction of the Customer Services Centre did not help the performance of the Housing Benefit team as anticipated. The team is also hindered by poor management information.

The council has taken steps to improve overpayments collection by utilising the debtors' module of its benefits system.

Overall BFI concludes that the council have done much to eradicate fraud, but needs to improve the verification of claims and recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments. The council is planning to address a number of the weaknesses identified in the report and demonstrated its commitment to improve the administration of HB and CTB in Three Rivers district council.

The BFI's report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration and counter fraud activity of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of East Lothian council. [10549]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report in respect of the East Lothian council was published on 18 September 2001 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library. This is the second report on East Lothian council by BFI.

The BFI expressed major concern with the lack of demonstrable commitment at senior manager level to address issues highlighted by the first BFI inspection. Relatively few of the major recommendations from the first inspection had been fully implemented in areas such as the provision of management information, system security and overpayment recovery where long standing weaknesses were identified.

The report finds the council had made little or no attempt to tackle serious shortcomings in benefit administration. Inspectors found that it was extremely difficult to assess performance in benefit administration and overpayment management because the council was unable to provide any reliable data for the previous two financial years. Additionally, the BFI was particularly concerned that a number of matters which had been reported to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (formerly Department of Social Security) as having been addressed were still found to be problematical. In particular, the report finds little evidence of sustained improvement in the council's strategic and operational management.

The report recognises that some definite improvements have been made in areas such as day-to-day claims processing and fraud investigation. Also there is praise for the commitment of front line staff.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as its counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of the London borough of Haringey. [10548]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report in respect of the London borough of Haringey was published on 18 September 2001 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Inspectors report that the council has made considerable improvements in many areas, particularly in re-designing processes to improve performance. Quality improvements have been less dramatic and the report recommends that the council should now focus on these areas to make further gains in the effectiveness and security of its service.

The speed of processing new claims was found to be very good but weaknesses in verifying evidence were identified and a similar pattern was found with renewal claims.

The council's counter-fraud efforts are meeting with some success but inspectors consider further work is needed in controlling and recovering over-payments. The council had over £15 million in benefit over-payment debt which, at the time of the inspectors' visit, was continuing to rise. The report notes that there was evidence that serious efforts were being made to recover this. The Report makes recommendations that, when implemented, will strengthen these.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as its counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of the London borough of Bromley. [10547]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report in respect of the London borough of Bromley was published on 12 September 2001 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Inspectors report variable standards of claim verification and identify improvements needed in this area and on the speed of processing claims. The report recommends more rigorous management and controls to improve the quality and consistency of checking and to ensure that guidance is followed.

The report notes that the council has a strong culture of probity at officer and Member level and that it recognises the need to draw together existing policies on probity into a single fraud and corruption policy. The BFI's findings show that Bromley's performance in tackling fraud was found to be ineffective in its organisation and investigation quality. A number of recommendations to tackle this are contained within the report.

The report notes the council welcomed the inspection as an opportunity to review and improve its benefit operations. The council has expressed its commitment to improving the security and integrity of the benefits system and modernising all its services using e-government.

Since the inspection, Bromley has begun to implement recommended changes, such as increasing staffing in the client unit. Full implementation of the recommendations contained in the report should enable it to build a more secure and efficient benefits system.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as its counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate into the Benefits Agency's closer working arrangements with local authorities. [10550]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report in respect of the Benefits Agency (BA) was published on 28 September 2001 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Inspectors report that their investigation took place at a time when significant changes were taking place in the organisation with the start of a major project to focus substantial resources on supporting the frontline delivery of services to customers. There was also a great deal of work underway to develop and improve the relationship with local authorities.

BFI found areas where the BA needed to make improvements in order to ensure benefit payments were free from fraud and error. These include training BA staff in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit issues, improving the recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments, and better checking of identities and more effective exchange of information with local authority counter fraud staff.

Inspectors consider there needs to be a higher profile on closer working with local authorities within BA.

The report notes that changes made in BA should have a positive impact on counter fraud activity, especially the appointment of a Chief Investigation Officer and Head of Profession for counter fraud activity. The appointments should lead to a clearer strategic direction and raise the profile of closer working on counter fraud.

Inspectors also consider the introduction of BA's Performance Improvement Action Teams to support equalisation of performance amongst BA offices should also have a positive impact on several of the areas of weakness identified in the report.

We are determined that we take every measure to bear down on fraud and error and we want to ensure that the work of the best is duplicated right through the organisation.

The report makes 49 recommendations to help the Benefits Agency address weaknesses and to improve its closer working arrangements with local authorities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the Agency for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to enhance the role of regional development agencies. [9619]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is continuing the process of enhancement of the RDAs started last year with the announcement of additional funding, more spending flexibility and a stronger economic focus. Implementation culminates on 1 April 2002 when the RDAs' existing programmes are brought together into a single, broader and more flexible programme managed through testing outcome and output targets.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what decisions she has made about the future membership of the boards of the regional development agencies outside London. [10239]

Alan Johnson: I have decided to implement a rolling programme of appointments to avoid a situation in future where all board appointments end on a common date. In order to achieve this I have re-appointed around two thirds of the membership of each board for periods of one, two or three years and asked one third of board members to stand down. I have also taken steps to ensure that business representation is strengthened on the boards. I have placed details of re-appointments in the Library of both Houses. Interviews are now being held in each region to find new members who will be appointed for a period of three years.

Decisions on re-appointments have been made following consultations with RDA chairmen and key national and regional players. A similar consultation exercise will be undertaken before new appointments are made.

Broadband Networks

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on which areas of the United Kingdom do not have access to broadband technologies. [9277]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* Broadband services via leased line or satellite are widely available around the country. Around 66 per cent. of the population are able to access cable, ADSL or wireless technologies. A geographical breakdown can be found in "UK Online: the broadband future", published in February 2001.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans have been put forward by *(a)* the Scottish Executive, *(b)* the Welsh Assembly and *(c)* regional development agencies for the fund designed to develop innovative schemes to extend broadband networks. [9278]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The devolved Administrations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, plus the English regional development agencies, are all in the process of developing action plans for the £30 million fund, consulting with the Government and local stakeholders. The plans will be announced in due course.

Marconi Transmission Centenary

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans his Department has made to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first successful wireless transmission across the Atlantic ocean to the Americas. [8714]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* There are a number of celebratory events planned to commemorate the sending of the first transatlantic wireless transmission that was made on 12 December 1901 from Poldhu in Cornwall to St. John's in Newfoundland, by Guglielmo Marconi. The Government fully back these events, and have been in regular contact with those involved to assist with the arrangements. We have been instrumental in securing agreement from Her

Majesty The Queen that she will send a commemorative message, which will be transmitted by amateur radio between Poldhu and St. John's on 12 December using equipment donated by the Radiocommunications Agency. The Radiocommunications Agency has also produced a booklet, "100 Years of Radio 1901–2001", commemorating the achievement, highlighting developments in radio during the subsequent 100 years, including the agency's contribution to those developments.

Post Office Closures (Sussex)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* Crown post offices and *(b)* sub-post offices have closed in Sussex in each of the last 10 years. [9769]

Mr. Alexander: I understand from Consignia that data on the post office network are not held on a county basis.

Ilisu Dam

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to make a decision on the Ilisu Dam project. [8309]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* No date has been set for a decision regarding ECGD support for the Ilisu Dam project.

ECGD has commissioned consultants' reports on the environmental impact assessment report on the Ilisu Dam project and also on the resettlement action plan. These reports are being studied, together with the comments received from non-governmental organisations and the public. The reports and the comments received will be the subject of discussion with other interested Government Departments, in particular the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport prior to any decision being taken regarding ECGD support.

Business Recovery Fund

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance is available to businesses eligible for grants from the business recovery fund once the regional development agencies have utilised the initial funding made available. [7802]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a £24 million extension to the business recovery fund on 18 October 2001. This will enable RDAs to help hard hit but viable rural businesses in the worst affected areas survive the difficult autumn and winter period by helping eligible small businesses to adapt, restructure, access new markets and invest as part of a business recovery plan.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Financial Reporting

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals she has for introducing consistent financial reporting in the light of responses to the consultation issued by her Department on 30 March. [10238]

Mr. Timms: A consistent financial reporting framework for schools shall be introduced from April 2002, as proposed in the consultation document. The consistent financial reporting framework, and guidance on the headings in the framework, is available on the Department's value for money website. A summary of consultation responses has been placed in the Library.

Higher Education

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students were *(a)* entered and *(b)* completed higher education courses in each year since 1996. [6107]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 16 October 2001]:* The information requested is given in the following table. It is not possible to calculate completion rates from these figures because of the inclusion of part-time courses, which have variable course lengths. The latest figures published by HEFCE estimate that only 17 per cent. of students who started full-time first degree courses in the UK in 1997–98 will not obtain a qualification.

In 2000, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a table comparing estimates of non-completion rates in member countries. They showed an average of around a third of university students failing to complete their courses in OECD countries. The UK had the second lowest non-completion rate among the 30 OECD countries.

Higher Education Students[1] in the UK

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*[2]
Entrants[3]					
Postgraduate	172.7	180.9	189.4	197.9	198.6
Undergraduate	541.9	553.7	549.5	564.8	597.0
Completers[4]					
Postgraduate	105.5	110.5	115.0	116.7	122.7
Undergraduate	312.7	321.4	322.6	331.9	337.8

[1] Includes UK domiciled and overseas students, full-time and part-time, including the Open University.
[2] Provisional.
[3] Based on a census count as at 1 December.
[4] Those gaining a qualification during the academic year.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students were participating in higher education in each year since 1990, broken down by social class. [9589]

Margaret Hodge: The available information on the social class of higher education students, as given in the following table, covers only those who apply to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and its predecessor organisations, the Universities Central Council for Admissions (UCCA) and the Polytechnic and Colleges Admissions Service (PCAS); data on the family background of students on postgraduate or part-time courses are not held centrally. Comparable figures for students entering in autumn 2001 will be released by UCAS in December.

UK domiciled accepted applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses in the UK

Thousand

Social class	*Year of entry*									
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
I Professional	26.5	35.5	37.0	37.6	38.7	39.3	39.6	38.5	38.9	38.8
II Intermediate	78.9	90.1	96.7	101.1	103.4	105.0	117.4	115.6	115.7	117.7
IIIN Skilled non-manual	19.7	25.7	28.1	29.7	30.3	31.3	37.3	35.6	36.3	37.8
IIIM Skilled manual	23.3	33.9	39.3	40.4	42.5	40.9	44.8	44.2	44.5	44.4
IV Partly skilled	12.7	15.8	17.4	18.6	19.8	19.9	23.5	22.7	23.1	24.2
V Unskilled	2.1	3.6	4.3	4.5	5.0	4.9	5.6	5.3	5.5	5.5
Unknown	37.9	39.0	35.2	19.4	25.8	27.1	35.0	36.3	39.1	40.3
Total	201.2	243.6	258.1	251.3	265.5	268.3	303.3	298.2	303.1	308.7

Source:
UCAS for the years 1994 to 2000, UCCA and PCAS for previous years. 1991 was the first year in which both UCCA and PCAS collected social class data

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students have dropped out of *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time higher education course in each year since 1990. [9590]

Margaret Hodge: The available information on non-completion rates are taken from the latest "Performance Indicators in Higher Education" published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency for England, which gives overall non-completion rates for students starting full-time first degree courses in the UK as follows:

Percentage

Students starting courses in	*Non-completion rate*
1997–98	17
1996–97	18

Non-completion rates for earlier years were calculated and published by the Department and are shown in the following table. These figures also cover students on full-time first degree courses but the methodology and institutional coverage used by the Department was different to that used by HEFCE, so the two sets of figures are not directly comparable. Neither HEFCE nor the Department have calculated non-completion rates for students on part-time courses. Non-completion rates for part-time courses are intrinsically more difficult to calculate because part-time students can take many years to complete their course.

Percentage

Students starting courses in	*Non-completion rate*
1995–96[1]	18–19
1994–95[1]	17–18
1993–94[1]	17–18
1992–93	17
1991–92	17
1990–91	13

[1] A range is given for these years because the introduction of a new data source in 1994–95 made it difficult to measure non-completion, as it was then calculated, accurately

In 2000, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a table comparing estimates of non-completion rates in member countries. They showed an average of around a third of university students did not complete their course in OECD countries. The UK had the second lowest non-completion rate among the 30 OECD countries.

Post-16 Education

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the relationship is between the Learning and Skills Council and local authorities in the provision of post-16 education, with particular reference to *(a)* North Yorkshire county council and *(b)* City of York council. [8152]

Margaret Hodge: Local authorities are key partners of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). A local LSC must prepare a plan for each of its financial years, and, in so doing, must consult the local authorities (including local education authorities) within its area. The local LSC must also have regard to the local authorities' strategies for the promotion of economic, social and environmental well-being. Local LSCs must also have members who understand the needs of local communities through local authority experience, either as elected members or in an official capacity. In most cases both local authority members and officials already sit on local LSC boards.

Each local LSC is responsible for approving the Adult Learning Plans provided by each local authority. These are then subject to national moderation. These Plans outline what each local authority will do with the funding provided by the local LSC in the provision of vocational and non-vocational education and training in the local area.

Local LSCs will, from April 2002, be responsible for funding local education authorities for their sixth-form provision, including new LEA-maintained 16 to 19 institutions. Those funds must be passed on to the relevant schools in full.

I can confirm that these arrangements apply to the North Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council in its relationships with the North Yorkshire county council and the York city council.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the mechanism by which Learning and Skills Councils are accountable to the local community. [8628]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council has been established to provide effective planning and funding of post-16 learning, focusing on individual, employer and community needs at national and local level. Local LSCs are accountable for delivery to their boards, whose members represent a broad cross-section of local interests. Local LSCs must have members who understand the needs of local communities through local authority experience, either as elected members or in an official capacity. In most cases both local authority members and officials already sit on local LSC boards. And when developing their strategic plans, local LSCs are required to consult with a wide range of local partners.

Tuition Fees

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she intends to respond to the recommendations of the Rees report to abolish student tuition fees; and if she will make a statement; [8645]

(2) what plans she has to take the conclusions of the Rees report on student finance into consideration in the Government's review of student finance; and if she will make a statement. [8646]

Margaret Hodge: I discussed the recommendations of the report with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning at the National Assembly for Wales during the summer. We have since announced a review of student funding arrangements in England and Wales, which will consider specifically the balance between state funding and the contributions made by students and their families.

It is for the National Assembly for Wales to respond to the recommendations in the report addressed to them.

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by her Department during the summer recess. [9234]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* During the summer recess the Department issued the following:

(a) 42 press notices;

(b) 16 consultation documents.

Copies of the press notices and consultation documents can be found on the DfES website www.dfes.gov.uk.

Failing LEAs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the value was, for each local education authority found to be failing by OFSTED, of additional payments from her Department to assist improvement of local education authority management in the last 12 months. [9908]

Mr. Timms: Between October 2000 and September 2001, the Department for Education and Skills has paid the following authorities the amounts shown as part of its response to an adverse report by OFSTED which resulted in formal DfES intervention.

£

	[1]Amount
Bradford	680,419
Bristol	117,886
Calderdale	528
Derby	48,997
Dudley	66,390
Hackney	115,398
Haringey	721,773
Islington	202,021
Leeds	1,509,584
Leicester City	372,728
Liverpool	12,805
Redbridge	67,360
Rochdale	187,144
Rotherham	388,075
Sheffield	–22,222
South Tyneside	184,475
Southwark	744,804
Walsall	310,653
Waltham Forest	561,444

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest pound

The payments relate to work such as specialist advice and interim managers sought to support the authorities during the intervention process. The cost of individual contracts for intervention work is commercial in confidence.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Properties

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number, value and location of properties newly leased in each of the last five years by his Department, including and distinguishing between the Department itself, its next step agencies and its non-departmental public bodies, differentiating between purchases made as a result of the creation of new bodies and those purchases made by established bodies. [7814]

Mr. MacShane: The only property newly leased by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the last five years is one floor of 89 Albert Embankment, London. The lease started in June 2000 and the annual rent is £274,069.

For NDPBs, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy leased new offices at 125 Pall Mall in June 1999, rent £40,000 per year; the Britain-Russia Centre leased new offices at 9 Elms Lane, Vauxhall in July 1998. rent £64,000 per year; and the British Association for Central and Eastern Europe leased new offices at 10 Westminster Palace Gardens in September 2000, rent £24,700 per year.

Security Council

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary-General of the UN concerning the timetable for reconfiguring the Security Council to allow for regional representation. [9387]

Peter Hain: The timetable for reform has not featured in recent discussions between Ministers and the UN Secretary-General and in any case is not the responsibility of the Secretary-General, but that of the UN General Assembly. In the General Assembly, we have continued

to press for expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent categories of membership, including new permanent seats for Japan, Germany and each of the regions of Asia, Latin America and Africa.

While we believe the Security Council should be made more representative of the diversity of UN membership, it already contains members drawn from all of the UN's regional/electoral groups. Article 23 of the Charter of the United Nations lists equitable geographical distribution among the factors to be considered in the election of non-permanent members.

Correspondence

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what departmental guidance is issued relating to maximum times for responding to hon. Members' correspondence by Ministers. [9250]

Mr. Straw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office follows the Cabinet Office good practice guide for handling correspondence for Members. The current target time for the FCO to reply to Members is 20 working days, as agreed with the Cabinet Office.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to President Mugabe to dissuade him from calling a state of emergency. [9435]

Mr. Bradshaw: There is no indication at present that President Mugabe intends to call a state of emergency. We continue to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to take the necessary steps to restore political and economic stability, to respect human rights and the rule of law, and to create an environment conducive to free and fair elections.

Afghanistan

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the impact on relations with *(a)* Saudi Arabia and *(b)* Pakistan of the bombing of Afghanistan. [9260]

Mr. Bradshaw: Saudi Arabia was quick to condemn the 11 September terrorist attacks in the US. It fully supports the international campaign against terrorism. Crown Prince Abdullah most recently reiterated this to the Prime Minister on 9 October. Saudi Arabia remains a close ally in the region and a long-standing friend of the UK.

We also applaud Pakistan's decision to back international action against terrorism. We have underlined that the campaign in Afghanistan is against terror and not against Islam or the Afghan people. We recognise that this reassurance is important to Pakistan. Pakistan is a valuable ally. Its decision to support the coalition has served to strengthen our bilateral relationship.

Pakistan

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the internal stability of Pakistan. [9261]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are aware that there have been demonstrations in Pakistan against coalition action in Afghanistan. However, when seen in the context of Pakistan's total (largely peaceful) population, we do not believe the recent disturbances pose a serious threat to Pakistan's internal stability.

Burma

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent changes there have been to the EU Common Position on Burma. [10371]

Mr. Bradshaw: Changes in Burma in the past nine months give grounds for cautious optimism, but the rapprochement between the regime and the domestic opposition remains fragile and reversible. Until Burma is firmly embarked on a return to constitutional, democratic rule it would not be appropriate to suspend or remove the core elements of the EU Common Position. The General Affairs Council of 8 October therefore decided to renew the Common Position for a further six months. The core elements of the Common Position are to remain unchanged, with the addition of required legal clarification that enables EU member states to fulfil their UN obligations by allowing Burmese Ministers to attend UN conferences in the EU.

However, in recognition of the progress achieved to date and in expectation of further positive developments, the EU Council Conclusions on 8 October set out a modest first package of positive measures. We stand ready to consider what further measures might be appropriate if change in Burma accelerates significantly. Conversely, if progress were to stall or fail, UK/EU policy would need to be tightened again.

TREASURY

Inheritance Tax

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to mitigate the impact of inheritance tax on those estates which are predominantly comprised of the value of the deceased's family home. [8681]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Even where property represents a high proportion of the total value, most estates also have sufficient liquid assets to satisfy all the inheritance tax which may be due. Executors can nevertheless defer payment of tax when a former home has not been sold by the time the tax on it would otherwise be due, if necessary by making instalments over as long as 10 years. Most eligible estates start in this way, but the overwhelming majority settle their tax before the 10 years is up, usually because the home is no longer in family use and has been sold.

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9223]

Ruth Kelly: From 23 July until 12 October 2001, 25 press notices and a statement by the Chancellor were released by HM Treasury, or by the Treasury in conjunction with another Government Department. During the same time period the Treasury released three consultation documents on its public website.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional cost has been factored into the 10 year transport plan to take account of the aggregates tax. [8854]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Any additional costs for transport infrastructure projects due to the Aggregates Levy were not identified in 10 Year Plan for Transport. However in appraising individual projects that are taken forward as part of the Plan, any such additional costs could be identified.

British Waterways

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the ability of British Waterways to have some flexibility to borrow from the private sector. [8591]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Borrowing from the private sector is normally more expensive than finance raised directly by Government. Therefore, on value for money grounds, all borrowing by British Waterways should normally be transacted through the National Loans Fund. The exception is PPPs in which value for money is achieved by transferring risk to the private sector.

Married Couples Allowance

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the abolition of the married couples allowance will affect families whose joint taxable income falls short of the personal allowance figure, but just over the point where tax is levied. [8201]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* If a family's joint income is less than £4,535 (the personal allowance), the couple will pay no tax.

Fiscal Variations

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for how long discussions have been continuing with the National Assembly for Wales on fiscal variations; what recent discussions have been held on the subject; and when he will announce conclusions. [9846]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor has discussions from time to time on a number of issues relating to the National Assembly for Wales. The Government announced in the 2000 spending review additional Objective 1 funding for Wales.

North-East (Expenditure)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the amount of spending per head in the north-east for the year 1999–2000 on *(a)* education, *(b)* health and social services, *(c)* roads and transport, *(d)* housing, *(e)* law and order, *(f)* trade, industry, energy and employment, *(g)* agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry and *(h)* culture, media and sport. [9646]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested is available in chapter 8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02 (Cm 5101), which shows total managed expenditure on services in 1999–2000, by Government office region and function of spending, on a per head basis.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the north-east's percentage share of *(a)* UK public expenditure, *(b)* UK population and *(c)* UK gross domestic product in each of the years from 1995 to 1999. [9647]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

(a) The Treasury publishes analyses of UK public expenditure by Government office region in chapter 8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses on an annual basis, the latest of which is PESA 2001–02 (Cm 5101).

(b) The Office for National Statistics publishes UK population estimates by Government office region in their annual publication Regional Trends. UK population estimates by Government office regions for 1999 are published at www.statistics.gov.uk.

(c) The Office for National Statistics published estimates of UK gross domestic product by Government office region in the First News Release dated 27 February 2001.

ECOFIN

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 16 October; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including their voting record; and if he will make a statement. [9364]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended the meeting of the Economic and Finance Council of Ministers.

The main theme of the meeting was the fight against terrorist financing. The council welcomed progress towards achieving agreement with the European Parliament on adopting the second money laundering directive. The directive has subsequently been agreed at conciliation.

The council welcomed an EU presidency report on the fight against the financing of terrorism. I stressed the need for concerted international action and co-operation. We also noted a report from the European Commission on the air transport industry.

The council approved terms of reference for a European Commission study on globalisation and development, which will report in February 2002 ahead of the UN Financing for Development Conference. The commission introduced its second report on the introduction of euro notes and coins and the council adopted a statement for reporting to the Ghent European Council.

Finance Ministers noted the commission's draft employment package for 2001–02, which will be approved at the Laeken European Council. The package reviews member states' employment policies and proposes guidelines and recommendations for taking these policies forward. The presidency report on progress on the draft

directive on occupational pension schemes was noted by the council. There was also a preliminary discussion of the joint report on pensions, which is being prepared for approval at the European Council in Barcelona, with a progress report to be considered at the European Council in Laeken.

No votes were taken at the meeting.

Following the ECOFIN Council, I also attended the joint ECOFIN/JHA Council, with the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs. The joint council agreed to take forward a further range of measures to combat terrorism, money laundering, economic crime and counterfeiting of the euro. In particular, the Protocol to the 2000 Mutual Legal Assistance Convention was adopted and signed. A copy of the joint council conclusions are being placed in the Library of the House.

Public Service Delivery

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 22W, on public service delivery, how he has identified that targeted efficiency improvements cover more than half of non-transfers spending. [8142]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The assessment was made on the basis of Departments' performance against their efficiency targets, published in the spring 2001 departmental reports.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was raised in corporation tax in the past financial year at the *(a)* starting rate, *(b)* small companies rate and *(c)* main rate; and if he will list his prediction for the same figures in the current financial year. [7783]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Provisional estimates of corporation tax receipts in 2000–01 are given in the ONS publication "Financial Statistics". A forecast for the current year will be published in the pre-Budget report. Estimates of the amounts of taxable profits at the various rates of tax (and the rates of tax) are given on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats../s11corporatetaxation2.pdf.

Pensioners (Tax)

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government are taking to reduce the tax burden on old age pensioners. [9655]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Following our personal tax and benefit changes, pensioner households will be £600 a year better off on average compared to 1997. As a result of our policies, seven out of 10 pensioners pay either no tax, or pay tax only at the 10p rate. We have pledged to extend tax allowances further so that by 2003 no pensioner pays tax until their income reaches £127 per week.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Special Advisers and Press Officers

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers were employed (i) full time, (ii) part time and (iii) on a contract basis by her Department in each year since 1992. [6885]

Tessa Jowell: Details for my Department (previously the Department of National Heritage) are shown.

Special Advisers

A total of 18 special advisers have been employed under contract over different periods since 1992 (15 full-time and three part-time) to maintain a maximum complement of one post in the years 1992 to 1995 and two posts from 1996 onwards.

Press Officers

A total of 82 press officers have been employed under contract over different periods since 1992 (81 full-time and one part-time) to maintain a maximum complement of seven posts during the years 1992 to 1998 and eight posts from 1999 onwards.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding is available to local authorities with cases of foot and mouth disease in their district for the promotion of tourism. [8436]

Dr. Howells: Over £90 million each year is available to local authorities to promote tourism. Funding is allowed as part of the environmental protective and cultural services block of the rate support grant and it is up to individual local authorities to allocate their funds in accordance with statutory requirements and local needs and priorities.

The regional development agency business recovery fund was established in April to provide targeted help for rural businesses, including funding for local and regional promotion and incentive schemes to encourage visitors to return.

The English Tourism Council received £3.8 million in additional funding to run an advertising and promotion campaign and provide other support to help offset the effects of foot and mouth disease on the domestic tourism industry; £2 million of this funding went directly to regional tourist boards.

In addition the British Tourist Authority received an extra £14.2 million to support a tactical marketing campaign to promote Britain as a great place for a holiday.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what grants are available to encourage tourism in areas affected by foot and mouth disease. [8437]

Dr. Howells: The regional development agency business recovery fund, established in April, was designed to provide targeted help for rural businesses, focused primarily on measures to enable them to develop in the medium term. The fund is one element in a package of recovery assistance for tourism that includes additional funding for marketing, business rate relief and deferral of tax payments. These measures and existing programmes will help to encourage tourism.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to help the tourist industry recover from the effects of foot and mouth disease and the events of 11 September. [9714]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* Since 1 March, my Department has provided an additional £3.8 million to the English Tourism Council and £14.2 million to the British Tourist Authority. The regional development agency business recovery fund, established in April, is designed to provide targeted help for rural businesses, including tourism businesses, affected by the consequent implications of foot and mouth disease. On 18 October, the Government allocated a further £24 million to the fund, taking the total to £74 million. The fund is one element in a package of recovery assistance for tourism that includes business rate relief and deferral of tax payments.

In-bound international tourism data for the month of September will not be available until November 2001. When these statistics are available, an assessment of the initial impact of the events of 11 September on tourism can be made.

Tourism (Lake District)

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the state of the tourism industry in the Lake District following the foot and mouth outbreak and the events of 11 September; and if she will review the case for further Government assistance. [7516]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Lord Haskins, appointed by the Prime Minister as rural recovery co-ordinator for Cumbria, has published his report on the effects of foot and mouth on Cumbria and we will be considering the need for further assistance in the light of this report.

It is not yet possible to provide an estimate of the impact of the events of 11 September on tourism at this point in time. Official in-bound international tourism data for the month of September 2001 will not be available until November 2001. When these statistics are available, a more thorough assessment of the initial impact can be made.

Football World Cup

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to meet representatives of the BBC and ITV to discuss the televising of the football world cup in 2002. [8760]

Dr. Howells: I have no such plans, but welcome the announcement made by the BBC and ITV on 18 October that they have signed an exclusive deal to broadcast the world cup finals tournament in 2002 and 2006.

Communications White Paper

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when her Department will publish its response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report on the Communications White Paper. [8672]

Dr. Howells: The Government will shortly be publishing their response to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's report on the Communications White Paper.

S4C

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent meetings she has had with S4C to discuss the company's financial arrangements. [8751]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such meetings, but financial issues were raised during my visit to S4C in Cardiff on 10 July and I am due to meet the Chair of S4C again on 6 December.

Regional Broadcasting

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what meetings she *(a)* has had and *(b)* plans to have with the Independent Television Commission to discuss regional broadcasting. [9437]

Dr. Howells: None, but the Communications White Paper made clear our commitment to retain and strengthen the regional dimension to public service broadcasting, and ensure that it continues to meet the needs of different communities and cultural interests.

Late-night Licences

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her response to the recent judgment on late-night flights into Heathrow; what impact this decision has had on her Department's policy on bar licence hours; and what her policy is on late-night noise disturbance in city centres. [9196]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The Government are carefully studying the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Hatton and Others *v.* the United Kingdom, and its possible implications for a range of issues including our policy on alcohol licensing hours. If appropriate, it will be carefully taken into account before a Bill to reform the alcohol and public entertainment licensing laws is presented in Parliament.

Permitted licensing hours for licensed premises in England and Wales are set out in the Licensing Act 1964. Our current policy on the reform of these laws provides that opening hours would be attached as a condition of individual premises licences. It also provides that local residents will have the right to object to the grant of a licence, or to apply for the hours of opening to be restricted, or to seek a review of an existing licence on grounds of public nuisance, including noise disturbance. Where the local authority denies such an objection, the objector would be entitled to appeal to the magistrates courts. In addition, on 1 December this year, we shall be bringing into force section 17 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 which provides new powers in England and Wales for the police to close instantly for up to 24 hours licensed premises which are causing disturbance to the general public as a result of excessive noise emitted from the premises.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will place in the Library the guidelines issued by her Department regarding noise abatement best practice in relation to conditions set by councils on late-night licence applications; and if she will make a statement. [9195]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Guidance on conditions which might be attached to public entertainment or late-night refreshment house or night café licences in England and Wales concerning noise abatement has not been issued by the Department or by the Home Office when it was responsible for this policy area. In the case of public entertainment licences, local authorities have a broad discretion to impose such conditions, terms and restrictions as they see fit. In the case of late-night refreshment houses and night cafés, conditions may be imposed to prevent unreasonable disturbance to local residents, and "closing orders" may be imposed to the same end. Some local authorities have sought agreements with parts of the licensed trade on standardised conditions which might be adopted in connection with public entertainment licences. From time to time local authorities publish advice on associated matters in conjunction with the Health and Safety Executive. The majority of local authorities in making licensing decisions generally adopt similar standards to those which they adopt in enforcing the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Noise Act 1996.

Alcohol licensing in England and Wales is the responsibility of licensing justices and not the local authority, and they have a broad discretion to refuse various extensions beyond normal permitted licensing hours to prevent unreasonable disturbance to people living in the neighbourhood.

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by her Department during the summer recess. [9236]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* During the summer recess my Department released: *(a)* 43 press notices, and *(b)* two consultation papers: Review of the Museum on London/Geffrye Museum/ Horniman Museum; Review of the National Museum of Science and Industry. These are available on the DCMS website www.culture.gov.uk

English Tourism Council

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to change the role of the English Tourism Council. [9715]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The role of the English Tourism Council is set out in its three-year funding agreement with this Department, as signed on 4 June 2001 and deposited in the Library of this House. The impact of foot and mouth disease and the terrorist attacks of 11 September have necessitated a review of short-term tourism policy and, in the light of recent discussions with key players in the industry, efforts will be concentrated on data collection, improving quality and skills and domestic marketing. The English Tourism Council, other tourism bodies and the industry all have important roles to play in this strategy.

Culture, Media and Sport Committee Report

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will implement the recommendations of the Fourth report of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, HC 2000–01, 430. [9713]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The Government response to the Fourth report was sent to the Committee as a Memorandum in August and presented to Parliament on 17 October as Command Paper 5279.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if her Department will respond to the Rural Task Force report, "Tackling the Impact of the Foot and Mouth Disease on the Rural Economy"; [10068]

(2) if her Department will respond to Lord Haskins' report, "Rural Recovery after Foot and Mouth Disease". [10069]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) on 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1301.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has put in place to cut the risk of foot and mouth being re-imported. [9430]

Mr. Morley: The Government take very seriously the need to have effective controls on imports of animal products, be they in personal baggage or commercial consignments. We in DEFRA are co-ordinating action across Government to ensure that the rules are enforced as effectively as possible at ports and airports.

New arrangements have been introduced across all enforcement agencies involved to improve the sharing and analysis of information about known or suspected illegal imports. This is being used to target enforcement action and to make best use of available resources. Our national regulations have also been amended to assist local authorities in seizing suspected illegal imports when they are found at point of sale. The Food Standards Agency is also encouraging local authorities to ensure that checking for illegal imports is part of their routine inspection of food premises.

Alongside this we have introduced improved publicity to ensure that travellers are aware of the restrictions on what may be imported. Posters have been placed at main airports and information is being provided to travellers by the travel industry and by British embassies abroad.

We are keeping these measures under review and will make improvements as necessary. In addition, we will be looking at further options to ensure the rules on imports are enforced effectively and efficiently.

On commercial consignments, all meat imported from third countries must be accompanied by veterinary certification. This must confirm that the meat is derived

from animals which have been subjected to an ante-mortem inspection during the 24 hours prior to slaughter at which the animal showed no signs of foot and mouth disease.

If there is an outbreak of disease likely to present a risk to human or animal health such as foot and mouth disease, Community legislation allows us to take appropriate safeguard action, which may include a ban on imports of meat from all, or parts, of that country. Recent examples include Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Swaziland, Uruguay and Zimbabwe, and within the EU, France, the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much meat was imported into the United Kingdom from countries *(a)* in which foot and mouth disease is endemic and *(b)* where there has been an outbreak in the preceding 12 months in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001 to date. [8342]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the amounts of meat from foot and mouth disease susceptible animals imported into the UK in 1999, 2000 and January to July 2001.

Community legislation permits the importation of meat from certain countries where foot and mouth disease is present but only where the disease is restricted to specific areas. Imports are permitted only from parts of the country that are free of disease or under strict conditions that ensure the meat does not come from any animal that may have come in contact with foot and mouth disease before, during and after slaughter. These provisions are in line with the guidelines set out in the Office International des Epizooties International Animal Health Code 2001.

If there is an outbreak of disease likely to present a risk to human or animal health such as foot and mouth disease, Community legislation allows us to take appropriate safeguard action, which may include a ban on imports of meat from all, or parts, of that country. In the last 12 months this includes Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Swaziland, Uruguay and Zimbabwe, and within the EU, France, the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland.

UK imports of meat from FMD susceptible species[1] from countries where FMD is endemic and which have had outbreaks in 1999, 2000 and 2001 (January to July)

Country	*Total tonnes*
1999	
Argentina	2,083
Botswana[2]	5,538
Brazil[2,3]	11,158
France	31,767
Greece	113
Irish Republic	114,232
Namibia[2]	6,635
Netherlands	64,002
South Africa[2]	224
Swaziland[2]	320
Uruguay	5,757
Zimbabwe[2,3]	5,055
Total	246,883
2000	
Argentina[3]	2,317
Botswana[2]	5,511
Brazil[2,3]	18,427
France	30,217
Greece[3]	261
Irish Republic	125,122
Namibia[2,3]	5,727
Netherlands	59,320
South Africa[2,3]	133
Swaziland[2,3]	582
Uruguay[2]	5,601
Zimbabwe[2]	5,436
Total	258,654
2001	
Argentina[3]	1,116
Botswana[2]	6,908
Brazil[2,3]	10,315
France[3]	18,300
Greece	0
Irish Republic[3]	62,614
Namibia[2]	4,027
Netherlands[3]	29,241
South Africa[2,3]	29
Uruguay[3]	2,942
Zimbabwe[2,3]	4,004
Total (January-July)	139,497

[1] Cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and reindeer. There were no imports of reindeer meat in 2000–01.
[2] Countries where FMD is endemic.
[3] Countries where there have been outbreaks.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on farm incomes of restrictions on the movement of animals . [8157]

Mr. Morley: We are aware that movement restrictions increase the costs of many livestock producers and others in the food chain. However, the restrictions were imposed to prevent the spread of disease and to speed its eradication. We have commissioned research to consider the costs to the agricultural industry of maintaining movement restrictions as a means of preventing disease spread in the future.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next plans to visit Westmorland and Lonsdale to discuss the foot and mouth outbreak. [9625]

Mr. Morley: There are no plans for the Secretary of State to visit Westmorland and Lonsdale in the near future.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the value of financial assistance from Government to the farming industry in England has been since the start of the foot and mouth crisis. [6068]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Since the first case of foot and mouth disease was confirmed on 20 February 2001, the Government have announced financial assistance worth £164.4 million to the farming industry (see table for cost breakdown). This supplements payments to date of £1,016 million[1] in compensation for compulsory slaughter of stock, £26.2 million[1] in compensation for seized or destroyed items, and a further £185 million[2] paid to date to farmers in respect of the

livestock welfare disposal scheme. UK farmers are also expected to receive around £3 billion in support under the Common Agricultural Policy in 2000–01.

In addition, some farmers will be benefiting from the range of other measures we have put in place to help enterprises affected by foot and mouth, such as targeted trade development and marketing activities and the Countryside Agency's scheme to provide matched funding to voluntary organisations for the relief of distress. The hon. Member will also be aware that the revenue departments have been asked to take a sympathetic view, on a case-by-case basis, of businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. They have so far helped over 18,000 businesses by agreeing to defer tax, national insurance contributions and VAT for periods of mainly between three and 12 months.

£ million

Initiative	*Coverage*[3]	*Funding*
Rural stress action plan	England	0.4
Farm business advisory service	England	[4]6
Agriculture development scheme	England	2
Agrimonetary compensation	UK	156
Total		164.4

[1] As at 9 October 2001.
[2] As at 3 October 2001.
[3] Information is not held on a regional basis for all schemes, so it is not possible to provide figures for England alone.
[4] Supplemented by £4.4 million in unspent provision from 2000–01, carried forward.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the total amount of compensation that will be paid as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. [7667]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Our current estimate of the cost of compensation that will be paid because of the foot and mouth disease outbreak is £1.216 billion. This figure includes £1.152 billion compensation for compulsory slaughter of affected livestock and £0.064 billion compensation for items seized and destroyed such as hay, feed, fodder and semen straws.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria the Government used to decide the method used for lifting the D notice restrictions in Herefordshire. [6664]

Mr. Morley: The criteria for lifting Form D notices are governed by EU rules for the control of foot and mouth disease (FMD). This requires a clinical inspection of all stock on premises within three kilometres of an infected premise, commencing at least 21 days after preliminary cleansing and disinfection of the premise.

There is also a requirement for serological testing of all premises with sheep and goats for evidence of FMD infection. This may commence 21 days after slaughter of the animals and preliminary disinfection. If all the inspections and blood tests prove negative for FMD and more than 30 days have elapsed since slaughter and preliminary disinfection, the Infected Area restrictions may be lifted.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what contingency plans are in place for tackling foot and mouth disease in the late autumn period. [6499]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 October 2001]:* Contingency plans are held and regularly reviewed by the Regional Operations Directors who have been put in place to deal with the current foot and mouth disease outbreak. The plans are kept under review and updated as necessary in the light of the latest disease situation. They are based on the continued adherence to and rigorous enforcement of the existing control strategies, including tight biosecurity, and take the form of working documents that have to be refined in the light of any new developments including up to date epidemiological advice.

Fox Hunting

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the independent veterinary risk assessment commissioned by her Department into the resumption of fox hunting following the foot and mouth outbreaks. [9468]

Alun Michael: The veterinary risk assessment on the possible resumption of hunting with dogs in England and Wales is currently being considered by Ministers. The assessment will be published on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/ and copies will be made available in the Libraries of the House.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to make a decision on whether she will be drawing down agrimonetary compensation for this year. [9529]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The Government are considering the case for payment of the agrimonetary compensation that is currently available for the arable sector, and have until 31 October to notify the European Commission of any intention to make these payments.

Flooding

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to provide further assistance to protect existing homes from flooding; and if she will make a statement. [9012]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I plan to reduce the risk of flooding by investing in effective flood warning arrangements and in flood defences in the highest risk areas. Funding for the Department's programme is increasing from £66 million in 2000–01 to £114 million in 2003–04. Further increases are planned in funding delivered through local authorities.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to ensure that the shortfall in North Yorkshire's flood defence levy for the period 2002–03 is made up to at least the amount allocated for 2001–02. [8143]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency's flood defence programme is funded mainly by levies paid by county councils, metropolitan boroughs and unitary authorities. These levies, and other flood defence expenditure, are taken into account in determining each council's flood defence standard spending assessment (SSA) for the following year.

North Yorkshire county council's flood defence SSA for 2001–02 was £2,423,000; the council paid a levy to the Environment Agency of £2,469,192 and I understand that they have no other flood defence expenditure. However, this has to be seen against an historic failure of some local authorities, including those in Yorkshire, to invest adequate sums to maintain and renew defences over many years.

The Government can compensate authorities collectively for expenditure up to the aggregate 4.2 per cent. increase provided for in Spending Review 2000 but to do otherwise would mean unfairly limiting the increase in other parts of the Environment, Cultural and Protective Services SSA block. Of course a local authority is able to utilise the funds provided for those services it judges a priority.

The Government have recently made additional funds available to the Environment Agency to meet flood defence expenditure in the current year. Alongside funds made available during the previous year, Government have now met almost all the emergency response and repair costs that the Agency incurred in the autumn/winter 2000 floods. In addition for both years it has met the design and feasibility costs of river flood defence schemes in order to accelerate their implementation. This represents a substantial contribution to the exceptional costs arising from those floods and the Yorkshire region is a major beneficiary. These additional funds have the effect of reducing the levy increase necessary to deliver the appropriate flood defence service in the region; we now expect the local authorities to make a proportionate contribution.

Meat Imports

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to prevent individuals importing meat into the United Kingdom. [9431]

Mr. Morley: Personal imports into the UK of meat from countries outside the EU are restricted to one kilogram per person of meat in a hermetically sealed container. People travelling from other EU countries can bring with them up to 10 kg of meat products per person, for their own consumption. However, if there is an outbreak of disease likely to present a risk to human or animal health such as foot and mouth disease (FMD), appropriate safeguard action is taken, which may include a ban on imports of meat from all, or parts, of that country. In those circumstances, personal imports may effectively be prohibited.

We have introduced improved publicity to ensure that travellers are aware of the restrictions on what may be imported. Posters have been placed at main airports and information is being provided to travellers by the travel industry and by British embassies abroad.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the effectiveness of controls to limit the import of meat and meat products into the UK that could carry contamination with *(a)* foot and mouth disease and *(b)* other animal diseases. [8988]

Mr. Morley: If any third country experiences an outbreak of disease likely to present a risk to human or animal health (such as foot and mouth disease) European Community legislation allows us to take appropriate safeguard action. This may include a ban on imports of meat from all, or parts, of that country. We have recently taken such action in respect of Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Swaziland, Uruguay and Zimbabwe. EU law lays down the protection measures to be implemented by a member state if they experience such a disease outbreak. These include a ban on the movement of susceptible animals, export restrictions on their products and the slaughter of infected animals.

All meat and meat products imported from third countries, must be accompanied by veterinary certification. This must confirm that the meat is derived from animals which have been subjected to an ante-mortem inspection during the 24 hours prior to slaughter at which the animal showed no signs of foot and mouth disease or any notifiable disease.

All meat and meat products imported into the UK from third countries must enter at designated UK Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) where they are subject to veterinary inspections. All consignments are subject to documentary and identity checks and at least 20 per cent. of consignments undergo physical checks. These ensure import conditions are met and that the products remain in a satisfactory condition during transport.

No matter what level of import controls are in place, it will never be possible to guarantee that no exotic disease could be imported into this country. It remains vital that farmers take effective precautions to minimise the possibility of spread of any disease that may occur, whatever its source.

Social Housing

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on proposals announced recently by the Countryside Agency to build more social housing in rural areas. [8541]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* I launched the Housing Corporation's Rural Policy Statement this month which builds upon the commitment in the Rural White Paper to achieve a higher proportion of affordable homes in both market towns and small villages. It illustrates the close co-operation between DEFRA Ministers and the Ministers at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who also strongly support the statement. It also demonstrates the close co-operation between the corporation and the Countryside Agency which has also welcomed the announcement of the new policy. The agency has confirmed its intention to work closely with the Housing Corporation to assist in 'rural proofing' its policies.

Throckmorton Mass Burial Site

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress in meeting claims for compensation for *(a)* nuisance and *(b)* loss of property value by individuals with homes adjacent to the Throckmorton mass burial site in Worcestershire. [8982]

Mr. Morley: The main nuisance complained of by the residents of Throckmorton was that of smell that was being created by Government activity in containing and eradicating foot and mouth disease. As this activity was being carried out lawfully, there is no liability on the Government to pay compensation.

I am aware of the hon. Member's interest in the issue and will be writing to him very shortly.

Farmers (Tourism)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding is available to assist farmers to diversify into tourism. [8438]

Alun Michael: The main source of funding to assist farmers to diversify into tourism is the Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES), which is a part of the England Rural Development Programme, measures are available in Objective 1 areas. The total RES scheme budget is £152 million for the period 2001–06. Another fund which can be used to assist farm-based tourism is the regional development agencies' Redundant Buildings Grant scheme.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the reforms to the CAP *(a)* made since May 1977 and *(b)* that Her Majesty's Government are proposing. [7297]

Mr. Morley: *(a)* The formal objectives of the CAP have remained as laid down in the treaty of Rome in 1957. However, while the treaty provisions supporting the CAP have remained substantially unchanged, the policy itself has evolved and developed over recent years. This has been particularly so during the period since the mid 1980s—when it was evident that agricultural production in a number of major sectors (cereals, milk, beef, wine) was running well ahead of consumption and export opportunities. This gave rise to structural surpluses and budgetary pressures. The principal adjustments to this policy since 1997 include:

	Year
Introduction of milk quotas.	1984
Introduction of binding agricultural budgetary guidelines limiting the growth of CAP expenditure to 74 per cent. of the growth of the budget.	1988
Structural funds reformed. Quotas extended. Set-aside measures designed to encourage the use of less intensive production techniques and to diversify away from products already in surplus introduced.	1989–91
Introduction of the MacSharry reforms, which cut some support prices, introduced direct income compensation, and made set-aside and other production control measures a central feature of the CAP.	1992
Completion of the Uruguay Round Agricultural Agreement brought agriculture for the first time fully within the multilateral trade mechanism: in that framework, the EU accepted the principle of tariffication (the conversion of all forms of tariff and non-tariff barriers into fixed tariff equivalents, the progressive reduction of tariffs and certain types of domestic farm support, and limits on the volume of subsided exports and the value of export subsidies.	1995
Agenda 2000 package of CAP reforms agreed in Berlin. The package included cereal and beef price reductions, milk prices to be cut and quotas increased and creation of the "2nd pillar", the Rural Development Regulation. When reforms fully implemented (2008), price reductions will reduce annual food bill for family of four of around 2 per cent.	1999
Review of sugar, olive oil, hops and cotton regimes recently completed. Review of rice and sheepmeat regimes on-going.	2001

(b) Responsibility for presenting proposals to reform the CAP rests with the European Commission. We expect proposals to issue next year for a number of key CAP commodity regimes. We will continue to work closely with the Commission and other member states to drive forward the reform agenda to achieve a more economically rational CAP which contributes to the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the industry and rural economy.

Food (Terrorist Biological Attacks)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consideration she has given to the possibility of terrorist biological attacks being made on the UK through food supplies; and if she will make a statement on foot import controls in the UK. [7770]

Mr. Morley: Her Majesty's Government are alert to the potential threat to the UK from terrorist activities. The most effective defence against a terrorist threat is good intelligence, efficient procedures to control the entry of people and materials into the UK, and the means to respond effectively to incidents. Contingency plans are maintained by the Government to minimise the consequences in the event of an attack.

All food for sale, whether it is produced in the UK or in other countries, must meet the necessarily high standards of hygiene and safety required to protect public health. Imports of food not of animal origin such as fruit and vegetables from countries outside the EU are subject to UK checks by local food authorities based on an assessment of the risk to health at the point of import.

All products of animal origin imported into the UK from third countries must enter at designated UK Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) where they are subject to veterinary inspections. Consignments are subject to documentary and identity checks and may also be subject to physical checks. These ensure import conditions are met and that the products remain in a satisfactory condition during transport.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the consultation paper on nuclear waste; and if she will make a statement. [7706]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 25W.

Farm Leavers

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers have left the industry in 2001 to date. [7732]

Alun Michael: The latest information available comes from the 2000 Agricultural Census for England. The figures indicate that there were 1,300 fewer farmers, and associated partners, directors and their spouses in June 2000 than in June 1999. This is a net figure and is the balance of farmers, associated partners, directors and spouses joining and leaving the industry. Figures on the number leaving the industry are not separately available. It is not possible to give a separate figure for "farmers". June 2001 figures will be available later this year.

Correspondence

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter sent to her on 1 August by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross. [9711]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* A response to the hon. Member's letter of 1 August was sent on 22 October 2001. I apologise for the time taken to respond to this letter.

Green Belt

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to publish proposals to modify green belt planning policies. [9167]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

There are at present no plans.

Minor Roads

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will increase the amount of Government money available to councils for the improvement of minor roads; and if she will make a statement. [9015]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Government are committed to halting the deterioration in local road condition and to eliminating the backlogs in carriageway, footway, bridge and street lighting maintenance. We will provide the necessary funding, £30 billion, through our Ten-Year Plan for Transport. This is a real increase of 23 per cent. above funding levels in the previous 10 years. And we are promoting several initiatives to help local authorities to optimise their road maintenance programmes and improve the quality of roads.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Distress for Rent

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will publish the results of her consultation on the Enforcement Review Consultation Paper 5: Distress for Rent; and if she will set out her timetable for the abolition of distress for rent in residential property. [9165]

Ms Rosie Winterton: LCD are currently analysing responses to this consultation which ended on 3 August 2001. We received approximately 150 responses from a wide range of individuals, private companies and professional enforcement organisations. We expect to publish a summary of responses in due course.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary announced the publication of the Green Paper, "Towards Effective Enforcement", by way of a written answer on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 451W. The closing date for responses was 3 October 2001. Because of the strong link between distress for rent and bailiff law in general, the responses to the distress for rent consultation will be taken into account along with the bailiff law issues arising from the Green Paper.

We hope to take forward distress for rent proposals when parliamentary time allows.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Chorley Police Station

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide resources for the improvement of the police cells at Chorley Police Station in order to meet health and safety requirements. [9100]

Mr. Denham: It is for chief constables, in consultation with their police authorities, to decide how best to deploy available resources taking into account operational priorities and objectives.

I am informed by the chief constable that the cell complex at Chorley was taken out of routine use as part of the rationalisation of the custody facilities within the Division. Improvements were made at the two remaining divisional custody sites at Leyland and Skelmersdale.

The force has confirmed that the rationalisation has enhanced the quality of the division's custody service, improving the supervision, care and control of offenders.

The cells at Chorley remain available to the division if necessary.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instruct the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to return all passports and original documents by recorded delivery or registered post. [8068]

Angela Eagle: The Integrated Casework Directorate (ICD) in Croydon deals with the majority of passport and document returns to applicants and their representatives throughout Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND). This year they began returning passports and original documents to applicants by recorded delivery.

However, ICD's Nationality Group in Liverpool ceased this service five years ago on the basis that the increased cost would add significantly to the cost of applications. Furthermore, the great majority of passports returned by ordinary post would reach their destination safely. However, any applicants who are concerned about the return of their documents can send in recorded delivery or registered post envelopes at their own expense.

Security Checks

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will monitor the length of time the security services take to complete security checks on those applying for *(a)* settlement in the UK and *(b)* naturalisation. [8099]

Angela Eagle: The Integrated Casework Directorate's (ICD) Nationality and General Group already monitor the length of time the Security Services take to complete checks on those applying for settlement in the United Kingdom and naturalisation.

Mr. Alan Bayle

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what correspondence he has received from Mr. Alan Bayle concerning his decision to resign from the Metropolitan Police Service; and what measures he has taken to address professional representations concerning training and supervision of the collection of forensic evidence. [8079]

Mr. Denham: My Department has not received any correspondence from Mr. Alan Bayle concerning his decision to resign from the Metropolitan Police Service.

In England and Wales, the collection of forensic evidence is the responsibility of Crime Scene Examiners and Assistant Crime Scheme Examiners, who are also responsible for forwarding such evidence to other departments or agencies as appropriate.

Training is provided in-force or at specialist centres such as the National Training Centre for Scientific Support in Durham, or the Metropolitan Police Service Scientific Support College.

Training and deployment are operational matters for individual chief constables and not ones in which it would be appropriate for Ministers to intervene.

Police Working Conditions

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his proposals for reform of police working conditions. [9723]

Mr. Denham: The police reform programme is about making the police service more effective in catching criminals and reducing crime and the fear of crime. To help ensure that the police service has the support it, managers and officers need to deliver these outputs, we are today presenting the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) with the outcomes we wish to achieve in respect of relevant police conditions so that it can explore and agree how best to deliver them. I have placed a copy of the outcomes paper presented to PNB in the Library.

Special Constables

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the role of special constables. [8566]

Mr. Denham: As part of the police reform process the Government are looking at measures to increase the size of the special constabulary. We are also currently looking at means of improving the management of special constables to ensure that they are deployed effectively to provide an increased visible police presence in our communities.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many special constables there were in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; [7716]

(2) how many special constables there were in Wales in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000. [7743]

Mr. Denham: The number of serving special constables in England and Wales from 30 September 1997 to 30 September 2000 is set out in the table.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Total strength[1]	19,163	17,296	15,727	13,487
Strength in Wales	1,140	1,047	940	811

[1] England and Wales

Home Office funded research into the premature wastage of special constables, completed last year, found that the primary reasons for leaving were often external to the service. However, the research identified some underlying management factors contributing to the decision to resign.

Recommendations aimed at reducing the wastage included making improvements to: the flexibility of duties and hours offered; the management structure within which specials operate; the quality of training provided locally; and local efforts to monitor and prevent wastage.

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and as part of the police reform process we are looking at radical improvements in the management, welfare and deployment of special constables.

Refugees

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of refugees into the EU from *(a)* Iran, *(b)* Iraq and *(c)* Afghanistan entered the UK in (i) 1990, (ii) 1995 and (iii) 2000. [8241]

Angela Eagle: It is not possible to provide information on how many refugees entered the United Kingdom in any given period, because some refugees arrive clandestinely and subsequently claim asylum in-country rather than claiming on arrival at United Kingdom ports. Information on the numbers of application for asylum in the United Kingdom from the specified nationalities as a percentage of European Union (EU) applications is given

in the table. However, only a minority of applications results in the granting of refugee status under the 1951 United Nations (UN) Convention.

Applications for asylum to the EU and UK from nationals of Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq, 1990, 1995, 2000[1]

	1990	*1995*[2]	*2000*[3]
Afghanistan			
EU	n/a	10,965	24,510
UK	215	715	6,835
UK (Percentage)	n/a	7	28
Iran			
EU	n/a	8,800	22,155
UK	560	755	6,905
UK (Percentage)	n/a	9	31
Iraq			
EU	n/a	13,405	33,120
UK	1,215	1,140	9,205
UK (Percentage)	n/a	9	28

[1] All data are provisional and rounded to nearest five. Dependants have been estimated where necessary.
[2] EU excludes Austria, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Greece.
[3] EU excludes Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Greece.
Source:
IGC Secretariat

"Welcome to the Asylum"

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his response is to the recommendations contained in "Welcome to the Asylum" by Harriet Sergeant; and if he will make a statement. [8464]

Angela Eagle: We have studied the report "Welcome to the Asylum", and its four recommendations, and we have noted its conclusions and recommendations. The Government have clear immigration and asylum policies which are based on honouring our international obligations, and dealing quickly and firmly with those who have no right to be here. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends to make an announcement on asylum policy later this month.

Fugitives

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases foreign Governments have asked for assistance in returning fugitives resident in the UK *(a)* generally and *(b)* for terrorist offences in each of the last five years. [9621]

Angela Eagle: Reliable records are available for only the last four years. In those years, the number of extradition requests received by the United Kingdom is as follows:

	Number of requests received
1997	107
1998	111
1999	101
2000	78

It is not possible to say with precision how many of those cases involved charges of terrorism. That is because the fugitive may have been accused of non-terrorist charges committed in furtherance of alleged terrorist acts. Of requests currently outstanding, nine involve suspected terrorist activity.

Criminal Records Bureau

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make funding available to voluntary bodies for the costs of starting up and administering a registered body disclosure service with the Criminal Records Bureau. [9606]

Mr. Denham: Having announced that standard and enhanced disclosures will be issued free of charge to volunteers, we are in the process of considering representations which have been received on the case for financial support for bodies involved in administering the disclosure service. We will announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Police Officers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement outlining comparisons in the number of police officers on duty in W1 between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. with figures for other UK cities, including if available Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Cardiff; and what are the figures for on duty police officers available per licensed premises for each city as compared with W1. [9137]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 19 October 2001]*: The information sought is not collected centrally.

Graffiti

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many graffiti artists have been prosecuted in the last 12 months. [9379]

Mr. Denham: The statistics collected centrally do not include the circumstances of the offence so that offences committed by graffiti artists cannot be distinguished from other offences of criminal or malicious damage.

Corruption

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the response to his Department's consultation on reform of the criminal law of corruption in England and Wales (Cm 4759). [9482]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 47W.

Extradition

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the responses to his Department's consultation document, "The Law on Extradition: A Review". [9483]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The "Law on Extradition: A Review" was published as a consultation document on 12 March 2001. Copies of the review were sent out to a large number of consultees which included the Houses of Parliament and interested parliamentary groups; the judiciary/magistracy and legal associations; the prosecuting authorities; civil liberties' groups, extradition practitioners, all our extradition partners and interested

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

parties in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The consultation document was made available on the Home Office website.

There were 22 written responses to the proposals contained in the document, seven of which requested that their responses should not be published. I am arranging for the 15 responses to be placed in the Library, they will also be made available on the Home Office website. I have also provided a detailed summary of the comments made by respondents in relation to the individual recommendations of the review, which I have also placed in the Library.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those in jail in Britain subject to an extradition request from a foreign Government *(a)* by name, *(b)* by country of origin, *(c)* by date of first request for extradition and *(d)* by date of any subsequent request for extradition. [7828]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There are currently 59 fugitives held in extradition custody. The power of provisional arrest means that in some cases the fugitive will have been remanded into custody before receipt of the formal extradition request. In some cases, the fugitive may be serving a domestic sentence, pending completion of which, no surrender can be ordered or take place. The table therefore provides the date of arrest in respect of each requesting jurisdiction. We are not aware of any case involving a supplementary or subsequent request. It is not policy or practice to list the names of those who are the subject of extradition proceedings.

Date of request	*Requesting jurisdiction*
1. July 1995	USA
2. July 1998	USA
3. October 1998	USA
4. November 1998	USA
5. February 1999	USA
6. September 1999	USA
7. September 1999	USA
8. September 2000	USA
9. September 2000	USA
10. October 2000	USA
11. October 2000	USA
12. January 2001	USA
13. January 2001	USA
14. May 2001	USA
15. May 2001	USA
16. August 2001	USA
17. September 2001	USA
18. October 2001	USA
19. July 1997	Italy
20. July 1998	Italy
21. June 1999	Italy
22. April 2000	Italy
23. June 2001	Italy
24. July 2001	Italy
25. August 2001	Italy
26. July 2001	Switzerland
27. September 2001	Switzerland
28. September 2001	Switzerland
29. September 2001	Switzerland
30. September 2001	Switzerland
31. September 2001	Switzerland
32. August 1998	Germany
33. March 2000	Germany
34. September 2001	Germany
35. September 2001	Germany
36. September 1999	Belgium
37. July 2001	Belgium
38. September 2001	Belgium
39. September 2001	Belgium
40. September 2001	Belgium
41. February 2001	Czech Republic
42. April 2001	Czech Republic
43. April 2001	Czech Republic
44. August 2001	Czech Republic
45. November 1995	France
46. June 1998	France
47. April 2000	France
48. May 2001	France
49. September 1996	South Africa
50. November 1997	South Africa
51. August 1999	South Africa
52. October 1998	Canada
53. September 2001	Canada
54. June 1996	Turkey
55. February 1997	Finland
56. August 1999	Greece
57. June 2000	Netherlands
58. April 2001	Spain
59. July 2001	Estonia

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which countries have sought the extradition of *(a)* Abu Qatada, *(b)* Yasser-al-Siri and *(c)* Abu Hamsa; and if he will make a statement. [8659]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: It is long-standing Home Office policy never to confirm or deny whether extradition requests in respect of particular individuals have been made or received.

Proceeds of Crime Bill

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the responses to his Department's consultation on the draft Proceeds of Crime Bill (Cm 5066). [9484]

Mr. Denham: A copy of the responses has been placed in the Library.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to allow housing associations and other public bodies to apply for antisocial behaviour orders; and if he will make a statement. [9479]

Mr. Denham: I recently announced my intention to look at the possibility of allowing public bodies, such as housing associations, which are or should be part of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, to apply for antisocial behaviour orders. I will consult with interested parties on the feasibility of this option before any moves to legislate in this area.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many antisocial behaviour orders have been imposed to date; and if he will make a statement; [9487]

(2) how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in respect of *(a)* juveniles and *(b)* adults; and if he will make a statement; [9475]

(3) how many antisocial behaviour orders have been imposed in the south-east region since the beginning of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [9474]

Mr. Denham: There is known to have been some under-recording of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) in a few police force areas. With the co-operation of Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) we are therefore undertaking a one-off reconciliation exercise to establish any differences between the numbers of ASBOs known to the police and the data from court returns. I will write to the hon. Member when the information becomes available.

Home Detention Curfew Scheme

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to require sentences to state, when passing sentence, *(a)* the existence of and *(b)* the potential effect on the date of earliest release of the home detention curfew scheme; and if he will make a statement. [9489]

Beverley Hughes: In January 1998 the then Lord Chief Justice issued a practice direction to the courts requiring them to explain the practical effect of the custodial sentences they imposed. This aimed to ensure transparency in sentencing for the benefit of the defendant, any victim and the public.

The practice direction does not prescribe a form of words in which the court's explanation should be given. It does, however, provide models to be adapted as necessary. These models do not cover the possibility of home detention curfew (HDC) since they pre-date its introduction, but the direction does make it clear that they are based on the statutory provisions in place on 1 January 1998 and will require modification if those provisions are materially amended. Since HDC can clearly be considered a "material amendment" it is appropriate for inclusion in the court's explanation. However, a sentencing court is not in a position to know whether the offender before it will be eligible for consideration for HDC or, if eligible, whether it will be granted. I am satisfied that this practice direction is adequate to promote transparency in sentencing and that legislation is not necessary.

Child Curfew Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child curfew orders have been imposed since the start of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [9486]

Mr. Denham: No applications have been received to impose child curfew schemes under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Sections 48 and 49 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, which took effect on 1 August 2001, have recently extended the upper age limit to 15 and allowed the police, as well as local authorities, to initiate schemes. Local areas are assessing the implications of these changes.

Police Resources (Lancashire)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Chief Constable of Lancashire on the deployment of her resources in the Southern Division. [6806]

Mr. Denham: I have had no such discussions. The deployment of available resources to the territorial Divisions and other Headquarters based specialist units are operational matters for the professional judgment of the Chief Constable.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that asylum seekers will be removed from unconverted Prison Service accommodation by 25 December 2001, and if he will make a statement. [9451]

Angela Eagle: We are currently using 500 surplus remand spaces for immigration detainees in seven local prisons in England and Wales on a temporary basis until new dedicated immigration detention centres come on stream later this year. We are committed to cease using one of those prisons, Cardiff, by Christmas and to cease using the other six local prisons by the end of January 2002.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if an asylum seeker detained in a prison is considered a prisoner; and if he will make a statement. [9118]

Angela Eagle: Persons detained in prison solely while their application for asylum is being considered, or where awaiting removal following a failed asylum application, or deportation by order of a court following the completion of a prison sentence of more than 12 months are immigration detainees. They are held under the same conditions as unconvicted prisoners with the same rights and privileges.

Asylum seekers who are serving a prison sentence following conviction by a court are treated accordingly.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to *(a)* prioritise and *(b)* speed up decisions on asylum seekers' applications where delay would have serious detrimental social or medical consequences for the asylum seekers themselves or members of their families; and if he will make a statement. [9125]

Angela Eagle: We are investing substantial resources to speed up the asylum process for all applicants. Where there are genuine and compelling medical or other reasons for prioritising individual applications, we endeavour to do so.

Metropolitan Police

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support he has provided to help Metropolitan police officers and civil staff purchase homes; and if he will make a statement. [9112]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office has worked closely with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) on the starter homes initiative (SHI), which will assist key public sector workers to buy their first homes. On 6 September my right hon. Friend

the Secretary of State announced the first allocations from the SHI. We expect around 550 police officers and civil staff in London to be helped over the next three years.

Immigration Status

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the immigration status of *(a)* Abu Qatada and *(b)* Yasser-al-Siri; and if he will make a statement. [8658]

Angela Eagle: It is not Home Office policy to disclose details of a person's immigration status to a third party. Both these men are known to the authorities and statements made by them are being monitored to establish whether any offences are being committed.

Dangerous Dogs Act

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions were *(a)* brought and *(b)* successful under (i) section 1 and (ii) section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [8663]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The available information, taken from the Home Office court proceedings database, is shown in the table.

It shows, for 1997, 1998 and 1999, the number of defendants proceeded against and those found guilty of offences under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in England and Wales.

Information for 2000 has not yet been published.

Number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts and convicted at all courts for the given offence and by year, England and Wales

		1997		1998		1999	
Principal statute	*Offence description*	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991—Indictable offences							
Sec. 3(1)	Owner or person in charge allowing dog to be dangerously out of control in a public place injuring any person	259	121	434	239	449	262
Sec. 3(3)	Owner or person in charge allowing dog to enter a non-public place and injure any person	22	5	28	13	34	19
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991—Summary offences							
Sec. 1(2)a	Breeding or breeding from a fighting dog	1	—	6	5	1	—
Sec. 1(2)b	Selling, exchanging, offering advertising or exposing for sale a fighting dog	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sec. 1(2)c	Giving or offering to give a fighting dog	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sec. 1(2)d	Allowing a fighting dog to be in a public place without muzzle or lead	12	8	7	2	11	6
Sec. 1(2)e	Abandoning, or allowing to stray, a fighting dog	3	2	—	—	2	1
Sec. 1(3)	Possession without exemption of a Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa or other designated fighting dog	15	9	23	8	12	5
Sec. 3(1)	Owner or person in charge allowing dog to be dangerously out of control in a public place, no injury being caused	175	88	248	125	254	126
Sec. 3(3)	Owner or person in charge allowing dog to enter a non-public place causing reasonable apprehension of injury to a person	10	4	12	8	9	5
	Total of above	497	237	758	400	772	424

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991; and if he will make a statement. [8660]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for dangerous dog legislation has now passed to me at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We have no plans to review the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

Police Pension Rights

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that his Department's changes to terms and conditions of service for police officers include the granting of pension rights to cohabiting partners. [8674]

Mr. Denham: Police pension arrangements are being reviewed in the coming months in the context of the police reform programme.

Drugs

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the statutory provisions which allow him to give a direction prohibiting a doctor from prescribing controlled drugs have not been used since November 1997. [8636]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The statutory provisions which give rise to such directions (known as the Misuse of Drugs Tribunal) have been seldom used since the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 was introduced. They are cumbersome, time consuming and inflexible.

In its response to the report of the independent inquiry into the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, set up by the Police Foundation, the Government accepted the recommendation that the tribunal system should be abolished with reliance henceforth placed on the revised procedures of the General Medical Council to provide an effective remedy.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of users of *(a)* all illegal drugs, *(b)* cannabis, *(c)* class A drugs and *(d)* class A drugs excluding heroin are graduates; and if this affects drug education programmes. [8648]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The statistics available at present do not provide information on the percentage of graduates using illegal drugs.

One of the aims of the Government's anti-drug strategy is to reduce the number of young people reporting the use of Class A drugs. All decisions concerning drug education programmes are taken at a local level, based on guidance provided by the Department for Education and Skills.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reasons for the increase in drug use among those of Indian heritage. [8649]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government have been concerned about not only the increase in drug use among ethnic minority groups but also the quality of the delivery of drugs prevention and drug treatment services to them. We have commissioned a study to look at the whole area of drugs and ethnicity which was undertaken by Kamlesh Patel from the University of Central Lancashire and Michael Shinner from Goldsmith's College. A report has been submitted to the Home Office which will be published in January and will help to inform a wider diversity strategy on drugs.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the steps his Department is taking to reduce drug dependency in Worcestershire. [8626]

Mr. Denham: My Department continues to support and fund the local drug action team in Worcestershire. The drug action team has taken numerous steps in support of the Government's four aims under the drugs strategy relating to young people, treatment, communities and availability. In 2000–01 these have included implementing arrest referral and Drug Treatment and Testing Order schemes in the county, developing 'parenting communication programmes', and developing drug enforcement activity within the West Mercia Policing Plan.

Mr. Hussain Ahmed

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will postpone the removal of Mr. Hussain Ahmed (Home Office Ref: A570495) until after his wife gives birth to their child. [8728]

Angela Eagle: Lord Rooker responded to my hon. Friend by letter on 5 October 2001.

Fingerprint Evidence

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the standards used in determining fingerprint evidence. [8606]

Mr. Denham: I have no plans to review the standards used in determining fingerprint evidence. Following extensive consultation with the Lord Chancellor, the Attorney-General and other criminal justice system stakeholders, the Association of Chief Police Officers introduced the change in fingerprint evidential standard from 16 points to a non-numerical system from Monday 11 June 2001.

PFI

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many PFI transactions have been overseen by his Department in each of the last 10 years; what his estimate is of the cost savings made in each of these transactions in comparison with the public sector alternative; what the outstanding payments to be made in relation to these transactions are for each of the next 15 years; and if he will make a statement. [5732]

Beverley Hughes: From the best information available, I list the PFI transactions overseen in the last 10 years:

Transaction/Project title	*Estimated cost saving*[1] *(£ million)*	*Outstanding payments*
2001		
Rainsbrook (Onley) Training Centre Expansion	10.5	
Heat Energy Services Tranche 2	3.73	[2]—
2000		
Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Ryehill	55.0	
HMP Dovegate	51.0	
Quantum	128.0	
Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)	[2]—	
IT2000 (Sirius Programme)	50	
Public Safety Radio Communications Project (PSRCP)	130.0	
1999	—	

Transaction/Project title	Estimated cost saving[1] (£ million)	Outstanding payments
1998		
Rainsbrook (Onley) Secure Training Centre	25.2	
Hassockfield (Medomsley) Secure Training Centre	29.5	
HMP Forest Bank	30.0	
Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS) Heat Energy Services Tranche 1	3.3	
Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution (HMYOI) Ashfield	19.0	
Passport Application Support System-Front End	[4]—	
Passport Application Support System-Back End	[4]—	
1997		
Medway (Cookham Wood) Secure Training Centre	[5]21.9	
1996		
Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) Casework Programme	[6]—	
HMP Parc	53.0	
HMP Lowdham Grange	30.0	
1995		
HMP Altcourse	1.5	
1994	—	
1993	—	
1992	—	

[1] Published guidance on Public Sector Comparators notes that: "Accounting Officers should not rely solely on a straight comparison of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) bid to its Public Sector Comparator (PSC), which should never be regarded as a pass/fail test but instead as a quantitative way of informing judgment". (Treasury Taskforce Technical Note No. 5: How to construct a public sector comparator).

[2] Details of individual payments to Contractors under Private Finance Initiative contracts are usually regarded as commercially confidential. Aggregate figures of estimated payments under all Private Finance Initiative contracts for the years 2001–02 to 2025–26 were published in Table C18 of the Budget 2001 "Red Book".

[3] The value of the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) contract and therefore that of outstanding payments, is entirely dependant on demand and so cannot be forecast with any greater accuracy. At this stage, before the Bureau has become fully operational, estimated cost savings cannot be calculated.

[4] It is unlikely that there will be any savings compared with the previous passport production operation. Following the passport problems of 1999, United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) embarked on a large number of initiatives to improve the service. These resulted in major changes to the system and associated hardware and the requirement of the PFI partners to increase all their resources to match capacity. The delay to the implementation of the system at all offices has delayed the income stream for both partners.

[5] A PSC was not calculated on the grounds that this was not necessary for projects which would not have gone ahead otherwise, because public sector capital provision was not available. The reasonableness of the bid was tested by comparing it with the nearest public sector example, ie the cost per place of local authority secure accommodation. The estimated cost saving has been calculated by deducting the Net Present Value (NPV) from the average of the PSCs for Rainsbrook and Hassockfield Secure Training Centres (STCs) (both 40 place STCs, similar to Medway).

[6] No PSC constructed. The directorate decided that it would be unrealistic to construct a conventional PSC. Detailed plans for a conventional solution were not available and the bids received proposed packages of risks, costs and benefits which were different from each other and from the ideas for a conventional solution which had emerged from a 1994 review by SEMA.

Police Wildlife Liaison Officers

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those police forces with at least one wildlife liaison officer. [8005]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 15 October 2001]*: There is a widespread network of police wildlife liaison officers across police forces but it is for each force to determine how, and to what extent this work is undertaken. Every force has a wildlife liaison capability of some sort although this varies from force to force.

Work recently completed by the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime in July 2001 resulted in the publication of a "Directory of Information Sources" which lists police wildlife liaison officer contacts. Details are recorded for more than 500 officers from forces in England and Wales.

Trenchard House

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make representations to the Metropolitan Police Authority to overturn their decision to sell off Trenchard House in Soho. [7938]

Mr. Denham: The decision to sell Trenchard House rests with the Metropolitan Policy Authority. I have no plans to make representations.

Airline Passengers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken at British airports to examine more closely the documentation of transit passengers into and out of the UK; and what guidance he gives relating to screening luggage of such passengers on arrival and departure. [7431]

Angela Eagle: Large numbers of passengers who transit the United Kingdom do not pass through United Kingdom immigration controls if they are proceeding without delay on a flight from the same airport.

At times of heightened security airport authorities are required by aviation security directions to route all passengers through immigration controls. This happened for six days after the attacks on the United States of America on 11 September.

Those passengers who are transiting the United Kingdom but depart from another airport or the next day are presented to the United Kingdom immigration controls where they are examined by an immigration officer before being allowed into the United Kingdom.

That examination includes checking personal details against the immigration service warnings index. The warnings index computer system is the primary tool for providing information to staff operating the immigration entry control. All immigration service staff at control points have access to the warning index and portable equipment is available for use elsewhere when needed. All arriving non-European economic area (EEA) passengers are checked against the system.

Aviation security is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and I am advised that the Department does not require screening of incoming baggage on arrival in the United Kingdom. I am, however, advised that all airlines flying from the United Kingdom are directed to screen all departing baggage whether from any passenger transferring through a United Kingdom airport or an originating passenger. In addition, at the request of the Federal Aviation Administration, all passenger baggage on transit flights to the United States of America and Canada is screened at United Kingdom airports.

The Government are putting forward new legislation to counter the threat from international terrorism, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on Monday 15 October 2001, and are looking at the existing legislation on the collection of passenger information and the sharing of that information between the law enforcement agencies.

Race Relations

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will bring forward secondary legislation under section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976. [10242]

Angela Eagle: I have today laid two Orders under Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000).

The Orders bring into effect the proposals set out in the consultation document on implementation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 which was published on 22 February this year.

The first Order brings some 300 additional bodies (or groups of bodies) within the scope of the general duty to promote race equality. The second imposes specific duties on the policy and service delivery functions of key public bodies to which the general duty applies, to ensure their better performance of the general duty. Separate duties are placed on schools and other educational bodies. It also places duties on the employment functions of bodies to which the general duty applies.

The Orders will come into force on 3 December 2001.

PRIME MINISTER

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the personal prerogative powers exercised by the Queen. [8096]

The Prime Minister: Most of the prerogative powers under the Crown are exercised on the advice of Ministers. A small proportion are personal powers of the Sovereign where he or she may or must act without ministerial advice, such as, in certain circumstances, the power to refuse a dissolution of Parliament. The exercise of powers under the prerogative has evolved over many years, and a precise list is not possible.

MOX Plutonium Plant

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what role he played in making the decision to permit British Nuclear Fuels to operate its MOX plutonium fuels plant; and what considerations underlay the decision to announce the decision on 3 October. [8871]

The Prime Minister: The decision to permit the manufacture of mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel was made by the Secretaries of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for Health having considered all relevant information, including the responses to their public consultation. The timing of the announcement was a matter for those Ministers and they made it at the earliest opportunity.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if the Cabinet Secretary has established an investigation into civil service procedures and relations with special advisers. [9637]

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish new guidance to special advisers on their relations with officials and the media. [9638]

The Prime Minister: No. The new "Code of Conduct for Special Advisers" already sets out special advisers' responsibilities in relation to the permanent civil service and their contacts with the media. All civil servants, including special advisers, who work on media and publicity-related issues, are also covered by "Guidance on the Work of Government Information Service".

Minister for Local Government and the Regions

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister (1) when he last spoke to the Minister for Local Government and the Regions; [9635]

(2) if he has communicated with the Minister for Local Government and the Regions concerning the latter's 12 September press release on councillors' allowances; [9636]

(3) on what occasions he has spoken to the Secretary of State for Transport since 10 September; and what matters were discussed. [9632]

The Prime Minister: I have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues and others on a wide range of subjects, and will continue to do so. As with previous Governments it is not my practice to provide details of confidential discussions.

News Management

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will issue guidance to Ministers to ensure that the practice of timing the release of information with a view to minimising coverage of that information is discontinued. [8768]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* No. The Ministerial Code already makes it clear that Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament and the public. The published guidance on the work of the Government Information Service and the GICS Handbook sets out clear principles and guidance for all those who support Ministers in this role.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9237]

Mr. Leslie: For the period of the summer recess, 20 July to 15 October inclusive, 18 press notices were issued on behalf of the Department. All press notices are published on the Cabinet Office website and are freely available to the public. The Cabinet Office (including the HMSO) issued eight consultation documents during the same period.

Cabinet Office consultations issued during recess included:

The Transport and Social Exclusion Consultation, issued on 25 July;

The Future of Emergency Planning in England and Wales, issued on 7 August; and

Licensing of Crown Copyright (HMSO), issued on 12 October.

The three documents can be accessed via the Department's own website register of consultations or on the central Government UKOnline register.

The figures also include five 'GovTalk' consultation documents issued during recess. GovTalk.gov.uk is a website which enables the public sector, industry and other interested participants to work together to develop and agree policies and standards for e-government.

Departmental Running Costs

Pete Wishart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the total annual running costs for buildings used, owned or rented by his Department for each nation and region of the UK, and estimate the average cost per square metre for properties used by his Department as a whole, and by region and nation of the UK. [6783]

Mr. Leslie: Estimates for the total running costs (in total and on an average cost per metre basis) for the financial year 2000–01 in respect of buildings used, owned or rented by my Department are as follows.

Country/region	*Total running cost (£000)*	*Average costs per m2 (£/m2)*
Scotland	25	606
Wales	14	92
London	26,405	409
South West	95	238
South East	3,298	237
North West	104	262
East of England	75	221
Yorkshire and Humberside	90	210
East Midlands	49	269
North East	41	162
West Midlands	103	233
Total England	30,260	374

The figures in the table exclude:

(a) Running costs totalling some £523,000, mainly in respect of the Emergency Planning College in Yorkshire, where building costs on a square metre basis are not currently available.

(b) Some £34,000 in respect of running costs incurred by the Central Office of Information on accommodation in Wales, Scotland and the South West where cost on per square metre basis is not known.

(c) Figures in respect of the Government Offices for the Regions and the Regional Co-ordination Unit, which have been included in the answer supplied by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

(d) Accommodation that the Cabinet Office owns but is occupied by another and those buildings that were vacant during the above period.

(e) VAT.

"Government Opportunities"

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost was of the *(a)* production and *(b)* distribution of the publication "Government Opportunities". [8978]

Mr. Leslie: "Government Opportunities" is a publication issued by a private publisher at no cost to the Government.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Palestine

8. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to tackle poverty among Palestinians. [6119]

Clare Short: Poverty among the Palestinian people has deepened greatly during the last year when closures of the West Bank and Gaza have become more frequent and severe. The key to tackling poverty is to find a just and lasting solution to peace in the Middle East. The Government are working to try to establish practical steps forward.

Since 1994 we have provided technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority to help prepare for Palestinian statehood.

To help cope with the current crises we have increased our contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees. We have recently committed £6 million to support emergency assistance to deal with the current crises.

Africa

9. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures her Department is taking to prevent violent conflict in Africa. [6121]

Clare Short: Violent conflict remains one of the biggest barriers to development in Africa. More than 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa are currently affected by or recovering from violent conflict and 20 per cent. of the continent's population live in countries affected by armed conflicts.

We are also working jointly with the FCO and MOD to improve the effectiveness of the UK contribution to conflict prevention and resolution in Africa through a new joint funding arrangement. Our joint paper on the causes of conflict in Africa will be published shortly.

The UK Government are strongly committed to bringing the conflict in Sierra Leone to an end and promoting development for the people of Sierra Leone. It is essential that we do not have another failed UN peacekeeping operation in Africa.

27. **Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures her Department is taking to support Africa's development efforts. [6139]

Clare Short: The Government are strongly committed to enhance international effort to promote development in Africa. We have in the past four years built strong programmes on a range of issues from conflict reduction to HIV/AIDS and education, to support for anti-corruption strategies. We are also leading the way in formulating innovative and new ways of disbursing funds, for example, providing direct budgetary support to those African countries with the most development focused policies.

This is a vitally important moment in the development of Africa. Not only have African countries recently joined together to agree the New African Initiative, but the Prime Minister has also signalled his own personal commitment to Africa in this Parliament, ensuring that it has also become a focus of the G8 for this year as well.

The New African Initiative is an African led movement to articulate what Africans themselves need to do, and the help they need from donors and the international community, in order to lift themselves out of poverty. DFID have been working closely with the leaders of the NAI to ensure that our response to it is based firmly on the priorities identified by African Governments.

India

10. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her development priorities for India. [6122]

Clare Short: The UK was providing £60 million in aid to India in 1997. This figure is projected to increase to over £300 million by 2003–04 in acknowledgement of the fact that one third of the poor of the world live in India.

Our programme in India is aimed at helping government, at both national and state level, to deliver pro-poor policies and services. We are working closely with four partner states committed to poverty reduction, including on their programmes of fiscal and public sector reform. We are also working on increasing access to basic health, education, and water and sanitation services for the poor, on promoting better management of the natural and physical environment, and on promoting greater empowerment of the poor, especially women and the marginalized.

18. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what work her Department is undertaking in respect of the aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake. [6130]

Clare Short: In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake my Department's priority was to ensure that survivors received humanitarian assistance until normal services could be restored. Subsequently the Indian Government have developed plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction, largely funded by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The UK makes contributions to both of these institutions. We have also offered assistance to the Indian Government to strengthen disaster preparedness arrangements across the country.

China

11. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she plans to have with the Chinese Government about human rights in China following the 2008 Olympics decision. [6123]

Clare Short: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office leads for the British Government on the issue of human rights and raises this regularly and in depth with the Chinese Government. I have no specific plans to discuss human rights with the Chinese Government but would do so if an opportunity arose, as it did during my last visit to China in October 2000. DFID's expanding programme in China is focused on improving economic and social rights, ensuring that poor people benefit from China's economic growth.

Tibet

12. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to help the people of Tibet. [6124]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development supports two projects in Tibet that are implemented by Save the Children UK. The goal of these projects is to provide basic services to poor Tibetan communities to improve their access to education, clean water and sanitation facilities. Our funding allocation for these projects is currently £1,227,500.

Global Health Fund

13. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the new Global Health Fund to combat malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS in developing countries. [6125]

Clare Short: The Global Health Fund is being designed to make available more and better drugs and commodities for the prevention and treatment of malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS in the poorest countries. It will also provide some associated health systems strengthening to ensure supplies are delivered safely, effectively and equitably.

Senior officials from my Department met with other donors, developing countries and multilateral agencies on 11–12 October in order to agree details so that the fund can be launched into operation by 1 January 2002. The UK has pledged US $200 million over five years. Total pledges to date amount to US $1.8 billion.

Sierra Leone

14. **Mr. Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's activities in Sierra Leone. [6126]

Clare Short: In Sierra Leone, my Department is promoting security, by giving substantial support to the police, helping to make the country's Ministry of Defence democratically accountable, and reintegrating ex-combatants from all sides who wish to return to civilian life, providing budgetary support, to help meet the direct costs of running the country and delivering government services, strengthening governance, including by supporting the newly created Anti Corruption Commission, reforming the judiciary, and helping the Government prepare for the elections due next year, and providing substantial support to meet the ongoing humanitarian needs of those displaced by the conflict.

20. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support the Government are giving to *(a)* democracy building and *(b)* conflict resolution in Sierra Leone. [6132]

Clare Short: We are one of the principal donors providing technical and other support to the National Elections Commission, to help ensure that the elections scheduled for next May are conducted freely, fairly and fully in accordance with democratic principles. Much of the rest of our development programme promotes democracy indirectly, by strengthening the processes of governance. Examples include our work to increase the accountability of the agencies responsible for security (police, army, and intelligence services), our support for judicial reform, for reform of governance in the paramount chiefdoms, the anti-corruption commission, and for strengthening the ability of civil society and the media to scrutinise government policy. Conflict resolution is being addressed by our support to the processes of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of ex-combatants. Here we are providing logistical assistance and other funding to the implementing agency, as well as funding a reintegration programme in Port Loko with the specific purpose of encouraging local communities to accept returning ex-combatants.

Indebtedness

15. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress she has made in reducing the debts owed by the poorest countries to G7 countries. [6127]

Clare Short: The UK has encouraged other donors, including our G7 partners to provide substantial relief on their bilateral debts. All the G7 countries are now providing 100 per cent. relief on their bilateral debts for countries that have qualified for relief under the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative.

The UK Government go further than is required under the HIPC and provide 100 per cent. debt relief to countries when they qualify for HIPC relief. The UK Government have also announced that they would hold all debt payments received from HIPC countries in trust, and return those payments to countries when they qualify for HIPC relief. The policy covers all debts owed by Governments in these countries to ECGD and CDC, freeing up more resources for poverty reduction.

Kosovo

16. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the welfare of children in Kosovo. [6128]

Clare Short: Following the crisis in 1999 we provided £4.5 million to UNICEF for support to schools. Since then we have collaborated with UNMIK and the World Bank in a wide-ranging review of social policy in Kosovo. We are now working jointly with them on social policy reform, which includes the provision of social assistance to families and children in need and social services for the protection of children. We have funded the development by the World bank of a living standards measurement survey for Kosovo, which assesses the situation of families to assist the design and monitoring of social services and benefits. In parallel with this, we are providing support to UNMIK for the strengthening of the Institute of Social Policy which will set standards and quality assurance for children's services across Kosovo. We are also supporting UNMIK with a review of cash benefit systems.

Third-world Debt

17. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on relieving third-world debt. [6129]

Clare Short: Twenty-three countries have now qualified for relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, with three countries Bolivia, Mozambique and Uganda having completed the HIPC process. More than $53 billion of debt relief has been agreed for those countries, which together owe $74 billion, so a major part of their debt has been written off. The money released is spent on poverty reduction.

The impact of that debt reduction means that social expenditure (primarily on health and education) in those countries is projected to rise by $1.7 billion per year. On average, these countries are expected to spend more than three times as much on social sectors in 2001–02 as on debt service. We hope that a further three countries—Ghana, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone—will reach their Decision Point this year. But the prospects of the 11 remaining eligible countries qualifying for relief in the near future are slim, as they are affected by conflict or have yet to demonstrate their commitment to reform. Greater progress on conflict resolution is needed so that these countries can qualify for debt relief.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress she has made in working with her counterparts in *(a)* Europe and *(b)* other western nations to reduce the burden of debt in less developed countries. [6120]

Clare Short: The international community continues to emphasise its commitment to reducing the debt burden of the poorest indebted countries, so that additional resources could be released for poverty reduction. At Genoa, the G8 leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Also, the Paris Club of Official Bilateral Creditors, which brings together its 19 permanent members from Europe and elsewhere, have agreed to participate fully in the HIPC process, delivering debt relief to countries that have qualified for HIPC.

Twenty-three countries have now qualified for HIPC relief, with three countries Bolivia, Mozambique and Uganda having completed the HIPC process. More than $53 billion of debt relief has been agreed for those countries, which together owe $74 billion, so a major part of their debt has been written off.

We hope that a further three countries—Ghana, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone will reach their Decision Point this year. But the prospects of the 11 remaining eligible countries qualifying for relief in the near future are slim, as they are affected by conflict or have yet to demonstrate their commitment to reform. Greater progress on conflict resolution is needed so that these countries can qualify for debt relief.

The UK is playing a key role in the development of the new Global Health Fund which is designed to make available drugs and commodities for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria in the poorest countries. We have committed £125 million to this initiative which will benefit the poor in Africa and elsewhere.

In addition, the Government are exploring the potential of a number of options for increasing the long-term affordability and availability of treatment for HIV/AIDS and related infections, while maintaining a focus on the development of sustainable health systems which is needed to deliver them.

GATS

19. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to ensure that developing nations benefit from negotiations on the General Agreement on Trade in Services. [6131]

Clare Short: The current negotiations on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) offer developing countries the potential to gain access to new markets overseas and to benefit from more efficient and competitive services at home. Developing countries are particularly interested in the liberalisation of sectors where they have the greatest export potential. At present these are tourism and the temporary movement of people to work outside their home countries.

My officials are working closely with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to ensure that UK and EU policy on trade in services takes development considerations into account.

We are also working with the UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on a £350,000 project to strengthen developing country involvement in the services negotiations in Geneva.

Women's Education

21. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in what ways her Department contributes to improving the education of women in the poorest countries. [6133]

Clare Short: Education is a precondition for development and poverty reduction. Investment in education for girls has been shown consistently to be one of the most important determinants of development, with positive implications for all other measures of progress. We are strongly committed to the international development targets of achieving universal primary education (UPE) by 2015 and gender equity in primary and secondary schooling by 2005. My Department's education strategy paper, "The challenge of universal primary education", recognises that achievement of UPE requires unwavering commitment to gender equality. Developing country Governments need to mainstream gender through all their policies and practices and have a real and sustained commitment to change. Since 1997 we have committed over £600 million to support sustainable primary education programmes, all with a strong focus on gender equality. We will do more. Our paper on "Poverty elimination and the empowerment of women" also indicates our commitment to stronger collaboration and co-ordination for the achievement of gender equality among donors, including the European Union, the UN system, the World bank and other international financial institutions.

AIDS (Africa)

23. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures her Department is taking to help southern African countries combat HIV/AIDS. [6135]

Clare Short: HIV/AIDS is the major development challenge in Southern Africa, and a priority for my Department's funding in that region.

Building on previous (primarily health) HIV/AIDS initiatives which we have supported in South Africa, I have recently approved the design phase of a £40 million over four years HIV/AIDS Multisectoral Support Programme, the aim of which is to reduce the number of new HIV infections and the impact of HIV/AIDS on individuals, families and communities.

Also under way is the Regional HIV/AIDS Programme, a commitment of £7.5 million over four years channelled through the SADC Health Sector Co-ordinating Unit, with coverage to Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland. The aim of this programme is to develop the capacity within each country, and across the region, to mount an effective response to the HIV epidemic.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what further assistance she proposes to deal with AIDS in Africa. [6134]

Clare Short: HIV/AIDS is the single most important development challenge in Africa. The epidemic is undermining economic growth and fundamentally threatens social and economic development in many countries. We know what needs to be done to tackle the

disease, and I strongly believe that commitments by the international community must now be transformed into a world wide effort to contain the spread of the disease.

My Department continues to give greatest priority to prevention, but we also place great emphasis on reducing the personal, social and economic impact of illness and death caused by the disease.

As national strategic plans to tackle the epidemic improve, we have begun to place our support within the framework of those plans. For example, we have recently approved significant HIV/AIDS related programmes in support of the national response in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe totalling over £60 million, £25 million for Ghana and a £20 million programme is being designed to support Mozambique. A major new multi sectoral HIV programme for South Africa is also planned for this year. We have also committed £25 million to support the International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa, and £7.5 million to a regional initiative on HIV/AIDS with the Southern Africa Development Community. We are providing £65 million in support of the Nigerian Government's efforts to control the spread of HIV.

Developing Countries (Governance)

24. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she next plans to meet representatives of the World bank to discuss governance in developing countries. [6136]

Clare Short: I have had discussions with the president of the World bank, James Wolfensohn, and his senior officials on a number of occasions throughout the year and, among other topics, have discussed governance.

My Department considers good governance to be crucial to achievement of the international development targets, and has recently published a Governance Target Strategy Paper. This sets out our agenda for building the capability of the state in developing and transitional countries, to govern in ways that promote poverty eradication. Copies of this document are available in the House of Commons Library and on our website.

An important priority in our governance strategy is to work in close collaboration with other development agencies, including the World bank, to promote and support a more coherent approach to making government work for poor people. My officials are pursuing this goal with colleagues in the World bank in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy framework, on a number of governance-related areas, including public financial management, public sector reform, and judicial reform.

Turkey

25. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had regarding the Ilisu Dam project in south-east Turkey. [6137]

Clare Short: I have had no discussions on this project.

Corruption

26. **Mr. Patrick Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to help developing countries fight corruption. [6138]

Clare Short: Our bilateral programmes provide a wide range of assistance depending on the particular needs of each country. This includes support for national anti-corruption strategies (including support for specific anti-corruption agencies); strengthening capacity for public sector budgetary and financial management procurement, accounting and audit; reforming civil service management, enhancing public oversight through strengthened parliamentary committees, developing measures to reduce judicial corruption and supporting civil society to promote transparency and accountability in public life.

We are also providing support to the UK National Criminal Intelligence Service, as current secretariat to the Egmont Group of national Financial Intelligence Units, to assist developing countries in developing financial intelligence systems to counter money laundering and are working closely with the Home Office to strengthen arrangements for mutual legal assistance, including providing practical guidance to developing country Governments to help them access the UK system.

The Department is also collaborating with other bilateral development agencies and contributing to multilateral efforts, in particular through supporting the implementation of international conventions against bribery in international trade and strengthening regional anti-money-laundering mechanisms.

United Nations Agencies

28. **Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the United Nations agencies in respect of which her Department acts as the United Kingdom lead Ministry. [6140]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development is the lead Ministry for the following United Nations Agencies:

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations Children's Fund

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

International Fund for Agricultural Development

United Nations Industrial Development Organisation

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT)

United Nations Population Fund

World Food Programme

UNAIDS—Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS

United Nations Development Fund for Women

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the New East

United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

We work closely with the FCO in respect of the following two agencies, where we take the lead on specific issues relating to our work:

Office of the UN High Commission for Refugees

Office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights.

Forced Labour

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress member states have made in ratifying and implementing the provisions

of the conventions relating to the elimination of forced and compulsory labour covered by the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. [8072]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

Out of a total of 175 member states, 159 have ratified ILO Convention 29 (Forced Labour), and 155 have ratified ILO Convention 105 (Abolition of Forced Labour). Member states which have ratified the Conventions must report to the ILO on implementation every two years, and member states which have not ratified must report on progress towards ratification every four years.

Sustainable Development Summit

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what consultation she *(a)* has had and *(b)* will have with (i) the Department for the Environment and (ii) non-governmental organisations regarding the UK's proposals for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. [8312]

Clare Short: My Department is closely involved, at both official and ministerial level, in planning and agreeing HMG objectives for the summit. DFID is also in close touch with development NGOs. We will make available a briefing note on the UK position well in advance of the summit. WSSD is one of the three themes for the 2002 series of Development Policy Forums which take place across the UK in the first six months of next year.

Microcredit Programme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the Government will *(a)* support the Microcredit programme and *(b)* propose an increase in the level of UN funding for it; and if she will make a statement. [9029]

Clare Short: Microcredit has a very important role to play in achieving the Millennium Development Goal to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.

Poor people need continuous access to appropriate savings, credit and other financial services. Put together, these services help poor people take advantage of opportunities to increase their incomes and build more secure livelihoods.

For this reason, DFID has made multi-year investments totalling some £100 million, strengthening micro-finance institutions throughout Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and the Caribbean. Its bilateral programmes and partnerships with many other agencies support the development and dissemination of best practice in micro-finance. DFID collaborates with many expert institutions in this field. They include the Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest, a coalition of donors and micro-finance practitioners developing new tools and approaches to improve delivery of micro-finance services all over the world.

DFID has also collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme in the Micro-Start programme, and the jointly funded micro Save Programme in East Africa that pilots and replicates new pro-poor savings methodologies. DFID also works with the International Labour Organisation to further the spread of post-conflict micro-finance. We support the allocation of further financial support to this sector, based on the principles of enhancing and replicating best practice, and accessing quality financial services to millions of poor families worldwide.

Russia

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much economic aid has been given to Russia in the last three years; and in what programmes her Department is involved in that country. [9027]

Clare Short: In 1999 the international community provided $1.816 billion in net official assistance to Russia. This year, my Department plans to provide approximately £40 million, of which £26 million will be through our direct programme and most of the balance through the EC. The purpose of DFID assistance to Russia is to support the Government's economic and social modernisation programme in order to reduce poverty, as set out in our country Strategy Paper 2001–05 a copy of which is available in the Library. Current priorities include support to WTO accession, public administration reform and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many and what percentage of the sexually active population in *(a)* Botswana and *(b)* Namibia is infected with HIV/AIDS; how many and what percentage are being treated with anti-retroviral drugs; and if she will make a statement. [9064]

Clare Short: The best data available are derived from annual surveys of pregnant women seeking ante-natal care. Extrapolations from the 2000 data suggest that up to 306,000 people aged 15 to 49 in Botswana and 190,000 in Namibia are HIV positive. This means that 38.5 per cent. of 15–49 year olds in Botswana and 22.3 per cent. of this group in Namibia are infected. At present, no one in either country receives free anti-retroviral drugs (ARV) from the Government. The Government of Botswana plan to introduce a comprehensive scheme to provide free ARV treatment to all who are HIV positive by the end of the year. Botswana has a national Mother to Child Transmission programme that includes the provision of a single dose of Nevirapine to reduce the risk of peri-natal and ante-natal transmission of HIV.

Swaziland

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the effects on the sugar industry in Swaziland of sugar imports from the EU. [8616]

Clare Short: We have not recently made any detailed assessment of the sugar industry in Swaziland.

Afghanistan

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to ensure that more routes for humanitarian aid convoys into Afghanistan are opened up as soon as possible. [8776]

Clare Short: My Department is actively supporting the endeavours of the UN agencies—including the UN World Food Programme, the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations to deliver as much food as possible through existing land convoy routes into Afghanistan.

We are also encouraging the opening of new land convoy routes by backing the representations of international humanitarian agencies to the Governments of neighbouring countries, requesting that they open their borders to allow the transportation of vital relief supplies into Afghanistan. The funds that we are channelling through international aid agencies working in the region are being used to stockpile relief goods in neighbouring countries for assistance to Afghan refugees and for onward transportation into Afghanistan as conditions allow.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much has been allocated since 11 September for humanitarian relief in Afghanistan; and how it has been distributed. [8781]

Clare Short: We have set aside £40 million to respond to the current crisis affecting Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. About £22 million has already been allocated to agencies for their work in the region: approximately £14 million to UN agencies; £3 million to the Red Cross movement; and around £5 million to non-governmental organisations.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what assessment she has made of the impact of the bombing campaign on the delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan; [9074]

(2) what assessment she has made of the desirability of a temporary cessation in military action in Afghanistan to enable humanitarian aid to be provided. [9075]

Clare Short: A temporary cessation in military action would not remove our difficulties in getting supplies into Afghanistan which have been difficult for a long time and were halted after September 11 before the military campaign began.

The UN has recently increased its delivery of food although this is still short of what is required to lay down sufficient stocks for the winter. The World Food Programme has reported delivery of 6,644 tonnes of food to Afghanistan in the first half of this month. We continue to work with WFP to increase the rate of delivery.

HEALTH

Spinal Injuries

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ask the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to consider the use of methylprednisolone in the emergency treatment of spinal cord injuries; and if he will make a statement; [6746]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent of the use of methylprednisolone in the immediate treatment of spinal cord injuries; and if he will make a statement. [6748]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* There has been a recent review of the evidence, in the journal Spinal Cord 2000, "High Dose methylprednisolone in the management of acute spinal cord injury—a systematic review from a clinical perspective." Their conclusion was that,

> the evidence produced by this systematic review does not support the use of high dose methylprednisolone in acute spinal cord injury to improve neurological recovery. A deleterious effect on early mortality and morbidity cannot be excluded by this evidence.

We are committed to keeping all interventions and treatment regimes under scrutiny and will consider commissioning guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence if we believe the treatment will have a significant impact on patient care, National Health Service resources, Government health related policies or the ability to add value, for example by resolving uncertainty over the appropriate use of the technology.

Pharmacists Remuneration

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was paid, in 1990 values, to pharmacists for each prescription dispensed in each year since 1990–91. [7268]

Jacqui Smith: Remuneration paid to pharmacies is intended to cover the generality of the National Health Service pharmaceutical services they provide. The scope of these services is not restricted just to dispensing prescriptions and has changed over time. The total remuneration to be paid in any given year is distributed through a system of fees and allowances, some of which relate directly to the number (and type) of prescriptions dispensed, some of which do not. However, if the total remuneration paid to pharmacies in each year is divided by the number of dispensing fees paid, the result is as set out in the table.

Value of payments made to community pharmacies, in England and Wales, per dispensing fee received—1990–91 to 2000–01 (in 1990–91 prices):

£

Year	*Value in 1990–91 prices*
1990–91	1.39
1991–92	1.42
1992–93	1.33
1993–94	1.27
1994–95	1.24
1995–96	1.21
1996–97	1.18
1997–98	1.13
1998–99	1.09
1999–2000	1.08
2000–01	1.05

Trolley Waits (Leicestershire)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average waiting time on a trolley before admission to Leicestershire hospitals in the last 12 months. [8523]

Mr. Hutton: In the 12 months from the beginning of July 2000 to the end of June 2001, 15,690 patients were

admitted as an emergency through the accident and emergency department at University Hospitals of Leicester National Health Service Trust.

Sudden Death Syndrome

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the different methods available for screening young people for the conditions constituting sudden death syndrome. [8860]

Jacqui Smith: Sudden adult death syndrome is not one single condition but a group of conditions which result in the sudden and unexpected death of apparently healthy young adults.

Many of the deaths in this syndrome appear to be caused by cardiomyopathies. Our policy is that the relatives of a family with a known high risk of contracting this disease should receive regular cardiovascular examinations.

The United Kingdom National Screening Committee (NSC) advises Ministers, the devolved National Assemblies and the Scottish Parliament on all aspects of screening policy. The NSC does not currently recommend screening for cardiomyopathy but is keeping its position under review.

The Department is working closely with the medical profession and voluntary organisations with a view to producing clear clinical guidance, which will play a key role in raising awareness, and in improving the diagnosis and testing of people at risk.

Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his latest estimate of the number of people who have hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. [8861]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected, although data can be provided on hospital in-patient care.

The figures in the table are taken from the hospital episode statistics database, which contains details of patients admitted to and treated in national health service hospitals in England.

The number of finished consultant episodes for hypertrophic cardiomyopathy in the 1999–2000 data year are as follows:

	Number
Obstructive hypertrophic cardiomyopathy	454
Other hypertrophic cardiomyopathy	172

A finished consultant episode is a period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. These figures do not represent the number of patients as a person may have more than one episode within the year.

National Strategy for Alcohol

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in publishing and consulting on a national strategy for alcohol. [8867]

Jacqui Smith: The broad timetable for the strategy is set out in the NHS Plan, which was published in July 2000. The plan said that the Department would be implementing the strategy by 2004. The Department expects to publish a consultation paper in due course.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the steps his Department is taking to reduce drug abuse in Worcestershire. [8627]

Mr. Hutton: Worcestershire health authority has a countywide strategy for substance misuse which has been agreed by all the relevant agencies. The health authority is leading on the following initiatives included in the action plan for March 2001 to April 2002:

To set up a community drug team in the south of Worcestershire

To increase and improve existing needle exchange provision

To improve access to and provision of services for women, including pregnant women

To assess the treatment and care needs of ethnic minority groups to improve access to services

To further promote and encourage general practitioner liaison and shared care

Working with community pharmacies and the local pharmaceutical committee to pilot supervised methadone consumption schemes in 2–3 local pharmacies, and review the results.

The multi-agency drug action team is currently working to implement the strategy across the county.

In addition, the health authority received £1.14 million (for 2001–02) from the Department to reduce drug abuse in Worcestershire.

Keyworker Accommodation

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that all vacant National Health Service property suitable for use as National Health Service keyworker accommodation will be considered for that use in priority to any other use. [9502]

Mr. Hutton: As set out in the Department's estate-code section on priority purchase, it is our policy that surplus National Health Service property will be made available for other healthcare users, and this includes the provision of key-worker accommodation in appropriate locations. The Department is further required to follow Government accounting principles in the disposal of surplus NHS property to ensure value for money.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the findings of the Zito Trust report "The Practice Gap in Schizophrenia"; and if he will make a statement. [9504]

Jacqui Smith: The publication of the Zito Trust report "The Practice Gap in Schizophrenia" was welcome, timed as it was to be relevant to the work that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is carrying out for us to advise on the clinical and cost effectiveness of the use of

atypical antipsychotic drugs in treatment of schizophrenia relative to conventional antipsychotics. This technology appraisal will contribute to the ongoing development of a guideline on the management of schizophrenia which should be published in 2002.

Hip Operations

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hip operations have been carried out in Leicestershire in each year since 1992 and for the last year for which figures are available. [9084]

Mr. Hutton: Finished consultant episodes (FCE) where a hip replacement operation was performed at national health service hospitals in the Leicestershire health authority area from 1992–93 to 1999–2000 are set out in the table. 1999–2000 is the latest year for which official figures are available.

Year	*Number*
1992–93	817
1993–94	817
1994–95	732
1995–96	936
1996–97	966
1997–98	791
1998–99	968
1999–2000	979

Notes:
An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year. Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data, except for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 which are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

NHS Patients (Europe)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who authorises sending NHS patients for surgery in Europe. [9427]

Mr. Hutton: Under the E112 scheme provided by European Community law for referral of individual patients for hospital treatment within the European Economic Area (EEA) authorisations are made by the Department on behalf of England, Wales and Scotland, generally after obtaining the agreement of the patient's national health service consultant and health authority. Northern Ireland operates its authorisation scheme independently.

Following recent rulings of the European Court of Justice NHS bodies now have the power to commission treatment for their patients in EEA countries, as part of wider efforts to reduce waiting times.

Kington Hospital (Herefordshire)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in building Kington Hospital in Herefordshire. [9043]

Mr. Hutton: Herefordshire Primary Care Trust and Herefordshire county council are working in partnership with an independent sector provider, Blanchworth Care, to improve health and social care services in Kington.

Blanchworth Care will build a new health facility in Kington, to which all of the services provided in the existing Kington Hospital will be relocated.

Contract discussions are at a very advanced stage with all parties expecting to be able to conclude an agreement and sign a contract soon. Blanchworth Care has already secured a site for the new facility and will be in a position to commence work as soon as the contract is completed.

Social and Care Workers

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to recruit and retain social and care workers. [9266]

Jacqui Smith: On 19 October 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a £1.5 million recruitment campaign, which is designed to increase the number of people interested in careers in social work and social care work in England. As well as this action to tackle recruitment problems, the Department is also working with the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services to help employers implement policies to improve recruitment and retention of staff.

Auxiliary Nurses (Pay)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what pay increases have been awarded to auxiliary nurses each year since April 1997. [10214]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is provided in the table.

Pay increases awarded to A and B grade nurses since 1997

Year	*Grades A and B*
1997	4.1 per cent. from 1 December 1997 (2.0 per cent. from 1 April 1997)
1998	3.8 per cent. from 1 December 1998 (2.0 per cent. from 1 April 1998)
1999	4.7 per cent.
2000	3.4 per cent.
2001	3.7 per cent.

Note:
All staged settlements are shown in full with the date of implementation first, followed by initial payment and date.
Source:
Advance letters, report of review body for nursing staff, midwives and health visitors

NHS Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate has been made of the financial effect on the NHS of delayed discharge problems in each of the last three years for which figures are available; [9716]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS as a result of delayed discharges from hospitals in the last 12 months. [9718]

Jacqui Smith: Patients who have their discharge from an acute hospital bed delayed may be awaiting transfer to other national health service care (such as intermediate care), transfer to a nursing or residential care home or for a package of care and support to allow them to return

to their own home. It is not possible to calculate a meaningful overall monetary cost to the NHS of this delay.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds have been occupied in each health authority area in England and Wales in each of the latest nine months for which figures are available as a result of delayed discharges. [9717]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Prior to June 2001 only data on delays to patients over 75 were collected centrally. From June 2001 figures have been collected for all adult patients, as well as those over 75, in order to give a more comprehensive picture of the reasons for delayed discharges.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 25 October 2001

PRIME MINISTER

Advisers

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish a list of *(a)* advisers, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* task forces (i) based in and (ii) administratively linked to his office. [7153]

The Prime Minister: At 15 October, I had agreed to the appointment of the following special advisers:

Andrew Adonis
Phil Bassett
David Bradshaw
Alastair Campbell
Hilary Coffman
Patrick Diamond
Kate Garvey
Anji Hunter
Sarah Hunter
Peter Hyman
Katie Kay
Roger Liddle
Liz Lloyd
Alasdair McGowan
Chris McShane
Fiona Millar
Joanna Nadin
Geoffrey Norris
Carey Oppenheim
Jonathan Powell
Ed Richards
Catherine Rimmer
Justin Russell
Derek Scott
Carl Sboben
Simon Stevens.

In addition, I announced last week the appointment of independent advisers to work with the new Forward Strategy Unit (FSU). These roles are unpaid. Those appointed are:

Arnab Banerji—Chief Investment Office of F&C Management Ltd.;

Nick Lovegrove—Partner at McKinsey's;

Penny Hughes—formerly President of Coca Cola Great Britain and Ireland, currently non-executive director of Vodafone plc and Trinity Mirror plc;

Adair Turner—Vice Chairman of Merrill Lynch.

Lord Birt, my unpaid strategy adviser, will have an overarching role on a number of projects supported by the FSU.

For details of other appointments and non-departmental public bodies linked to my office, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Cabinet Office Departmental Report 2001 (www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/2001/co report), a copy of which is in the Library of the House. An up-to-date list of task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups will be published soon by the Cabinet Office.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister for what reason salaries of Ministers special advisers are confidential. [10221]

The Prime Minister: Details of individual special advisers' salaries are not published in order to protect the privacy of the individual concerned.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Money Laundering

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the role of the banks in Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus in money laundering for *(a)* terrorists and *(b)* drug runners connected to Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [8876]

Peter Hain: The "Turkish Republic of northern Cyprus" is not internationally recognised except by Turkey, and has consequently never been formally assessed by any of the leading global anti-money laundering organisations. There is evidence, however, that it is vulnerable to exploitation by those involved in money laundering, and it has taken some steps to combat this.

The United Kingdom authorities will continue to remain alert to the activities of financial institutions in the area.

Maluku

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent action the Government have taken to help Indonesian Christians and Muslims on the Maluku Islands. [9657]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department for International Development (DfID) has pledged more than £4 million to help establish the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Conflict Prevention and Recovery Unit in Jakarta. The unit will build up capacity in conflict reduction and recovery in the provinces torn apart by ethnic conflict, particularly in north Maluku. We will continue to work with the Indonesian authorities and UNDP to promote reconciliation, begin wider reconstruction work and to offer practical assistance where appropriate.

The British Government have repeatedly encouraged the Indonesian Government bilaterally and through multilateral forums to bring to justice religious extremists responsible for human rights abuses in Maluku. I most recently raised these issues with the Indonesian Vice President, Hamzah Haz, when we met in Jakarta in August.

Balkan Rebels (al-Qaeda Funding)

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence he has of al-Qaeda funding of the rebels in Albania [9618]

Mr. MacShane: We have no evidence of al-Qaeda funding activity in Albania.

Macedonia

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Mujahedeen who operated with the Bosnian Army in the 1990s are now involved with the rebels in Macedonia. [9617]

Mr. MacShane: We have no evidence that any Mujahedeen who operated in Bosnia are now active in Macedonia.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Plutonium Transportation

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the security arrangements covering the transportation of plutonium. [7871]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The transportation of plutonium is carried out in accordance with strict national and international regulations and recommendations. The standards applied are approved by the Director for Civil Nuclear Security, the Government's Regulator, to ensure that the security risks associated with the transportation of nuclear material are effectively countered by protective measures.

Pyramid Investment Schemes

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to introduce regulations tightening controls on pyramid investment schemes. [9622]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Investment schemes fall within the responsibility of the Financial Services Authority.

Utilities

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ensure that consumers of gas and electricity who are wrongly transferred from their supplier are compensated for resulting loss and inconvenience. [9871]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A voluntary code has been developed by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) and the Gas and Electricity Consumer Council (Energywatch) and has been accepted by all suppliers of gas and electricity to domestic consumers. The code, known as the Erroneous Transfer Customer Charter, will come into effect in January 2002. It will ensure that consumers who have been wrongly transferred will be returned to their previous supplier with as little inconvenience as possible. The consumer will be able to contact either supplier, who will resolve the problem and provide the consumer with any necessary information.

Bassetlaw

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many businesses in Bassetlaw constituency have been *(a)* assisted and *(b)* established by the Small Business Service in the last year. [9879]

Nigel Griffiths: Since April 2001, 142 businesses in Bassetlaw have been assisted. In the previous 12 months a local Enterprise Agency supported 226 and facilitated 29 business start-ups.

Fishermen's Compensation Scheme

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many ex-trawlermen whose claims are outstanding have died since the fishermen's compensation scheme was announced. [9869]

Nigel Griffiths: I regret that this information is not available, since the Department is not informed of deaths in many cases.

Fireworks (Accidents)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries were caused by fireworks in each of the last 10 years. [9603]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The number of deaths and injuries caused by fireworks in each of the last 10 years is given in the following table. The seriousness of injuries is not separately identified in the annual statistics.

	Total number of accidents	*Deaths*
2000	972	2
1999	1,056	0
1998	831	0
1997	908	0
1996	1,233	2
1995	1,530	0
1994	1,574	2
1993	1,058	0
1992	942	0
1991	723	0
1990	805	0

Wind Turbines

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to promote offshore wind farming as an alternative source of energy. [10563]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 13W.

BSkyB

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects the Office of Fair Trading to report on its inquiry into BSkyB. [10097]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Competition Act inquiries are a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

TRIPS Council

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the TRIPS Council between WTO member states on 19 September. [8313]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The TRIPS (Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights) Council on 19 September concentrated on issues about access to medicines.

The meeting reached no conclusion and the matter has been referred to the Chair of the World Trade Organisation General Council to take forward discussions regarding a ministerial declaration. The next TRIPS Council will be on 26 to 30 November 2001.

DEFENCE

Service Personnel (Gosport)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes are planned for the numbers of service personnel to be based in service establishments in the Gosport constituency. [9771]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 334–35W to my hon. Friend the member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) in which I advised the House that as part of the implementation of the Defence Training Review the Ministry of Defence is conducting a series of studies into rationalisation of training facilities. Under this programme HMS Sultan in Gosport will be the benchmark or Public Sector Comparator for electro-mechanical engineering training. As Project Definition work is not due to be completed until next March it is, however, too early to judge the outcome of this study.

Skynet 5

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the employment implications for United Kingdom companies with special reference to Astrium Ltd. of the awarding of his Department's Skynet 5 Military Satellite Communications contract to a majority UK-based communications company; [10169]

(2) when he expects to announce the name of the company making the successful bid in his Department's Skynet 5 Military Satellite Communications contract, and if he will make a statement; [10168]

(3) what assessment he has made of the Paradigm Secure Communications consortium's bid to be awarded his Department's Skynet 5 Military Satellite Communications contract, and if he will list the names of the companies which have submitted bids; [10171]

(4) what criteria he is using to assess the bids for the awarding of his Department's Skynet 5 Military Satellite Communications contract. [10170]

Dr. Moonie: Proposals have been received from two consortia: Paradigm Secure Communications (led by Astrium) and Rosetta Global Communications (led by Lockheed Martin, British Telecom and BAE Systems). The evaluation of Skynet 5 is very complex and will primarily take into account financial, commercial and technical issues. The assessment will also consider the industrial implications of each proposal. Both bidders have been invited to submit 'Best and Final Offers' by the end of November 2001. All aspects of the bids will be fully assessed before a decision is reached. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the bidders' proposals while the competition is taking place. However, on current plans I expect to announce the preferred bidder in the early part of 2002.

Internees (Far East)

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice the Department of Social Security gave to the Association of British Civilian Internees Far East Region in November 2000 on the interpretation of which categories of claimant could count as British in order to qualify for the ex gratia payments announced on 7 November 2000. [10226]

Dr. Moonie: The ex-gratia scheme for former captives of the Japanese is administered by the War Pensions Agency, which was an executive agency of the Department of Social Security until 8 June 2001 when the agency transferred to the Ministry of Defence.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 2W.

Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the source of the 0.3 tonnes of plutonium still to be moved from AWE Aldermaston to Sellafield as of 14 March 2000; what quantities of plutonium have been moved to Sellafield and placed under safeguards since this date; and what plans there are to move further quantities of military plutonium to Sellafield. [8962]

Mr. Ingram: Taken in their totality, acquisitions of plutonium for the nuclear weapons programme were predominantly from Sellafield. A number of other sources are described in the Ministry of Defence report of April 2000, entitled 'Plutonium and Aldermaston, an Historical Account'. It is however impossible to identify the specific original source of the 0.3 tonnes of weapon grade material to which my hon. Friend refers. Of this 0.3 tonnes, some 235 kilograms have been moved to Sellafield and placed under International Safeguards—this represents some 162 kilograms since 14 March 2000. It is intended that the balance of 65 kilograms will be moved in due course.

Microsoft

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has plans to migrate to Microsoft Windows XP and MS Office XP; what estimate of the costs involved has been made; and what alternatives have been examined. [8782]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is planning to integrate its corporate information systems under a single Defence Information Infrastructure programme, the requirements for which are still being

formulated. If approved, this programme will assess various options including software provision and any potential move to Microsoft XP products, taking account of costs and benefits.

Separately, MOD has recently agreed a defence-wide licensing agreement reflecting the considerable number of Microsoft products already used within the MOD. This agreement would allow MOD to migrate to new products if shown to be cost-effective.

Armed Forces (Pensions)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what abatement is made in respect of pay levels in the armed forces to take account of the benefits from the non-contributory pension scheme. [9392]

Mr. Ingram: It is the remit of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) to consider broad pay comparability, and this includes taking account of the deferred pay represented by pension provision. The AFPRB currently applies an abatement to comparators' earnings to account for the early and fast accrual of benefits under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) compared with those available in the civilian sector. The level of abatement set in the AFPRB's 30th Report (2001) is 7 per cent.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate has been made of the costs of increasing death-in-service benefits of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [8739]

Mr. Ingram: Within the current Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS), the death-in-service gratuity for non-attributable deaths is significantly lower than in most other comparable pension schemes. The recent consultation document setting out our initial findings from the review of the AFPS therefore recommended that the death-in-service gratuity should be increased to three times pensionable salary. Overall, the changes would represent a substantial improvement in terms for family and dependants. The additional cost of this enhancement has been estimated at some £9 million per annum.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the review of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme will report. [8742]

Mr. Ingram: The period of public consultation was due to end formally on 31 July but was extended informally to admit some late replies. The Ministry of Defence is now undertaking an analysis of the responses with a view to identifying significant issues and recommending how it might move ahead on these. This will require detailed discussions to agree responses that meet our recruitment and retention needs, but which are also consistent with wider public sector pensions policy. In addition, we intend to engage in further discussions with the ex-service community during this process, both to discuss their particular concerns and inform them of our thinking. This approach means that it is not possible to set a definitive time scale but our current plan is that we should seek to report on the review by the late spring of next year.

Service Accommodation

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to ensure that substandard service living quarters are upgraded; and within what time scale. [9770]

Dr. Moonie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced a significant new programme of investment at the Defence Estates Conference for Industry on 14 March 2001.

The upgrade programme will involve a major investment year on year for the next decade, which will build up to new investment levels of approximately £200 million per year on new and upgraded accommodation.

A number of upgrade and rebuild programmes are already under way. We are preparing a competition for a major Single Living Accommodation Modernisation Prime Contract, to be awarded by the end of 2002.

Territorial Army

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role has been played by the Territorial Army in Exercise Swift Sword. [R] [9675]

Dr. Moonie: The Territorial Army have made a very positive contribution to exercise Saif Sareea (Swift Sword) II in a variety of roles. Around 400 Territorial Army personnel have been deployed primarily to augment regular units in a wide range of specialist functions including intelligence, medical support and military policing.

Porton Down

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which states *(a)* biological and *(b)* chemical material have been supplied from Porton Down since 1990. [8770]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The Defence and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down has supplied biological, or biologically derived samples to the following countries: USA, France, Belgium, Sweden, Australia, Germany, Austria, Spain, Netherlands, Norway, Italy, Japan and Canada. Chemical materials that fall within the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention have been supplied to Sweden and Canada.

Challenger

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the production lead time is for producing additional air filters for the Challenger II main battle tank; [8740]

(2) what production facilities exist to produce air filters for the Challenger II main battle tank. [8741]

Dr. Moonie: The Challenger II air filter is produced by PALL Aerospace at their facility in Redruth, Cornwall. The company have a production lead time of eight weeks, but they have been able to provide filters within a three week period when necessary.

Tracer Programme

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Tracer programme. [10157]

Dr. Moonie: The UK and the US have taken a joint decision to bring the Tracer programme to a close in July 2002 when the current assessment phase comes to an end. In keeping with the principles of Smart Acquisition, this illustrates our willingness to take the right decision early in a programme in response to changing priorities. The Tracer programme has successfully developed a pool of key technologies that can now be utilised in future programmes such as the Future Rapid Effects System which will play a key role in meeting the Land Commander's Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance needs.

STTA Map

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors underlay the drawing of the STTA map, LFA14T; and when the borders were last redrawn. [9982]

Dr. Moonie: The Tactical Training Areas, within which Operational Low Flying is conducted, were selected on the basis of low population density and remoteness from major conurbations. The boundary of Low Flying Area 14(T) has remained unchanged since it was established, with the creation of the current UK Low Flying System, in 1979.

Chemical Warfare Training

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent training the armed forces have received for dealing with chemical warfare; how up to date that training is; and what has been done to ensure that training has been updated to take account of recent terrorist attacks and the present international situation. [9270]

Mr. Ingram: Training for nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) defence is a wide ranging and comprehensive activity for all armed forces personnel, beginning with basic recruit courses and continuing throughout their careers. Training is carried out both individually and collectively in units and formations. NBC defence is integrated into a wide range of military training, including major and minor exercises. The Defence NBC Centre at Winterbourne Gunner is world-renowned. A major task of this tri-service unit is to provide the best possible training in NBC defence for officers and NCOs, whether they are employed in staff appointments, as instructors, or at unit level. The content of training courses remains under regular review to ensure that it is relevant, up to date and effective, and mechanisms are in place to ensure that NBC Defence training is validated by all three services.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Road Traffic Accidents involving service personnel have taken place in the last 12 months on *(a)* MOD property and *(b)* public roads in which driver's fatigue has been identified as a significant factor; and if he will make a statement. [10217]

Mr. Ingram: Information on Road Traffic Accidents is updated centrally for the period 1 April to 31 March each year. The number of Road Traffic Accidents for the year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 where driver fatigue was identified as a contributory factor, rather than a significant factor, is 115, broken down as follows:

Places	*Number*
On Ministry of Defence property	47
On public roads	68

Further information on road safety matters is contained within the Defence Annual Road Safety Report and a copy of the report for 1999–2000 will be placed in the House shortly. This report also contains details of various measures being put in place to reduce the risk of accidents (including fatigue). The report for 2000–01 is due to be published towards the end of this year, and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House when it becomes available.

Apache Helicopter Programme

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 4W, when the first operational Apache Squadron will be available; and when a full task force capability based on an attack helicopter regiment will be operational. [10227]

Mr. Ingram: The first regiment to be equipped with Apache will be 9 Regiment Army Air Corps, based at Dishforth. Elements from that regiment will provide an Initial Operational Capability in 2004. A full Operational Capability, based on three regiments, is expected to be available by the end of 2007.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Questions

Margaret Moran: To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to make proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on submitting parliamentary questions by electronic means. [9611]

Mr. Robin Cook: Responsibility for this rests with the Procedure Committee. However, I understand the Committee is currently inquiring into parliamentary questions and I am sure that Members will have an opportunity to make the Committee aware of their views.

Webcasting

Margaret Moran: To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to make proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on webcasting the business of the House. [9612]

Mr. Robin Cook: Responsibility for this rests with the Broadcasting Committee. However, I understand that, following a recommendation from the Committee, a pilot project to explore the potential of webcasting will begin in January, and proceedings from each House will be webcast from that date.

New Technology

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Council what the cause was of the delay in the supply of new technology for hon. Members; and if he will make a statement. [10220]

Mr. Robin Cook: During the debate on Members' Allowances, Insurance &c. on 5 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 421–77, I said to the House that distributing new computer equipment to Members' offices in Westminster and the constituencies has proved to be a massive logistical exercise. Hon. Members will therefore not be surprised to learn that early delays were due to the complexity of the operation. Our suppliers have had to process orders with different combinations of product and then to dispatch and install the equipment, often on two or three sites.

The new Advisory Panel on the Members' Vote which advises Mr. Speaker and myself has been monitoring progress. I am told that of the 468 Members who have now placed orders, 162 have been fulfilled and 55 have been met in part. Members who ordered before the end of the recess can expect to be offered delivery and installation before the end of November. By the end of the financial year over 6,000 items will have been delivered and installed to over 1,300 locations.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

School Exclusions

11. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to reintroduce targets for the reduction of exclusions from schools. [6697]

25. **Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to reintroduce targets for the reduction of exclusions from schools. [6713]

Mr. Timms: We have no plans to set fresh targets to reduce permanent exclusions further. We have met our target to reduce permanent exclusions by a third a year early and consider the current level of exclusions to be sustainable. Our priority now is to ensure that teachers are supported in maintaining classroom discipline, and that where pupils are permanently excluded, they receive a full-time education.

Teachers (Retention)

13. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to encourage people who have left the profession to return to teaching. [6701]

Mr. Timms: We have recently introduced a series of incentives to encourage qualified teachers to return to the profession. We have introduced a scheme to pay bonuses of up to £4,000 to those returning to teaching in maintained schools and non-maintained special schools between April and December this year. We have increased funding to provide a total of 1,800 places a year on refresher courses for returners to teaching, including £150 a week grants and help towards child care costs. And we have also made changes to the Teachers' Pension Scheme to make it easier and more attractive to retired teachers to return to teaching on either a full-time or part-time basis.

Class Sizes

14. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to reduce junior class sizes. [6702]

Mr. Timms: As a result of the additional funds we have invested in education, the average size of junior classes has fallen from 28.4 January 1999 to 27.9 in January 2001.

Grammar School Ballots

15. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to alter the franchise for ballots on the future of grammar schools to include those parents whose children attend the school. [6703]

Mr. Timms: In selective areas the electorate already includes parents whose children attend grammar schools. We have no plans to amend the criteria of eligibility for parents voting in feeder school ballots.

24. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to alter the system of holding ballots on the future of grammar schools. [6712]

Mr. Timms: We have no plans to amend the grammar school ballots legislation.

Teacher Work Load (PricewaterhouseCoopers Review)

17. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to publish the findings of the review of teacher work load being carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers. [6705]

Mr. Timms: PricewaterhouseCoopers produced their interim report in August. Copies are available on the Department's website: www.dfes.gov.uk/teachers/workloadstudy. The final report is expected at the end of November.

Student Finance

18. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to review student finance. [6706]

29. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements her Department has made to monitor and evaluate the impact of funding changes on access to higher education. [6717]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced on 3 October 2001 that she is leading a review of student funding, working together with representatives from HM Treasury and No. 10. We need to ensure that we have an appropriate balance between the contribution made by students, their families and the state to support our ambitions to widen access and participation in higher education. A range of policy options is being considered. No decisions have been taken.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) which bodies she will invite to submit representations to the cross-departmental review she has announced on student finance; [10200]

(2) what plans she has to invite external submissions to the cross-departmental review she has announced on student finance. [10199]

Margaret Hodge: We have said that we plan to consult on any proposals to emerge from the review.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she plans to meet representatives of Universities UK to discuss student finance. [10201]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has written to Prof. Roderick Floud, President of Universities UK, to inform him that a review is under way. We plan to consult on any proposals for change and would expect Universities UK to contribute.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she intends to meet representatives of the National Union of Students to discuss student finance. [10202]

Margaret Hodge: I met Owain James, President of the National Union of Students, in the summer to discuss student finance. We are currently reviewing student finance policy. We plan to consult and would expect the National Union of Students to contribute.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what options are under consideration in the review of student finance which she has announced; and if she will make a statement. [10203]

Margaret Hodge: We will consult on proposals that emerge from the review.

A-level Results

19. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on this year's A-level results. [6707]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The advanced level results published by the Joint Council for General Qualifications on 16 August 2001 are provisional. A copy of these provisional results has been placed in the Library. Final figures for this year's results will be published in November.

Learning and Skills Councils

20. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on learning and skills councils. [6708]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council and its 47 local arms became fully operational from April 2001. Significant progress has been made by the LSC to develop its strategic framework for the period to 2004, with the publication of its first corporate plan at the end of July. The plan includes key objectives and targets for 2004. This is providing the foundation for local strategic plans and business plans, which are now being developed by the local councils in consultation with key local and regional partners.

Further Education

21. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her plans to improve standards in further education colleges. [6709]

John Healey: We are fully committed to raising standards in further education colleges and will reward high quality and take firm action where our standards are not being met. We are supporting teaching staff to continue their professional development, requiring that new staff have the necessary qualifications, and helping colleges to update their computer equipment and develop centres of excellence.

Mr. Miliband: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her plans for the development of further education provision for *(a)* 16 to 19-years-old and *(b)* adults. [6686]

Margaret Hodge: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford), *Official Report*, 25 October 2001, column 393.

Research Assessment Exercise 2001

22. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to review with the Higher Education Funding Council the operation of the 2001 research assessment exercise. [6710]

Margaret Hodge: The operation of the 2001 research assessment exercise will be reviewed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the other UK funding bodies after the exercise has been completed.

Specialist Schools

23. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the progress of the specialist schools status programme. [6711]

Mr. Timms: The Specialist Schools Programme is popular and successful. Since May 1997, 504 schools have joined the growing network of specialist schools. There are now 685 operational specialist schools across the country and we are on course to achieve the proposals set out in the White Paper "Schools achieving success" to extend the programme to eight specialisms and expand the number of specialist schools to 1,500 schools by 2005.

Curriculum 2000

26. **Mr. Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will issue new guidance following the review of Curriculum 2000. [6714]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In August, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority published detailed guidance for schools and colleges. This is available on its website. A copy has been placed in the Library.

On 12 September, the Joint Council for General Qualifications issued guidance to schools and colleges about measures designed to reduce "burden of assessment".

Teacher Shortages

27. **Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received from Oxfordshire county council concerning teacher shortages. [6715]

Mr. Timms: Officials have maintained regular contact with Oxfordshire local education authority over recent months. The LEA and schools are working hard to recruit the teachers they need and I am pleased to be able to report that schools in Oxfordshire are operating normally.

Education White Paper

28. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has had with the National Union of Teachers to discuss the Government's White Paper on education. [6716]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend met the National Union of Teachers at the time of the launch to brief them on the White Paper and again on 4 October 2001 to discuss the proposals.

Connexions Service

30. **Ms Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what effect the Connexions service has had on levels of participation and attainment. [6718]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since April 2001, 15 out of a total of 47 Connexions partnerships have commenced operation. The remaining partnerships will be phased in during 2002–03. Raising the levels of participation and attainment of young people in education and training in conjunction with other partners is seen as a key objective of the new service and is reflected in the priorities and targets of all Connexions partnerships. The progress of partnerships towards meeting these key targets will form an important part of the performance review process in future years once relevant annual data covering participation and achievement become available from 2002 onwards.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the future of individual learning accounts. [10372]

Estelle Morris: The individual learning account (ILA) programme is to be withdrawn from 7 December in England. The programme has attracted over 2.5 million account holders and has been a great success in bringing down the financial barriers to learning. ILAs have opened up access for a great many people to a wide range of learning opportunities. However, the rapid growth of the scheme has exceeded all expectations, causing us to think again about how best to target public funds in this area and secure value for money. I also have concerns about the way in which some ILAs have been promoted and sold. There is growing evidence that some companies are abusing the scheme by offering low value, poor quality learning.

The scheme is now closed to applications for new accounts, but learning begun by existing account holders will continue to be supported provided it is booked with the ILA centre by 7 December. We remain committed to a forward-looking policy of encouraging the widest possible participation in lifelong learning.

Failing Schools

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the funding of failing schools and strategies to improve them. [6692]

Mr. Timms: The Standards Fund supports expenditure required to bring schools out of special measures. LEAs and schools may provide additional funding focused on action to secure improvements.

Governors of every school on special measures and the LEA are required to produce an action plan setting out how they are addressing causes of failure. The effectiveness of a school's actions is monitored by OFSTED. My Department works with LEAs to challenge and support actions under way.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the royal prerogative for the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9368]

Estelle Morris: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised, nor would it be practicable to do so.

LEA Funding Formula

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress she has made in the review of the LEA funding formula. [6691]

Mr. Timms: We have two working groups, comprising local government and schools partners, developing proposals for a new LEA funding system. To ensure that we get the formula right, we have decided to implement reform in 2003–04 rather than 2002–3. This will allow us to see the impact of all the changes we will be making to local authority finance, not just those which affect education.

Post-16 Education (Northumberland)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about the operation of the new funding for post-16 education in Northumberland. [6699]

Margaret Hodge: Funding for school sixth forms in Northumberland this year is provided by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The Learning and Skills Council provides funding for further education and work-based training. From April 2002 responsibility for funding school sixth forms will transfer to the Learning and Skills Council. Funds will continue to reach schools via the Local Education Authority.

Primary School Standards

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about standards in primary schools. [6698]

John Healey: There has been a substantial rise in primary school standards following the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Since 1998, there has been a 10 per cent. point improvement to 75 per cent. in the number of pupils achieving the expected standard for their age in the Key Stage 2 English tests and a 12 per cent. point improvement to 71 per cent. in maths. We remain committed to raising standards further and achieving the challenging targets we have set.

School Discipline (Somerset)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has had with Ofsted to discuss standards of discipline in schools in Somerset. [6684]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend has not taken part in any meetings with Ofsted about school discipline in Somerset. However, we do meet Ofsted colleagues regularly, and standards of discipline in a particular local education authority will be discussed if an inspection of that authority shows that standards are poor.

Aiding Communication in Education Centre North

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to support the Aiding Communication in Education Centre North. [9815]

John Healey: The Department for Education and Skills funds both the Aiding Communication in Education (ACE) Centre North and the Aiding Communication in Education Centre Advisory Trust through the British Education Communications and Technology Agency (Becta).

We are currently working with the ACE Centre North to support its transition to charitable status. We will continue to support the valuable work of these centres in providing services for children and young people who use communication aids.

Education Spending

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the share of gross domestic product spent on education in each year since 1992–93. [8878]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The amount of gross domestic product spent on education between 1992 and 1997 fell from 5.1 per cent. to 4.6 per cent. Between 1998 and 2002 it will have risen from 4.5 per cent. to 5.0 per cent. This translates to a cash increase of almost £11 billion. It is estimated to rise to 5.3 per cent. by 2003–04, which means the Government will have kept their manifesto promise to increase the proportion of national income spent on education in this Parliament.

Public sector education spending in the United Kingdom as a proportion of GDP in each year since 1992–93 is shown in the table:

	Percentage
1992–93	5.1
1993–94	5.1
1994–95	5.0
1995–96	4.9
1996–97	4.7
1997–98	4.6
1998–99	4.5
1999–2000	4.5
2000–01[1]	4.8
2001–02[1]	5.0
2002–03[2]	5.1
2003–04[2]	5.3

[1] Estimate

[2] Forecast figures

Source:

Tables 1.2 and 3.4 of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses, 2001–02" and prior equivalents

Union Learning Representatives

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will announce the results of the recent consultation on proposals to place union learning representatives on a statutory footing. [10237]

John Healey: I am pleased to announce today the results of the consultation. There were 89 responses and the majority of respondents agreed strongly with the proposals in the consultation document that learning representatives should qualify as such if elected or appointed according to the rules of the union and that they should undergo training within a specified period. There was much general support for the production of a Code of Practice to help with the implementation of the practical implications of the proposals. This will include guidance on reasonable time off and the use of facilities. We will introduce legislation on this at the earliest opportunity.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Safe Cells

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many safe cells will be installed in *(a)* prisons and *(b)* police stations in (i) the current and (ii) the next financial year. [8457]

Beverley Hughes: A total of 681 safer cells will be installed in prisons in 2001–02, and there is at present financial provision for a further 531 in 2002–03. These include 576 in 2001–02, and in 2002–03, in Design, Construction, Management and Finance (DCMF) prisons in which elements of the safer cell are being incorporated.

Safer cells are not fitted at police stations, but each of the 43 forces will continue to upgrade cells to reduce ligature points. There are no figures available for the number of cells to be improved in this manner either for this year or the next financial year.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners accommodated in safe cells have committed suicide in the last five years. [8459]

Beverley Hughes: One. The cause of death is not yet known as the inquest is outstanding.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many safe cells were installed in *(a)* prisons and *(b)* police stations in each of the last five years. [8458]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the numbers of safer cells installed in prisons in each of last five years. These include 2,441 cells in Design, Construction, Management and finance (DCMF) prisons in which elements of the safer cell are incorporated. Safer cells are not fitted at police stations, but each of the 43 forces will be upgrading cells to reduce ligature points as and when funds allow.

The number of safer prison service cells installed in prisons from 1997–2002

Year	*Total*
1997–98	10
1998–99	120
1999–2000	10
2000- 01	1,919
2001–02	681
Full total	2,740

Prison Suicides

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners committed suicide in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many were *(a)* male, *(b)* female, *(c)* on remand and *(d)* aged under 21 years. [8456]

Beverley Hughes: Statistics for the number of self-inflicted prisoner deaths between 1996–2000 are shown in the table.

Number of suicides in England and Wales in each of the years 1996 to 2000 by gender, on remand and under 21 years of age

Year	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*On Remand*	*Under 21 years*
1996	64	62	2	31	12
1997	68	65	3	26	9
1998	82	79	3	39	14
1999	91	86	5	45	14
2000	81	73	8	39	16

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Yeovil on 20 July [ref. 373]. [9959]

Beverley Hughes: I replied to the hon. Member on 24 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 288W.

Work Permits

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits were issued under the fast track scheme for shortage occupations in the period since the introduction of this scheme; how many permits were issued for shortage occupations as a proportion of the total; and if he will make a statement. [9443]

Angela Eagle: The number of work permits issued for Tier 1 applications can only be given from 1 October 1999 which are 120,750 of which 65,002 are shortage occupations. The shortage skills occupation category was first introduced into the work permit arrangements in February 1990. The number of work permits issued for shortage occupations since that date are not available as the way in which work permit management information is collected was changed on 1 October 1999.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits were issued to IT professionals in *(a)* the last year and *(b)* in the latest period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9446]

Angela Eagle: The number of work permits which were issued to Information Technology professionals in the last year, from 1 October 2000 until 30 September 2001 was 28,191. The number of work permits issued in the period 1 September to 30 September 2001, which is the latest period available is 1,477.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits were issued in the last 12 months to immigrants from India and Pakistan seeking employment in the IT industry. [9382]

Angela Eagle: The number of work permits approved in the last 12 months for Indian nationals seeking employment in the Information Technology (IT) industry was 16,575. The number approved for nationals from Pakistan seeking employment in the IT industry was 342.

Home Detention Curfew Scheme

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for the period between the commencement of the home detention curfew scheme on 28 January 1999 and 30 September 2001, what are *(a)* the total number of prisoners released on the scheme, *(b)* the number of prisoners convicted of each specific offence who were released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, including the specific offences committed by prisoners normally classified under the categories (i) other homicide and attempted homicide, (ii) other violence against the person, (iii) drug offences, (iv) assaults and (v) other offences, including a breakdown of the prisoners normally classified in the sub-category of other offences called other offences, *(c)* the average sentence (1) received and (2) served, and the average period spent on the scheme, in respect of each specific offence, *(d)* the number of prisoners released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, who (A) breached the conditions of the curfew, (B) disappeared and were recaptured, (C) disappeared and remain unlawfully at large and (D) had their licences revoked, and for what reasons, *(e)* a breakdown of the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme while on the scheme, including all offences committed by prisoners who committed more than one offence and *(f)* a breakdown of the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme who committed a further offence while on the scheme that was similar in character to that for which they were originally convicted, including all offences committed by prisoners who committed more than one offence; and if he will make a statement. [9476]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to permit asylum seekers to take paid employment; and if he will make a statement. [9455]

Angela Eagle: We do not presently envisage any changes to the operation of the employment concession for asylum seekers. Under the terms of the employment concession adult asylum seekers can apply for permission to work if their application has been outstanding for longer than six months without a decision being made on it.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost per week of detaining an asylum seeker *(a)* in prison and *(b)* in a closed reception centre; and if he will make a statement. [9456]

Angela Eagle: *(a)* The weekly cost of detaining an immigration detainee in prison is set out in the table.

Location	*Cost per place*	*Cost per prisoner*
Male locals	495	455
Haslar	323	360

These data are derived from the annual report for that year. We do not publish figures for cost per week so the above data have been derived by dividing the annual outturn by 52 weeks.

(b) The current weekly unit cost of housing an asylum seeker at Oakington, the only closed reception centre currently operating and based on an average occupancy of 170 in September, is estimated at £1,620. This is a higher figure than quoted in earlier replies but the unit cost is subject to variation because of changes in occupancy and, during September, this was significantly lower than during any of the previous six months. This was as a result of the contingency arrangements required in the light of legal proceedings on the legality of detaining asylum seekers at Oakington.

The weekly costs quoted are not comparable as they compare an average cost for a prison with the specific costs of a unit designed to take quick asylum casework decisions. Oakington was set up to fast track asylum applications and this has resulted in significant savings in the time taken to process applications and therefore in asylum seekers support costs, which offset operating costs.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the organisations involved in asylum seeker support and advice who have expressed to him their views on the voucher scheme; what proportion of them opposed it; and if he will make a statement. [9448]

Angela Eagle: We have undertaken to place a list of the organisations that contributed to the review in the Library of the House, together with copies of their responses. A summary of the responses will be published in the review report.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the level of support to asylum seekers including dependants, increased in the year 2001; and if he will make a statement. [9447]

Angela Eagle: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is only responsible for setting the support levels for the asylum seekers it is supporting directly. NASS has not increased its levels of support in 2001. Individual local authorities are responsible for setting the level of support paid to asylum seekers supported under the interim scheme and there is no central record of the amounts paid. But the grant paid by the Home Office is subject to unit cost limits.

Some asylum seekers remain eligible for support under the income support arrangements. It is understood that the rates for adults and children were increased in April and that there was a further increase in the income support rate for children yesterday. In most cases, asylum seekers in receipt of income support will also get their full housing costs paid through housing benefit.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary intends to make a statement on the voucher review before the end of the month.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of every £10 allocated for vouchers to asylum seekers is spent on administering the support arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [9454]

Angela Eagle: Of the total amount spent by the Home Office on supporting destitute asylum seekers just over 3 per cent. can be identified as administration costs. This includes grants to the voluntary sector for the provision of services associated with the current support arrangements.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers and dependants whose applications have not been determined have been detained in custody for *(a)* over 25 days, *(b)* over 50 days, and *(c)* over 100 days; and if he will make a statement. [9452]

Angela Eagle: The latest published information on the number of asylum seekers detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 June 2001. Information on the length of detention of persons detained as at this date is given in the table.

Detained asylum seekers as at 30 June 2001

Length of detention[1]	*Number*[2]
More than 25 days	850
of which:	
more than 50 days	640
more than 100 days	365

[1] Relates to current period of detention; where persons have been transferred to and subsequently from the Oakington Reception Centre, the time in detention prior to Oakington is excluded.

[2] Figures rounded to the nearest five, and exclude persons detained in police cells and the Oakington Reception Centre. Figures include 100 persons who are recorded as being detained under dual immigration and other powers.

Information on the stage of application of detained asylum seekers is not available except by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost, so it is not possible to determine how many of these persons were awaiting an initial decision on their asylum claim on 30 June 2001.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers and dependants were held in detention on the last day of each of the last 12 months; and what proportion of these were detained in prison. [9453]

Angela Eagle: As at 30 June 2001, 1,515 persons (to the nearest five) who are recorded as having claimed asylum at some point were being held in detention under Immigration Act powers. Of these, 880 (58 per cent.) were held in prison service establishments, which includes 400 persons detained in the dedicated Immigration Service wings at Haslar, Lindholme and Rochester, and 135 persons detained under dual immigration and other powers. Information on the number of asylum seekers held in immigration detention is not available prior to 30 June 2001. More recent information is not currently available.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* asylum appeals have (i) taken place and (ii) have failed and *(b)* failed asylum seekers, excluding dependants, were removed in (A) 1998, (B) 1999, (C) 2000 and (D) 2001; and if he will make a statement. [9458]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is given in the table. The information on appeals relates to first appeals only (excluding appeals to the Tribunal, or a higher court). Appeal outcomes and removals in any given time-period do not necessarily relate to one another.

Asylum appeals

	Determined by IAA[1]	*Of which dismissed*[2]	*Removals*
1998	[3]25,320	21,195	6,990
1999	19,460	11,135	[3]7,665
2000	19,395	15,580	[3,4]8,980
2001 January-July	[5]23,760	19,470[5]	[3,4,5]4,170

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.

[2] Immigration Appellate Authority.

[3] Estimates based on Presenting Officer's Unit data.

[4] Includes persons returned under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme.

[5] Covers the period January to June only. Excludes dependants.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to abolish the voucher scheme for asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [9449]

Angela Eagle: We are reviewing the operation of the voucher scheme. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary intends to make a full statement on immigration and asylum policy later this month. The outcome of the voucher and dispersal reviews will be announced at the same time.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* women, *(b)* children under 14 and *(c)* children aged between 14 and 18 asylum seekers and relatives of asylum seekers are detained (i) in prison and (ii) in closed reception centres; and if he will make a statement. [9460]

Angela Eagle: The latest published information on the number of asylum seekers detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 June 2001. As at that date, 25 females (to the nearest five) who are recorded as having sought asylum at some point were being held in immigration detention centres, and 10 females were being held in prison service establishments, most of whom were being held under dual Immigration Act and other powers. Information on the age of detainees is not available except by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost, so it is not possible to determine the number of children detained. The requested information is not available for the Oakington Reception Centre.

HM Prisons

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the availability of *(a)* work and *(b)* courses in building trades in HM prisons. [8612]

Beverley Hughes: Around 800 prisoners at any time are employed by prison works departments on minor maintenance work in establishments. Around 1,100 prisoners at any time are engaged in construction industry training courses across 69 establishments running 134 courses. These cover painting and decorating, bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing and other building trades. The Prison Service is seeking through this and other work and training activity to increase the proportion of prisoners able to gain employment on release.

Drugs Policy

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to review *(a)* the targets and *(b)* the policy on drugs relating to 16 to 24-year-olds. [8647]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We are currently reviewing progress against all the Drugs Strategy targets as part of the work for the 2002 Spending Review, to ensure that we still have the right balance and focus. This supports the hard work already done by Keith Hellawell. As the Home Secretary indicated in his evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 23 October 2001, he is also seeking advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on their assessment for reclassifying cannabis from Class B to Class C, proposing an innovative public awareness campaign on drugs aimed at young people, providing £1 million as a starter fund for a pilot project to help police target regional drug traffickers with a view to a national roll-out of the scheme, proposing the roll-out of drug testing programmes, and a series of measures, in partnership with the Department of Health, to minimise the harm drugs cause.

Addressing substance misuse among 16 to 24-year-olds is a key priority in delivering the Strategy. We are developing our policy and approach in a number of areas,

such as in improving the planning and co-ordination of the delivery of services for young people through "Young People's Substance Misuse Plans". These will help integrate the work of the Drug Action Teams, responsible at local level for delivering education, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation measures, with other children's services. We will shortly be launching a consultation exercise on ways of supporting effective joint working at local level.

Family Visits

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* oral and *(b)* written appeals concerning family visits to the UK were disposed of in each of the last 12 months; what proportion were successful; and if he will make a statement. [9445]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

The number of family visit visa appeals disposed of by Adjudicators in each of the last 12 months and the proportion successful is set out in the table.

	Oral appeal disposals (number)	*Proportion successful (percentage)*	*Written appeal disposals (number)*	*Proportion successful (percentage)*
2000				
October	0	n/a	0	n/a
November	0	n/a	22	45
December	7	57	45	18
2001				
January	9	56	93	49
February	12	92	57	30
March	71	59	138	25
April	70	69	131	44
May	96	70	161	39
June	148	67	263	33
July	297	75	214	45
August	239	77	350	41
September	228	68	240	36

WORK AND PENSIONS

Combined Pension Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason the roll-out of the combined pension statement has been delayed. [8973]

Mr. McCartney: Roll-out of the new combined pension forecasting service, which is a joint initiative between the Department and the pensions industry, began, as planned, from October 2001.

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much of the expenditure by her Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation; which expenditure programmes are allocated with respect to this index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if he will make a statement. [8938]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: None. Expenditure on the benefit programme is determined by the number of benefit claimants who satisfy the qualifying conditions that apply to a particular benefit. Similarly, the employment programmes offer help to all people seeking work providing they meet any criteria for entry to a particular programme. Certain employment programmes—Action Teams and Employment Zones—are designed to support people in disadvantaged areas, but expenditure on these is not allocated with specific reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Jobcentre Plus Interviews

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on the process for *(a)* deferments, *(b)* exemptions and *(c)* waivers, set out in the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001; [8047]

(2) when he will issue written guidance to offices on the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [8046]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on the process for deferrals, waivers and exemptions is set out in the guidance for Jobcentre Plus staff which was sent to offices on 10 September 2001. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Civil Servants (Retirement Age)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the compulsory retirement ages which apply to employees of his Department and of executive agencies and other public sector bodies for which it is responsible, broken down by grade or job title. [7236]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on the normal retirement age and on compulsory early retirement or severance for my Department and for the executive agencies and public sector bodies for which it is responsible is as follows:

All staff outside the Senior Civil Service are able to elect to remain in employment beyond the minimum retirement age of 60 for any period of time up to 65, at which age staff must retire. Under the Civil Service management code, Senior Civil Servants are required to retire at 60.

Staff may also be retired on compulsory early retirement or severance terms on grounds of structure, and on compulsory early retirement terms on grounds of limited efficiency. In addition, as a pre-redundancy measure, volunteers can be sought to leave on compulsory terms to avoid compulsory redundancies. Early retirement applies to staff aged 50 and over; early severance applies to staff aged under 50.

London Weighting

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the total value of

London weightings and London living allowances for his Department; and if he will make a statement. [6848]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The total value of London weightings and London living allowances for the Department for Work and Pensions is £49,737,543.

London weightings and London allowances account for 2 per cent. of the Department's total wage bill. London staff represent 12 per cent. of the total staff in the Department.

These figures are correct as at 31 August 2001.

Refurbishment Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* building and *(b)* refurbishment projects are planned by his Department in (i) the current and (ii) the next financial year; and what the costs will be of each project. [6594]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Details of building and refurbishment projects that will be completed within this financial year and the next are given in the tables. Information is provided only in respect of projects costing £1 million or over in total. No building or refurbishment projects have so far been approved to commence in the next financial year.

Building projects—expenditure

£ million

Description	*Site*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*Total cost*
Extension on existing site for the Pension Service.	Tyneview Park, Newcastle	n/a	n/a	[1]10.0
Adaptation of three buildings for the Pension Service to accommodate circa 500 staff in each building.	Dundee	4.09	0.05	4.14
	Simonstone, Burnley	1.96	0.02	1.98
	Swansea	1.98	0.02	2.00
Provision of new, and reconstruction of existing, portacabins to accommodate staff on modernisation projects.	Lytham St. Annes	2.5	—	2.5
Construction project (new build) to provide Pathfinder Office for JobCentre Plus.	Birmingham South West	3.0	—	3.0
Reconstruction of a commercial premises to re-house staff in support of the Government's modernisation programme in Sheffield.	Sheffield	0.135	3.99	4.125

[1] The equivalent cost for Tyneview Park is given as this is part of an Inland Revenue-led PFI project and hence no capital cost is involved.

Refurbishment projects—expenditure 2001–02

£ million

Description	*Site*	*[1]Total*
Renovation and refurbishment of existing DWP office buildings to provide new Pathfinder Offices for JobCentre Plus.	Aberdeen	1.33
	Blackburn	2.663
	Greenock	2.091
	Harlesden	1.79
	Kilburn	1.31
	Neasden	1.69
	Port Glasgow	1.47
	Southend	1.39
	Streatham	1.515
	Wallasey	2.404
	Wembley	1.25
Renovation and refurbishment of existing DWP accommodation (in three buildings) to house staff to administer Carers Allowance for over 60s.	Preston Office Centre	1.0

[1] All refurbishment projects to be delivered this financial year.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Yeovil on 20 July [ref. 428]. [9961]

Jane Kennedy: I answered these questions today.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many PFI transactions have been overseen by his Department in each of the last 10 years; what his estimate is of the cost savings made in each of these transactions in comparison with the public sector alternative; what are the outstanding payments to be made in relation to these transactions for each of the next 15 years; and if he will make a statement; [5720]

(2) if he will list the economic penalties imposed on private sector firms in each of the last five years for failures to deliver in relation to key performance indicators in projects involving the private finance initiative; and if he will make a statement. [5721]

Jane Kennedy: The NIO has had no involvement with PFI projects over the last 10 years.

HEALTH

Spinal Injuries

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the spinal injuries units in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [6751]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* There are eight units in England as follows:

Middlesbrough: South Cleveland Hospital

Oswestry: Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital

Salisbury: Odstock Hospital

Sheffield: Northern General Hospital

Southport: Southport and Formby General Hospital

Stanmore: Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital

Stoke Mandeville: Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

On 28 February 2001 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that a National Service Framework would be developed for long term conditions, and that this would have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological disease and brain and spinal injury.

Issues relating to Wales are matters for the devolved Assembly.

Maternity Services

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when information will be provided on the criteria and deadline for applications to the maternity services capital fund; if funds from the fund can be used to create midwifery-led birth centres in existing maternity centres; and if funding will be approved for the creation of *(a)* stand-alone birth centres and *(b)* birth centres within a community and cottage hospital. [7072]

Ms Blears: Letters inviting applications for the maternity service capital funds, including the criteria, were issued to the regions on 11 July 2001, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The funding allocations for each unit were announced on 11 October 2001.

This capital investment of £100 million is to modernise and upgrade facilities in maternity units to improve the environment in which care is provided and not primarily for the redesigning of maternity services. Each existing maternity unit and/or trust decided their own priorities for using the capital fund after consultation with local health communities, staff and service users.

The National Health Service provides a variety of types of care for women during pregnancy and childbirth including care in midwife-led birth. We expect this variety to continue and it is important that decisions about service provision are made at a local level.

Herceptin

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps the Government are taking to speed up the assessment periods for Herceptin; and if he will make a statement; [7078]

(2) what the Government's policy is on the priority to be given to clinical assessment of Herceptin; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the time taken for the clinical assessment of *(a)* Herceptin and *(b)* Viagra. [7079]

Ms Blears: The assessment report for the appraisal on Herceptin was extended following consultation in order to consider additional clinical data. While it is regrettable that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's guidance should be delayed, it is in the interests of all concerned that NICE's authoritative guidance should be soundly based and fair.

NICE's appraisal committee will meet again on 25 October 2001 and, if there are no appeals, guidance is expected in December 2001.

Viagra has not been referred to NICE for appraisal as regulations regarding the availability of Viagra and other specified drug treatments for impotence have been in place since July 1999.

MRSA

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what chemical agents are being used within the NHS to combat MRSA. [8722]

Mr. Hutton: The following chemical agents that are active against methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus are currently in use in the national health service:

Chemical agent	*Composition/ingredients*
All purpose cleaner/sanitiser for hard surface cleaning five litre: Brand D10	2-Aminoethanol (OES) Nonionic surfactant Cationic surfactant
Surface sanitiser for hard surfaces 3 per cent. available chlorine 10 kilogramme: Brand D4BX	Chlorinated trisodium phosphate
Powder surface sanitiser 2 per cent. available chlorine 500 gram: Brand Titan Sanitiser	Sodium silicate Anionic surfactant Sodium dichlorolsocyanurate dihydrate
Detergent liquid general purpose neutral 5 litre: Brand Hospec	Aqueous solution of anionic/nonionic surfactants, salts and preservatives

Although the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency has national contracts for the items listed, individual NHS trusts may buy other products containing agents that combat MRSA.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in each health authority contracted MRSA in each of the years 1995 to 2000. [9238]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* Aggregate data on numbers of incidents of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) voluntarily submitted by national health service trusts for specialist microbiological tests since 1995 are shown in the table. These data are routinely available on a regional basis only. Data on staphylococcus aureus bacteraemias (blood infections) showing the proportion resistant to methicillin in England and Wales are published quarterly by the Public Health Laboratory Service in the Communicable Disease Report. Copies of these are available in the Library. More comprehensive information about bacteraemias, including MRSA, has been collected from all acute trusts since 1 April 2001 and these data will be published from 1 April 2002.

Incidents of MRSA: 1995–98

	1995	1996	1997	1998
Anglia and Oxford	142	237	297	223
North Thames	566	539	544	289
North West	65	176	259	215
Northern and Yorkshire	90	150	224	202
South and West	80	206	254	101
South Thames	377	421	385	220
Trent	52	99	123	109
West Midlands	128	121	102	69
Wales	116	158	176	169
Total	1,616	2,107	2,364	1,597

Notes:
1. Population estimates are mid-year estimates based on 1991 census data.
2. For 1995 and 1996 and the first half of 1997 data have been amalgamated to the approximate boundaries of the new regional office areas. This allows for comparison with subsequent years.

Incidents of MRSA: 1999–2000

	1999	2000
Eastern	80	60
London	290	170
Northern and Yorkshire	170	70
North West	180	90
South East	170	100
South West	40	10
Trent	100	30
West Midlands	30	50
Wales	130	40
Total	1,190	620

Notes:
1. Data for 2000 are complete.
2. An incident is three or more patients infected or colonised by the same strain of MRSA in the same month from the same hospital.
3. The criteria for submission of isolates of MRSA (and other isolates of staphylococcus aureus) to the Public Health Laboratory Service for specialist tests have been revised twice since 1996 (in January 1998 and in January 2000).
4. These revised criteria have led to a fall in the number of incidents of MRSA that were reported to the PHLS.

Job Vacancies

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish figures giving job vacancy percentages by health authority for *(a)* radiographers, *(b)* radiation physicists and *(c)* radiography technicians. [9094]

Mr. Hutton: Figures for diagnostic and therapeutic radiographer vacancies are in the tables. The Department does not collect vacancy information for radiation physicists or radiography technicians.

Department of Health vacancies survey, March 2001 vacancies in NHS trusts by region and health authority areas[1], radiographer three month vacancy rates[2,3] and staff in post

	Staff in post (wte)		Three month vacancy rates (Percentage)	
	Diagnostic radiographers	Therapeutic radiographers	Diagnostic radiographers	Therapeutic radiographers
England total	9,165	1,309	4.4	8.0
Northern and Yorkshire	1,323	154	2.5	10.4
Bradford HA	114	[4]—	0.0	n/a
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	102	[4]—	0.0	n/a
County Durham and Darlington HA	80	[4]—	0.0	n/a
East Riding and Hull HA	94	14	5.0	27.0
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	68	[4]—	1.5	n/a
Leeds HA	273	56	3.5	18.2
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	119	44	1.2	1.1
North Cumbria HA	51	8	6.6	0.0
North Yorkshire HA	123	1	3.1	0.0
Northumberland HA	48	[4]—	0.6	n/a
Sunderland HA	56	[4]—	3.4	n/a
Tees HA	134	32	1.5	0.0
Wakefield HA	60	[4]—	7.6	n/a
Trent	816	154	2.5	1.9
Barnsley HA	32	[4]—	0.0	n/a
Doncaster HA	55	[4]—	0.0	n/a
Leicestershire HA	127	23	0.0	4.3
Lincolnshire HA	96	31	0.0	0.0

Department of Health vacancies survey, March 2001 vacancies in NHS trusts by region and health authority areas[1], radiographer three month vacancy rates[2,3] and staff in post

	Staff in post (wte)		*Three month vacancy rates (Percentage)*	
	Diagnostic radiographers	*Therapeutic radiographers*	*Diagnostic radiographers*	*Therapeutic radiographers*
North Derbyshire HA	31	7	0.0	0.0
North Nottinghamshire HA	57	[4]—	1.4	n/a
Nottingham HA	131	29	5.1	0.0
Rotherham HA	36	[4]—	0.0	n/a
Sheffield HA	124	35	0.0	0.0
South Humber HA	49	7	9.3	0.0
Southern Derbyshire HA	78	23	9.3	8.1
West Midlands	912	84	5.5	15.1
Birmingham HA	261	32	7.3	15.9
Coventry HA	88	13	12.1	13.7
Dudley HA	53	[4]—	1.9	n/a
Herefordshire HA	24	[4]—	0.0	n/a
North Staffordshire HA	93	13	2.1	0.0
Sandwell HA	28	[4]—	0.0	n/a
Shropshire HA	79	11	2.7	8.6
Solihull HA	[4]—	[4]—	n/a	n/a
South Staffordshire HA	77	[4]—	4.0	n/a
Walsall HA	38	[4]—	9.9	n/a
Warwickshire HA	53	[4]—	0.0	n/a
Wolverhampton HA	45	17	5.7	26.2
Worcestershire HA	73	[4]—	6.4	n/a
North West	1,481	150	3.8	3.8
Bury and Rochdale HA	45	9	0.0	0.0
East Lancashire HA	98	[4]—	8.4	n/a
Liverpool HA	149	[4]—	5.2	n/a
Manchester HA	203	53	5.7	10.1
Morecambe Bay HA	69	[4]—	0.0	n/a
North Cheshire HA	72	[4]—	8.3	n/a
North West Lancashire HA	132	27	0.0	0.0
Salford and Trafford HA	94	[4]—	5.6	n/a
Sefton HA	110	1	4.2	0.0
South Cheshire HA	103	[4]—	0.0	n/a
South Lancashire HA	28	[4]—	0.0	n/a
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	53	[4]—	10.2	n/a
Stockport HA	43	[4]—	7.7	n/a
West Pennine HA	78	[4]—	0.0	n/a
Wigan and Bolton HA	108	[4]—	0.0	n/a
Wirral HA	97	60	3.0	0.0
Eastern	876	137	4.1	6.8
Bedfordshire HA	97	[4]—	5.8	n/a
Cambridgeshire HA	170	41	0.6	10.9
East and North Hertfordshire HA	54	1	15.0	0.0
Norfolk HA	152	29	3.2	0.0
North Essex HA	120	20	2.4	0.0
South Essex HA	100	[4]—	6.5	n/a
Suffolk HA	95	14	0.0	0.0
West Hertfordshire HA	88	32	8.5	8.5
London	1,535	246	7.1	9.1
Barking and Havering HA	57	16	5.0	10.9
Barnet HA	64	[4]—	14.2	n/a
Bexley and Greenwich HA	62	[4]—	6.1	n/a
Brent and Harrow HA	90	2	3.2	0.0
Bromley HA	30	[4]—	6.2	n/a
Camden and Islington HA	246	43	5.4	4.4
Croydon HA	30	[4]—	0.0	n/a
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	117	32	11.3	25.4
East London and The City HA	155	34	6.0	0.0
Enfield and Haringey HA	40	17	4.8	0.0
Hillingdon HA	37	[4]—	7.5	n/a
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	151	55	7.9	13.4
Kingston and Richmond HA	48	[4]—	0.7	n/a
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	206	41	1.9	2.4
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	146	[4]—	15.6	0.0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	56	5	11.1	0.0

Department of Health vacancies survey, March 2001 vacancies in NHS trusts by region and health authority areas[1], radiographer three month vacancy rates[2,3] and staff in post

	Staff in post (wte)		*Three month vacancy rates (Percentage)*	
	Diagnostic radiographers	*Therapeutic radiographers*	*Diagnostic radiographers*	*Therapeutic radiographers*
South East	1,300	214	5.1	13.1
Berkshire HA	111	17	3.5	5.5
Buckinghamshire HA	94	[4]—	2.1	n/a
East Kent HA	99	1	4.5	0.0
East Surrey HA	43	[4]—	22.0	n/a
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	130	13	4.4	19.2
Isle of Wight HA	19	[4]—	15.9	n/a
North and Mid Hampshire HA	58	[4]—	0.9	n/a
Northamptonshire HA	76	23	0.0	0.0
Oxfordshire HA	126	27	11.5	25.5
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	78	29	0.0	6.5
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	112	30	3.5	21.1
West Kent HA	137	40	6.8	6.9
West Surrey HA	128	35	0.8	2.8
West Sussex HA	90	[4]—	5.5	n/a
South West	921	170	3.0	2.9
Avon HA	265	54	5.1	6.8
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	86	7	2.3	0.0
Dorset HA	145	26	0.0	0.0
Gloucestershire HA	97	28	0.0	0.0
North East and Devon HA	71	23	0.0	0.0
Somerset HA	69	1	2.8	0.0
South and West Devon HA	119	31	4.0	3.4
Wiltshire HA	69	[4]—	6.7	n/a
Special health authorities	1	[4]—	0.0	n/a

[1] Health authorities figures are based on trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of healthcare
[2] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents)
[3] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the non-medical workforce census (whole time equivalent)
[4] Trust does not employ these staff
Notes:
1. Percentages rounded to one decimal place
2. Numbers rounded to the nearest whole number
Source:
Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001
Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2000
Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2001
Vacancies in NHS trusts by region and Radiographers

	wte		*wte*		*Percentages*	
	Staff in post		*Number of three month vacancies*		*Three month vacancy rates*	
	Diagnostic radiographers	*Therapeutic radiographers*	*Diagnostic radiographers*	*Therapeutic radiographers*	*Diagnostic radiographers*	*Therapeutic radiographers*
England total	9,170	1,310	420	110	4.4	8.0
Northern and Yorkshire	1,323	154	30	20	2.5	10.4
Trent	816	154	20	0	2.5	1.9
West Midlands	912	84	50	20	5.5	15.1
North West	1,481	150	60	10	3.8	3.8
Eastern	876	137	40	10	4.1	6.8
London	1,535	246	120	20	7.1	9.1
South East	1,300	214	70	30	5.1	13.1
South West	921	170	30	10	3.0	2.9
Special health authorities	1	[1]—	0	0	0.0	n/a

[1] Means no staff
Notes:
1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents)
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental and non-medical workforce census (whole time equivalent)
3. Health authority figures are based on trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of healthcare
4. Percentages rounded to one decimal place
5. Numbers rounded to the nearest 10 for three month vacancies and to the nearest one for staff in post

Bed Blocking

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures will be taken under the cash for change initiative to reduce bed blocking. [9059]

Jacqui Smith: Local authorities will receive funding allocations through a special grant under Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2000. The grant is to be used to enable local authority community care services to work with national health service partners to significantly reduce the number of people who are ready to leave hospital but are unable to do so. Local authorities will achieve this by increasing the availability of care home places and support services which enable people to return to their own home.

Prescriptions

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will allow people on Incapacity Benefit to receive free prescriptions; [8506]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent of non-use of prescriptions by citizens on Incapacity Benefit who cannot afford the charges. [8507]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* No. Incapacity Benefit is not income related and it would not, therefore, be appropriate to extend automatic exemption from prescription charges to recipients of this benefit. No assessment has been made of the extent to which people on Incapacity Benefit do not make use of prescriptions. People on low income who are not otherwise exempt from charges, can apply for free prescriptions under the national health service low income scheme.

Feng Shui

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent employing feng shui experts in his Department in the last 12 months. [9239]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Department has not employed any feng shui experts and has not expended any money on this service within the last 12 months.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average daily number of available beds, in wards open 24 hours, for *(a)* short stay and *(b)* long stay patients in each year since 1995–96. [10520]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not collected centrally in the format requested.

Bed data including average bed availability rates are available in the annual publication "Bed availability and occupancy—England: Each Financial Year to 1999–2000", copies of which are available in the Library. Alternatively information can be downloaded from the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Restaurant Food

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the nutritional value of restaurant food. [9730]

Ms Blears: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that they have an on-going programme to determine the nutrient content of a wide range of foods on a regular basis. Analytical surveys in 1994 and 1997 included foods and meals sampled from takeaway outlets or restaurants. There are plans to update this work soon.

This obviously is subject to the qualification that there will be significant variation in the nutritional balance between individual restaurants and individual restaurants' meals.

From a nutritional point of view, the composition of individual foods is less important than the nutrient content and overall balance of the diet as a whole. A varied and balanced diet, which includes plenty of fruit, vegetables and starchy foods, should provide all of the nutrients that a healthy individual requires.

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the expenditure by his Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the index of multiple deprivation; which expenditure programmes are allocated with respect to this index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if he will make a statement. [8933]

Mr. Hutton: No national health service resources are allocated using the index of multiple deprivation. The weighted capitation formula used to inform revenue allocations to health authorities includes a number of health and socio-economic variables. These are listed in "Resource Allocation: Weighted Capitation Formulas", copies of which are available in the Library.

No personal social services resources are allocated using the index. The personal social services standard spending assessment formulas, which are used to allocate most of personal social services resources, include a number of socio-economic variables. These are listed on the following web site: http://www.local.dtlr.gov.uk/finance/ssa/0102/lgfr/index.htm.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Yeovil on 20 July [ref 296]. [9962]

Mr. Hutton: I wrote to the hon. Member on 21 August.

Residential Care (Wales)

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase funding to the National Assembly for Wales for residential care in Wales. [9267]

Mr. Touhig: I have been asked to reply.

Allocation of funds from the Welsh block is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

The Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt, has recently announced that £8 million is to be provided to help health and social services authorities in Wales to meet immediate pressures this winter. Within

that, up to £5 million will be made available for measures which are aimed at avoiding hospital admissions, supporting people in their own homes after discharge and helping local authorities in commissioning additional capacity in residential and nursing homes.

Child Protection

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been killed since 1 January 1995 during contact visits with violent parents in England and Wales; how many children have been killed since 1 January 1995 in circumstances where the parents had separated due to domestic violence and were disputing contact or residence in England and Wales; what the names and ages of each child killed were; and in how many of these cases contact or residence orders had been made by the courts. [9610]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

Information about the number of child deaths during contact visits, where an application for contact or residence is outstanding or where a residence or contact order is in force, is not available. I am looking into what information we can collect in this area. The Government acknowledge the concerns about the safety of both children and the resident parent in cases where domestic violence is a known factor and, in addition to an interdepartmental working group, has set up a ministerial group to consider this matter fully.

WALES

London Weighting

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the total value of London weightings and London living allowances for his Department; and if he will make a statement. [6812]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department does not pay a London weighting or living allowance. Staff permanently based in London are on different (higher) pay scales than those based elsewhere. Staff serving temporarily in London are reimbursed accommodation and travel costs and receive a 10 per cent. recruitment and retention allowance.

Civil Servants (Retirement Age)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the compulsory retirement ages which apply to employees of his Department and of executive agencies and other public sector bodies for which it is responsible, broken down by grade or job title. [7232]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Civil servants working within my Department (who are all secondees from other Departments) would ordinarily retire at 60 if they were members of the Senior Civil Service (SCS) or between 60 and 65 years if they were at a grade below the SCS. I am responsible for no other agencies or bodies.

Refurbishment Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* building and *(b)* refurbishment projects are planned by his Department in (i) the current and (ii) the next financial year, and what the costs will be of each project. [6595]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Plans are not yet complete. However work in the current year will include the provision of disabled access and the completion of a programme of redecoration begun in 2000–01.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the top 10 companies to which his Department contracted out their construction and refurbishment work in the last 12 months. [6609]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There has been no construction work in this period.

Design and project management of refurbishment work has been provided through the National Assembly for Wales' contract with the managing agent Dalkia Energy and Technical Services Ltd. The actual work was carried out by Vale Building Services Ltd.

Special Advisers and Press Officers

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers were employed (i) full time, (ii) part time and (iii) on a contract basis by his Department in each year since 1992. [6893]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Information is not available in the detail requested. However, during the period from 1994 until June 1999, the former Welsh Office employed a maximum of two special advisers and between eight and nine press officers. Since its establishment on 1 July 1999, the Wales Office has employed two special advisers and three press officers, including my Press Secretary.

SCOTLAND

Boundary Commission

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest date by which the Boundary Commission for Scotland's recommendations for the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies in Scotland would have to be enacted by Order in Council in order to take effect for a Scottish parliamentary election in 2007. [8864]

Mrs. Liddell: This will depend on the nature of the recommendations in the Boundary Commission's report.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the circumstances in which she would seek to make modifications under the terms of section 4 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 to the recommendations contained in the next report of the Boundary Commission for Scotland on the general review of the parliamentary constituencies in Scotland. [8848]

Mrs. Liddell: I will be able to consider whether modifications to the Boundary Commission's recommendations might be appropriate only once I have received and studied its report.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she expects to receive from the Boundary Commission for Scotland their final report on the general review of parliamentary constituencies in Scotland. [8863]

Mrs. Liddell: The Boundary Commission for Scotland is required, by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, to submit its report to me between December 2002 and December 2006. It is a matter for the Commission when, within that time scale, it reports.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the revised constituency and regional boundaries to be recommended by the Boundary Commission for Scotland by December 2006 will be used for the 2007 Scottish parliamentary elections. [8865]

Mrs. Liddell: This will depend on the date the Boundary Commission submits its report. It is not envisaged that changed boundary arrangements for the Scottish Parliament would be implemented before 2007.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if it is her policy that *(a)* the boundaries of Scottish parliamentary constituencies should be coterminous with constituencies used to elect Scottish hon. Members of the House of Commons and *(b)* the ratio of constituency to regional members should remain as set out in the Scotland Act 1998. [8847]

Mrs. Liddell: The statutory position on the boundaries of Scottish parliamentary constituencies and the ratio of constituency to regional members is set out in Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998.

The Government have, however, made it clear that if a good case for changing the Scotland Act is made, in the light of experience in the Scottish Parliament, we will consider it.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland began its review of Scottish constituencies; when she expects to receive its report; and if she will make a statement. [9740]

Mrs. Liddell: The Boundary Commission for Scotland gave notice in the *Edinburgh Gazette* on 29 June 2001 of its intention to commence forthwith its general review of constituencies in Scotland.

The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 requires the Commission to submit its report to me not less than eight or more than 12 years from the date of its last report. Its next report is therefore due between December 2002 and December 2006. It is a matter for the Commission when, within that time scale, it reports.

Regional Television

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she plans to meet Scottish Television to discuss regional television coverage. [9337]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with broadcasters in Scotland about a wide range of matters, including regional television coverage and the wider implications for Scotland of the forthcoming Communications Bill. I last met representatives from the Scottish Media Group on 23 August.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Government Art Collection

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is in respect of disposals from the Government art collection. [10078]

Dr. Howells: It is the general policy of the Government art collection (an Exchequer-funded national collection) to retain for posterity and to preserve to the best of its ability all items accepted into its core holdings. The Government art collection has a disposals policy which closely follows the ethical guidelines for disposals recommended by the Museums Association. A number of items purchased with specific funds or donated with specific conditions attached may not be disposed of at all.

Film Industry

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support the Government have given to the British film industry in *(a)* direct funding and *(b)* tax breaks in the last five years. [8247]

Dr. Howells: The table gives details of Government funding for film. In addition to direct Government funding, the Film Council, Scottish Screen and the Arts Councils for Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland distribute lottery funding for film.

£ million

Grant receiving body	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Scottish Screen	1.8	2.0	1.8	—	—
Sgrîn	0.3	0.3	0.3	—	—
Northern Ireland Film Commission and other grants	0.3	0.7	0.8	1.1	—
British Film Institute	16.5	16.0	15.1	16.91	—
British Screen Finance	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	—
British Film Commission	0.8	0.85	0.85	0.85	—
European Co-Production Fund	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	—
National Film and Television School	1.9	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.3
Film Council	—	—	—	0.5	21.8
Total	25.6	25.9	24.9	25.6	24.1

Notes:

The Film Council became operational in April 2000. It now funds the British Film Institute from the grant-in-aid it receives from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The British Film Commission is now part of the Film Council. British Screen Finance and the European Co-Production Fund have been absorbed into the Film Council.

Figures shown for Sgrîn, Scottish Screen and the Northern Ireland Film Commission are pre-devolution.

The estimated tax cost of relief provided to British qualifying films under section 48 Finance (No. 2) Act 1997 is £200 million in the period 1997–98 to 2000–01. The additional estimated tax cost of relief provided to British qualifying films under section 42 Finance (No. 2) Act 1992 is £150 million in the period 1996–7 to 2000–01. Finally, the estimated tax cost of relief to other films produced in the UK under sections 40A to D of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1992 (formerly, section 68 Capital Allowances Act 1990) is £250 million over the same period. In total tax relief for films produced in the UK is around £600 million in the period 1996–7 to 2000–01.

Civil Servants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many and what proportion of each Civil Service grade in her Department is located in each region and nation of the UK; what the average salary is for each grade; and if she will make a statement. [6778]

Dr. Howells: The information regarding the number and proportion of staff in my Department, and the average salary of each grade is set out in the table.

Government Office region	*All grades*	*SCS level*	*Level 6/7*	*SEO/HEO level*	*EO level*	*AO/AA level*	*Industrial/ other grades*
Number of staff by grade level and region (WTE)							
London	461	25	74	133	107	122	0
South East	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
South West	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
North West	2	0	1	0	0	1	0
North East	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
East Midlands	2	0	1	0	0	1	0
Eastern	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
England total	471	25	82	133	107	124	0
Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scotland	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
UK total	472	25	82	133	107	125	0
Northern Ireland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand total	472	25	82	133	107	125	0
Average salary	—	55,700	37,028	26,056	18,560	14,893	—
Percentage of staff by grade level and region							
London	97.7	100	90.2	100	100	97.6	0
South East	0.2	0	1.2	0	0	0	0
South West	0.2	0	1.2	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	0.2	0	1.2	0	0	0	0
North West	0.4	0	1.2	0	0	0.8	0
North East	0.2	0	1.2	0	0	0	0
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yorkshire and Humberside	0.2	0	1.2	0	0	0	0
East Midlands	0.4	0	1.2	0	0	0.8	0
Eastern	0.2	0	1.2	0	0	0	0
England total	99.8	100	100	100	100	99.2	0
Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scotland	0.2	0	0	0	0	0.8	0
UK total	100	100	100	100	100	100	0
Northern Ireland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand total	100	100	100	100	100	100	0

Royal Palaces

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many flats in the royal palaces are occupied by persons other than the royal family. [8240]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* There were 244 residences in the occupied royal palaces occupied by persons other than members of the royal family at 31 December 2000.

Theatre Visitor Numbers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact on *(a)* London and *(b)* regional theatres of the fall in the number of visitors following the events of 11 September. [9649]

Dr. Howells: It is too early to say how far the events of September 11 have affected attendance at theatres in London and the regions. The Arts Council of England, Regional Arts Boards and Society of London Theatres

will continue to monitor the situation within both the commercial and subsidised sectors over the coming weeks and will keep me informed of all developments.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the royal prerogative for the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9366]

Dr. Howells: The Department does not keep records of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised, nor could it be practicable to do so.

TV Quality Criteria

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what criteria relating to quality of programmes and schedules she applies to decisions on granting and renewing television broadcasting licences. [10204]

Dr. Howells: Under the terms of the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996, the licensing of television services is a matter for the Independent Television Commission. Channel 3 and Channel 5 licensees had to pass a programme quality threshold before the Commission granted their licences. Channel 4's distinctive and innovative remit is incorporated in its licence. Cable and satellite television services are not subject to statutory programming requirements.

On-line Libraries

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many local authorities have put all of their public libraries on-line; and when the remaining libraries will be brought on-line. [10469]

Dr. Howells: 79 local authorities offer public internet access in all their public libraries. By the end of December 2002 all will do so.

Sportsmatch

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much grant was allocated to Sportsmatch in each full financial year since the scheme was started. [10233]

Dr. Howells: Sportsmatch received the grants shown in the table.

	£ million
1992–93	1.0
1993–94	2.9
1994–95	3.3
1995–96	3.7
1996–97	3.2
1997–98	3.2
1998–99	3.2
1999–2000	3.37
2000–01	3.37
2001–02	3.55
2002–03	3.55

Commercial Radio Licences

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish her policy on future commercial radio licences as they affect Torbay and South Devon. [9979]

Dr. Howells: The award of commercial radio licences is a matter for the Radio Authority.

Lottery Funding (Scotland)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was *(a)* the total amount of Lottery awards, *(b)* their purpose and *(c)* the total value of Lottery awards per constituency in Scotland over the last year; and what was the total percentage of Lottery funding and value in Scotland compared with the other nations and regions within the United Kingdom. [10159]

Dr. Howells: To date, National Lottery awards across the UK total £9.54 billion, shared between projects covering the Arts; Charities; Health; Education and Environment; Heritage; and Sport, plus those associated with celebrating the millennium. (A complete list is available on the DCMS website: www.culture.gov.uk.) The total value of Lottery awards per constituency in Scotland over the last year was £1.22 million. A comparison of Scottish Lottery funding with the other nations and regions within the United Kingdom is set out in the following table.

The total percentage of lottery funding and value in Scotland as compared with the other nations and regions within the United Kingdom, over the last year[1]

Regions/country	*Amount awarded (£)*	*Percentage of lottery funding*
East Midlands	51,569,533	5.[illegible]
Eastern	44,273,651	5.06
London	172,898,301	19.74
North-East	45,541,175	5.20
North-West	95,052,820	10.85
Northern Ireland	36,023,995	4.11
Scotland	88,066,669	10.06
South-East	59,966,324	6.85
South-West	56,865,218	6.49
Wales	51,202,363	5.85
West Midlands	58,538,348	6.68
Yorkshire and Humberside	59,701,202	6.82
n/a	56,011,231	6.40
Total	875,710,830	

[1] Covering the period 1 October 2000 to 30 September 2001

TV Licences (Scotland)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what income the BBC raised in the last 12 months from licence payers in Scotland; and how much of this is spent on the production and broadcasting of television and radio programmes in Scotland. [10098]

Dr. Howells: The BBC income and budgets are calculated for the financial year. In the financial year 2000–01, the total licence fee income from television licence fee payers in Scotland, minus approximately £10 million collection costs, was £195 million.

BBC Scotland's budget income for the same period breaks down as follows:

	£ million
Specific television and radio services for Scotland	68.1
Scottish productions for network TV	35.1
Scottish productions for network Radio	3.4
Co-production/Gaelic Broadcasting Funds	13.8
Total	120.4

The projected budget for BBC Scotland in 2001–02 is £140 million, and in 2002–02 is £160 million.

Scotland also benefits, of course, from the programming which the BBC provides across the UK as a whole.

The costs of transmitter operations, which are paid for centrally by the BBC, are not included. The budgets for independent production companies commissioned by network television and radio on behalf of BBC Scotland are included, but the costs of independent companies commissioned by the networks for their own productions are not included.

Departmental Staff

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will estimate the number of staff employed by her Department by region and nation of the UK; and if she will make a statement. [6774]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1008–12W.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the expenditure by her Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation; which expenditure programmes are allocated with respect to this Index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if she will make a statement. [8936]

Mr. Morley: No departmental funding has previously been allocated on this basis. The Index is used however, as an indicator to measure sustainable development.

Organic Farming

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farms became organic in 2001 to date. [7733]

Mr. Morley: For the period December 2000 to June 2001, the number of officially registered organic holdings, including those in conversion, in the UK increased from 5,508 to 5,939.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the support mechanism to convert to organic farming in EU member states; which countries make no payments for them; which provide transitional support; and which make continuing post conversion payments. [9533]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Support for conversion to organic farming is governed by EC Regulations 1257/99 and 1750/99. The regulations require member states to set out their planned support for organic farming in a rural development programme which must be approved by the EC Commission. We have done so in the England Rural Development Programme, which can be accessed through the DEFRA website. We do not have copies of the programmes of other member states but detailed information about other Governments' support is available at www.organic-europe.net.

Under the EC regulations, payments to farmers who convert their land to organic farming methods must be made for at least five years. For most farmers, the conversion period is two years, thus farmers are supported during conversion and in the immediate years following. The rates and structure of payments vary widely between member states. Many of them make payments beyond the five-year period. The current England Organic Farming Scheme directs support at the time of greatest need, ie during the conversion period and the initial years of full organic status.

Agriculture Review

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made on her review and reform of agriculture. [9143]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The independent Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food have commenced their work and are undertaking a written consultation exercise. We expect their report at the end of the year.

Farming

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent measures she has taken to promote British farming. [8428]

Mr. Morley: Since 1997 the Government have injected some £1.35 billion into the farming sector. We are promoting the modernisation of farming through key policy initiatives including the Action Plan for Farming, the England Rural Development Programme, and measures in the Rural White Paper. We are also now working on how to help the livestock sector move forward to a more secure future in the aftermath of the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

The independent Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food will give further impetus to this work.

Cereal Producers

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support her Department is giving to cereal producers in the East Midlands. [8140]

Mr. Morley: The principal means of support for cereal producers in the East Midlands, as elsewhere, is the EU's Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS). Claimants in the East Midlands in 2000 received some £107 million for cereals under AAPS, as well as £3.6 million in agrimonetary compensation. Cereal producers also benefit from support measures which operate under the EU's common market organisation for cereals, and many of them also participate in agri-environmental schemes under the England Rural Development Programme.

Payments under AAPS for 2001 will start later this year. The aid rate for cereals will be £225.64 per hectare, compared with £217.27 per hectare in 2000.

Pyre Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government have taken to dispose of waste arising from pyres used to incinerate livestock in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [8092]

Mr. Morley: Where possible, and subject to groundwater authorisation from the Environment Agency, ash has been buried on site. This activity is carried out by contractors and staff working to local disease emergency control centres. Where groundwater authorisations could not be given, ash has been collected under a national scheme and transported to a suitable landfill site and buried.

Waste Plastic

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to encourage the collection and recycling of waste plastic. [8504]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 place obligations on certain businesses to recover and recycle specific tonnages of packaging waste, including plastic. The recovery and recycling targets for 2001 under the packaging regulations are 56 per cent. for recovery and 18 per cent. for material-specific recycling of packaging waste. We are currently consulting on recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste in 2002.

All local authorities have been set statutory recycling performance standards, to underpin the national targets established in the Waste Strategy 2000 for England and Wales, of recycling or composting at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005. Future standards will be considered in the light of technological advances, with the aim of maximising the recycling and composting of waste. It is for local authorities to decide which waste streams they should tackle in meeting their performance standard.

The Government have also established the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to promote more sustainable waste management through tackling the barriers to increased reuse and recycling.

WRAP has identified plastics as a priority area in its business plan to 2003–04. One of WRAP's priorities is marketing existing recycled plastic products and removing discriminatory standards. These are linked to the development of 'buy recycled' policies and a research and development programme to develop plastics recycling technology and support composite product development. One of WRAP's aims is to achieve a 20,000 tonne increase in the mixed plastics processing for industrial products by 2003–04.

Flood Defences

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what requests for funding she has received from the Environment Agency to prevent future flooding of the *(a)* Ouse, *(b)* Uck and *(c)* Cuckmere; and if she will make a statement. [8676]

Mr. Morley: Following the severe flooding last year, this Department has responded with a number of funding initiatives, some of which have benefited the Environment Agency's flood management of the Ouse, Uck and Cuckmere directly as shown in the table.

£000

Initiative	*Benefit to Ouse, Uck and Cuckmere*
Contribution to emergency response and repairs costs	over 500
Special funding of design and feasibility costs of, for River Ouse strategy	150

The agency has made some estimates for possible capital works in its medium term plans and these will be considered for grant aid in the normal way when detailed applications are submitted.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Environment Agency regarding the funding of the agency's four proposed schemes to combat flooding of the River Uck. [9768]

Mr. Morley: None. We understand that the Environment Agency are still considering a range of options for schemes to alleviate flooding from the River Uck. No doubt when the agency has identified its preferred options, applications will be submitted to this Department for grant aid. Any such applications will be considered sympathetically against the normal economic, technical an environmental criteria and priority score arrangements.

Form A and D Notices

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what records are kept of Form A and D notices in Herefordshire. [9436]

Mr. Morley: A computer record is maintained by the Worcester Animal Health Divisional Office of all Form A and Form D notices in Herefordshire.

Oak and Horse Chestnut Trees

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent information she has collated about the spread of diseases, viruses or bacteria adversely affecting *(a)* oak and *(b)* horse chestnut trees; what her assessment is of the risk they pose to those trees; and if she will make a statement. [9117]

Mr. Morley: We have collected information about two diseases that affect oak trees, neither of which is thought to pose a significant risk to trees in Britain.

The first is known as Oak Dieback. The Forestry Commission has been investigating this over the last decade, and a similar decline in the health of oak trees has been reported from many other countries in Europe. The cause remains unclear but our experts consider that a strain of fungus may be thriving as a result of climate change. Drought and insect defoliation are also thought to be playing a part. The species affected is the Common oak (*Quercus robur*) while our native, the Sessile oak (*Q. petraea*), appears to be immune.

The second is known as Sudden Oak Death. This new disease, recently named *Phytophthora ramorum*, was identified in parts of California last year. The principal host is Tanoak (*Lithocarpus densiflorus*) although some species of true oak (*Quercus* spp.), which do not occur in Europe, and certain other plants including rhododendron and viburnum have also been affected. Similar symptoms were recorded on rhododendron and viburnum plants in Germany and the Netherlands as long ago as 1993 although it was only earlier this year that it was established that *P. ramorum* was the causal agent. The Forestry Commission and DEFRA are working together to establish whether any British oak trees have been affected or are, indeed, even susceptible to this disease. Early indications are that European oaks may not be susceptible. Current quarantine controls on plants exported from the USA, aimed at other pests and diseases, are considered sufficient to provide protection against accidental import of the disease. This disease and controls against it are being considered by the EU Standing Committee on Plant Health.

There are no specific pests or diseases affecting horse chestnut trees in Britain, although we are monitoring the progress of the Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner (*Cameraria ohridella*) in continental Europe. This pest was first detected in Austria in 1989 and has since spread to many parts of Central and Eastern Europe. It is only found in leaves and leaf litter, and is dispersed when leaves are moved to new areas. Unfortunately, cars, lorries and trains often carry leaves long distances, and this is probably how it has spread across Europe. Leaves are, of course, also dispersed by the wind. Attacks are not fatal and trees may survive repeated attacks by successive generations of larvae. Our scientists are closely involved in research into control methods. The Forestry Commission is also planning to publish an illustrated leaflet describing the biology and symptoms of infestation of the moth next spring, to coincide with the period of the moth's activity.

Litter

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to review the litter laws; and if she will make a statement. [8329]

Mr. Meacher: In March 2001, I announced that the litter legislation was to be reviewed. We will be looking in particular at litter in water, storage and collection of trade waste, providing and using civic amenity site, fly-tipping, managing trade wastes, litter on private land and easing the route for local authorities to prosecute offenders.

Recycling

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of levels of recycled household waste in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other European countries. [7769]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1052W.

Departmental Staff Costs

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate total annual staff costs for her Department and its agencies by nation and region of the UK; and if she will make a statement. [6841]

Mr. Morley: The estimated staff costs (pay, national insurance contribution, pension provision) for my Department, for the 2001–02 financial year, are given in the table.

	£ million
English Government Office Regions	
East Midlands	7.5
Eastern	23.4
London	78.4
North East	9.0
North West	16.0
South East	115.4
South West	26.2
West Midlands	11.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	32.6
Total England	320.1
Scotland	2.9
Wales	0.7
Total	323.7

These figures do not include the additional costs incurred in tackling foot and mouth disease. They include full year costs for the following agencies: Central Science Laboratory, Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Pesticides Safety Directorate, Rural Payments Agency (which came into being formally on 16 October), Veterinary Laboratories Agency and Veterinary Medicines Directorate. The Agency costs have been included in the region where their headquarters is based, for example the Rural Payments Agency has been included in the figures for the south-east. The figures for London reflect the large concentration of the Department's policy and senior staff being based there.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total amount of spending by her Department was in each nation and region of the UK, in the last year for which figures are available; what proportion of her Department's total spending this constitutes; and if she will make a statement. [6845]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 854W.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what was, for each year since 1995, the average response time for providing a substantive answer to *(a)* hon. Member's correspondence, *(b)* correspondence from members of the public and *(c)* written parliamentary questions in the (i) Commons and (ii) Lords; [7043]

(2) what was, for each year since 1995, the total number of *(a)* letters from hon. Members *(b)* letters from members of the public and *(c)* parliamentary questions from (i) hon. Members and (ii) Lords dealt with by her Department; what percentage took (A) more than one month and (B) more than three months to provide a substantive answer; and if she will make a statement. [7044]

Mr. Morley: The effective handling of correspondence and PQs is an issue to which I, and ministerial colleagues, attach great importance.

General information on the volumes of correspondence received across Whitehall and on overall performance is published by the Cabinet Office. Figures for 2000 were published on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 324–28W, and 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 454–56W.

This Department was created on 8 June 2001, bringing together some groups from the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and animal welfare issues and fox hunting from the Home Office. The information requested is therefore not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Yeovil (ref 148) on 20 July. [9963]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1073W.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 23 October; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [10369]

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Whitty, attended the meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers in Luxembourg on 23 October.

We reported on the experiments to identify whether UK sheep had been exposed to BSE. We emphasised that the UK was conducting a large programme of research into BSE, of which the experiments on brain material from the early 1990s was a small part. Other continuing experiments had shown no evidence of BSE in the flock. Commissioner Byrne reported on progress with the EU programme of cattle testing for BSE and concluded that the Council would need to keep current measures under review.

The Commission presented a number of new proposals: proposals for measures to improve the monitoring and control of animal diseases transmissible to man; a report on the evaluation of the active substances in agricultural pesticides to which the Council will revert in November; and proposals for improving the control of genetically modified food and feed and for the traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms.

On foot and mouth disease, we updated colleagues on progress towards stamping out the disease in this country. The Council also discussed the situation in the beef market and agreed to keep it under examination.

There was in addition a brief exchange of views on the Commission's proposal to withdraw the authorisation for use of certain feed additives. A number of member states, including the UK, voiced concern over some of the possible withdrawals. The Commission noted that the necessary technical information had not been supplied to support continued authorisation.

Over lunch Commissioner Fischler updated Ministers on the agricultural aspects of the preparations for the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting at Doha.

Livestock Markets

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to announce conclusions about the future of livestock markets. [9627]

Mr. Morley: For reasons of foot and mouth disease control, there are no plans to re-open livestock markets in the immediate future. Veterinary and scientific advice is that there is an inherent risk of spreading the disease by mixing animals together and then dispersing them. Any livestock keeper with poor standards of biosecurity might attend markets from anywhere in the country and put at risk others attending the market. Even in designated free counties it would take only one such lapse in biosecurity precautions to spread the disease. It is right to be cautious at this stage but the situation will be kept under review.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many representations have been made by farmers with regard to the difference in valuations of stock with regard to foot and mouth disease *(a)* before and *(b)* after 22 March. [9071]

Mr. Morley: The Department has received representations from 1,224 farmers (as at 21 October) about the valuation of stock with regard to foot and mouth disease. Of these 370 were received before 22 March (when standard values were introduced) and 854 after this date.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last met Professor Fred Brown of the US Department of Agriculture to discuss foot and mouth disease; and when she next plans to do so. [7512]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Secretary of State has not met with Professor Brown and at the moment does not have a meeting planned.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from farmers on the fall in income they have incurred since the outbreak of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [8158]

Mr. Morley: The Department has received a number of representations in relation to revenue losses suffered by farmers and farming organisations as a consequence of foot and mouth disease. We are very much aware that the outbreak is having a considerable impact on farming and a range of industries throughout the UK. However it is not possible at this stage to make a reliable estimate of the overall loss of revenue caused by the outbreak. DEFRA is working with a number of other Government Departments to prepare such an estimate and the results of this work will be made publicly available. We are also developing proposals for a survey to collect information from farmers on the direct and indirect impact of foot and mouth disease.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent action she has taken to ensure that the UK is returned to foot and mouth disease-free status. [8156]

Mr. Morley: While we cannot rule out the possibility of a resurgence of the disease at this stage, the Department is taking a number of measures to reduce the risk of further outbreaks. We will continue to stamp out disease whenever it occurs and we are conducting a comprehensive programme of blood testing sheep flocks as part of our arrangements for the gradual relaxation of movement controls. We also have in place a system for cleansing and disinfecting previously infected farms.

We are providing advice to farmers on the controls that need to be exercised when reintroducing animals on to their land. This is not only intended to minimise the risk of foot and mouth disease, but other important diseases of livestock.

Biosecurity measures are also vital in helping to prevent the spread and resurgence of foot and mouth disease. As part of the on-going campaign to provide timely and accurate information and advice to all concerned, we have mailed biosecurity guidelines, leaflets and letters and placed adverts in local, national and specialist publications. In addition, local veterinary inspectors have contacted their clients to discuss biosecurity and other aspects of the disease.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the farms and farm buildings which have been demolished to eradicate foot and mouth disease, indicating the nature of the building, its age, features of architectural significance and its location. [7249]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The Department is unable to publicly identify those farmers whose farm buildings have been demolished as part of the measures to control foot and mouth disease because this would contravene the Data Protection Act 1998. General information on the type or age of buildings that have been demolished can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Following the suspension and revision of secondary cleansing and disinfection costs, guidelines have been issued making it clear public funds will not be used for betterment of farm buildings, or where they are in poor conditions and health and safety is compromised or where the costs are disproportionate.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if all the previously outstanding payments to farmers in Chorley as a result of the outbreak of foot and mouth have been paid. [8429]

Mr. Morley: All statutory compensation due to farmers in Chorley for animals slaughtered during the current outbreak has now been paid. The Department has received a number of other claims from farmers related to the outbreak. These are currently under consideration.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the operation and logistics of the cleansing and disinfecting operation following foot and mouth disease. [8154]

Mr. Morley: Preliminary cleansing and disinfection (C&D) is carried out during the slaughter and disposal stage on all premises known, or believed, to be contaminated with foot and mouth disease in order to minimise the risk of the virus spreading to neighbouring farms.

Twenty-four hours after this stage has been completed, secondary cleansing and disinfection can commence, the purpose of which is to allow restocking and reduce the risk of recrudescence. Secondary C&D is generally undertaken by either farmers themselves or commercial contractors. Subject to preparatory work being undertaken by the farmer, secondary C&D is normally undertaken at DEFRA expense.

The secondary C&D operation is well advanced, with 60 per cent. of premises subject to secondary C&D now complete, and a further 30 per cent. in progress.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on ecological changes arising from the de-stocking of hill areas during the foot and mouth outbreak. [7885]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* There has been little opportunity to observe the changes that are taking place because of biosecurity restrictions. However, it is unlikely that there will be any lasting changes providing normal grazing resumes within a reasonable time.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the promptness of payment of *(a)* livestock compensation to farmers whose animals have been slaughtered in the foot and mouth crisis and *(b)* contractors who have assisted in the disposal and clean up operations. [7722]

Mr. Morley: Throughout the outbreak the aim has been to make payments as soon as possible subject to the necessary checks to protect public funds, but at the peak of the outbreak payments were delayed due to the large volume of claims received.

The Department's target is to pay all contractors/ suppliers of goods and services we employ within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice. Given the large number of suppliers of goods and services which the Department has

contracted—all of whom expect to be paid promptly—this target has proved difficult to meet. However, the time taken to process invoices is being reduced.

In addition to this, there is a duty to ensure proper, effective and efficient use of public money. This means that the Department cannot pay invoices for goods and/or services that are not accompanied by accurate supporting information as to the nature and extent of the goods and services supplied. Unfortunately this information is not always provided by some of the suppliers we have employed. This has made the Department's task much harder, and it is often one of the reasons for delays.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the *(a)* highest, *(b)* lowest and *(c)* average payment of compensation made to farmers following the foot and mouth outbreak. [7652]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* As at 10 October the highest amount paid for a valuation for statutory animal compensation is £4,238,800; the lowest is £20; and the average is £104,395.

Diesel Storage

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the health and safety implications of the storage of diesel on domestic premises. [8339]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

Diesel is not a significant fire risk in its own right but would add fuel to any fire which started in other combustible material.

The storage of diesel on domestic premises is not currently covered by specific health and safety legislation. However, some restrictions are placed on fuel storage spaces in the Building Regulations and (in Scotland) in the Building Standards.

The Health and Safety Executive is currently reviewing the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928, which controls storage of petrol. It expects to carry out the third and final phase of this review next year, to look at domestic storage of petrol and consider whether in future other vehicle fuels, such as diesel should be covered by safety controls for domestic premises.

Flood Damage

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what specific measures she plans to take to contribute to the completion of repairs to north Yorkshire's road network following flood damage incurred in autumn 2000. [8144]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply

The Government have decided to give extra assistance to those authorities where the cost of dealing with flood damage to their highways and bridges incurred during the autumn of 2000 would absorb a high proportion of their available resources for highway and bridge maintenance. £23 million was made available nationally from the Government's emergency reserves, from which north Yorkshire county council received £1.258 million.

This was also in addition to a previous additional allocation of £0.7 million towards the repairs to Mercury Bridge in Richmond, which was seriously damaged during flooding in June 2000.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

CPS (Child Abuse)

35. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the policy of the CPS in connection with allegations of child sex abuse in children's homes. [6724]

The Solicitor-General: The CPS applies the code for Crown Prosecutors in all cases referred to it by the police so that it can make fair and consistent decisions about prosecutions. Every case is reviewed to make sure that it meets the evidential and public interest tests set out in the code.

The more serious the offence the more likely it is that it will be prosecuted. Cases of child sexual abuse committed in children's homes are always regarded as serious and often involve one or more of the public interest factors listed in the code that generally tend in favour of prosecution. These factors include: where the defendant is in a position of trust; where the victim is vulnerable; where there are marked differences in age; or where there is an element of corruption. In such cases, a prosecution will usually take place unless there are strong public interest factors tending against prosecution which clearly outweigh those tending in favour.

Criminal Prosecutions

36. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Solicitor-General what criteria apply in deciding whether to prosecute *(a)* serious fraud and *(b)* other criminal offences. [6725]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is the principal prosecuting authority in England and Wales, and as such it takes over and prosecutes the complete spectrum of criminal cases instituted by the police. This includes serious offences of fraud, although these cases can also be prosecuted by the Serious Fraud Office (SFO).

CPS decisions on whether or not to prosecute an offence, of any kind, are taken in accordance with the principles set out in the code for Crown Prosecutors, issued by the Director of Public Prosecution under section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985.

The code acknowledges that each case is unique and must be considered on its own facts and merits. However, fairness and consistency in assessing these elements are promoted by applying a common framework of key principles, irrespective of the type of offence under consideration.

CPS Reform

37. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on her plans to reform the CPS. [6726]

The Solicitor-General: Reforms recommended by the Glidewell Review to deliver better justice are presently being implemented in the CPS.

The CPS is restructuring its front line operations to secure benefits from close working with the police, and enabling lawyers to concentrate on more serious cases. A modern IT infrastructure is being rolled-out and a new electronic case management application is planned for 2003. The recruitment of more lawyers, caseworkers and administrative staff has begun, from resources provided by the last spending review, and an enhanced level of service is being delivered to victims and witnesses.

CPS (Denman Report)

38. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on progress with the report of Mrs. Sylvia Denman on racism within the CPS. [6727]

The Solicitor-General: The Denman report into racism in the Crown Prosecution Service was published on 26 July 2001. The report was welcomed by the Director of Public Prosecutions and all 10 recommendations were accepted. The Crown Prosecution Service has started work on implementing the 10 recommendations. These have already been implemented, a further six are in the process of being implemented and the last recommendation will be implemented in spring 2002.

The Attorney-General has formed a group called the Attorney-General Race Advisory Group, which will assist the Law Officers in overseeing the service's implementation of these recommendations. Members of the group include Sylvia Denman herself and Gurbux Singh the Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality.

CPS (Prosecution Rate)

39. **Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Solicitor-General what proportion of cases passed by the police to the CPS for prosecution are subsequently dropped. [6728]

The Solicitor-General: During the year ending June 2001, 13 per cent. of completed cases were discontinued by the CPS in magistrates courts, and 12.8 per cent. of completed cases were dropped in the Crown court. The magistrates court figures include those cases dropped at court before prosecution evidence was heard as well as those formally discontinued in advance of the hearing. The Crown court figures represent all cases dropped by the CPS before a jury was sworn, including those discontinued under section 51 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 implemented in January 2001.

Human Rights Act

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment has been made of the impact on prosecutions of the implementation of the Human Rights Act 1998. [6723]

The Solicitor-General: High quality CPS training and guidance has ensured that prosecuting lawyers are well equipped to advise on and argue their cases, fully respecting human rights. A fast tracking procedure for appeals involving human rights points has proved an effective mechanism for obtaining authoritative judgments from the higher courts, keeping uncertainty and delay to a minimum while important points are clarified. Judgments in these cases have contributed to the emerging domestic human rights jurisprudence.

TREASURY

Regulators

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to restrain the costs of official bodies classified as regulators. [9926]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This February the Treasury published an "External Efficiency Review of Utility Regulators". The purpose of this review was to give the Treasury, the utility regulators concerned (Ofgem, Ofwat, Oftel and ORR) and their stakeholders reassurance that each regulator is efficiently run, to identify any shortcomings and to encourage the spread of good practice.

The report concluded that the UK regulators are professionally run organisations. The regulators' positive response to this report will lead to further improvements in UK regulatory standards. My officials have discussed the implementation of the report with Ofgem, Oftel, Ofwat and ORR and will continue to monitor progress. Implementation of the report will increase transparency in budget setting, lead to better assessment of the costs and benefits of major projects, spread best practice, and help the regulators recruit and retain quality staff.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the *(a)* individual and *(b)* total costs to HM Government of official bodies classified as regulators for each year since May 1997, including predictions for 2002. [9930]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The utility regulators are funded by fees paid by the licence holders in their industries. With one exception for part of Oftel's expenditure, the regulators are therefore not funded through general taxation, although they are all subject to control of gross spending and the use of receipts through Estimates presented to Parliament.

The best single source of cost information in relation to the utility regulators Ofgem (energy), Ofwat (water), ORR (rail) and Oftel (telecommunications) is contained in the "External Efficiency Review of Utility Regulators" which was published this February. The full report can be found on the Treasury website www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pdf/2001/regulators 1902.pdf. (see "Cost Efficiency" section 4—Table 4.1).

Detailed cost information is published in each of the organisations' annual reports.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total staff costs in real terms; and how many staff were employed, by all official bodies described as regulators in each year since May 1997. [9927]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The best single source of staff cost information in relation to the utility regulators Ofgem (energy), Ofwat (water), ORR (rail) and Oftel (telecommunications) is contained in the WS Atkins report, "External Efficiency Review of Utility Regulators", which

was published this February. The full report can be found on the Treasury website www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pdf/2001 regulators 1902.pdf.

Detailed cost information and staff numbers are published in each of the organisations' annual reports.

Euro

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the First Ministers and others from the devolved Administrations in relation to UK entry into the euro-zone and their role in a referendum on that question. [9847]

Ruth Kelly: If the Government recommend UK entry into economic and monetary union, it will be put to a vote in Parliament and then to a referendum of the British people. A Government decision to recommend UK entry into economic and monetary union is a reserved matter, and therefore a matter for the UK Government.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials in his Department are involved in the preliminary technical work on the five economic tests relating to membership of the euro; which official is in charge of this work; when he expects this work to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [8942]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 67W and 12 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 648–49W.

Child Care

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he plans to consider child care as part of the 2002 Spending Review. [10822]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We intend to conduct an inter-departmental review of child care, whose conclusions will feed into the 2002 Spending Review.

The review will be led by my noble Friend Baroness Ashton, and will involve the Department for Education and Skills, the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury, and the Women and Equality Unit, together with the Performance and Innovation Unit.

Split-capital Investment Trusts

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the number of split-capital investment trusts which have breached their banking covenants in the UK in the last three months; and if he will make a statement. [9794]

Ruth Kelly: Subject to the requirements on listed companies to make disclosures to the market, individual companies' relationships with their banks is a matter for them.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* increases and *(b)* decreases in departmental budgets have occurred since May 1999 on the basis of departmental performance in relation to public service agreements; and if he will make a statement. [8927]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information about performance against the targets set in public service agreements is a significant factor when considering departmental budgets. Information on budget allocations and departmental performance is published annually in Departmental Reports.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to report on the success of Departments in achieving their public service agreement targets; and if he will make a statement. [8929]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Government Departments will continue to publish information about performance against their public service agreement targets in annual Departmental Reports.

Public Finances

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the public sector net cash requirement in the financial year 2001–02 to date; how this compares with the PSNCR at the same stage of the 2000–01 financial year; and if he will make a statement; [8930]

(2) what his estimate is of the percentage change in *(a)* income tax, *(b)* value added tax, *(c)* corporation tax, *(d)* excise tax and *(e)* national insurance contribution receipts, between the period from April to September in (i) fiscal year 2000–01 and (ii) fiscal year 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [9956]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested can be obtained from the joint HM Treasury/Office for National Statistics (ONS) public sector finances "First Release", which was published on 18 October. Copies are available in the Library and on the ONS website www.statistics.gov.uk.

Taxes and Excise Duties

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce deferred increases in taxes and excise duties; and if he will make a statement. [9954]

Ruth Kelly: The Government keep all taxes under review and decisions will be made as part of the normal Budget process.

Corporate Directors (Salaries)

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will introduce proposals to use the tax system to control very large salary increases for corporate directors and managers; and if he will make a statement; [9735]

(2) if he will introduce proposals to restrict the ability of a corporation to deduct as a business expense an increase in the salary of a director or manager which is not approved by shareholders. [9736]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Salary levels are a matter for the organisation concerned and its shareholders, not for the tax system. In general terms the business tax system does not seek to distinguish between one sort of expenditure and another but tests for tax relief by reference to whether or not the expenditure was incurred for business purposes.

Personal Investment Authority Investigations

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce the administrative fee levied on financial services firms by the Financial Services Authority for Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman investigations into advice given by such firms. [9253]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) will replace the Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman Bureau and seven other complaints schemes on 1 December 2001.

The FOS will be funded by a combination of a general levy (which all authorised firms will pay) and case fees. The FOS will consult on its 2002–03 budget in January 2002.

International Tax Recoveries

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers there were in the years ending 31 March *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000, including as one any group of taxpayers who are for tax assessment purposes a single taxpayer from whom recoveries in terms of tax, duty, interest and penalties of £214 million (1999) and £1,091 million (2000) were made by International Division; what was the total largest recovery from such taxpayers in each of those years; and if the recoveries included penalties. [9384]

Ruth Kelly: The Inland Revenue has a duty to maintain taxpayer confidentiality, and it is not therefore possible to disclose precisely how much International Division recovered from any single taxpayer.

The table provides an analysis of recoveries.

	Year to 31 March	
Current tax yield range	*1999*	*2000*
Less than £1 million	103	78
£1 million to £10 million	11	18
£10 million to £50 million	6	7
£50 million to £100 million	0	0
Over £100 million	0	2
Total settlements	120	105

No penalties were included in the tax yield.

Independent Insurance Company

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had for compensation following the collapse of the Independent Insurance Company; and if he will make a statement. [9050]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has received a number of inquiries relating to Independent Insurance.

I understand that the provisional liquidators are continuing to go through the process of identifying all policyholders and agreeing claims where appropriate. Many of those claims will be covered by the Policyholders Protection Board (PPB). This means: valid claims under compulsory insurance, including third party motor insurance, are payable in full; and valid claims made by private policyholders (essentially individuals and partnerships, but not small companies) under non-compulsory insurance, including other liability claims, claims for own damage under comprehensive motor policies, buildings and home contents policies etc., are payable to 90 per cent.

Claims by businesses, except for claims under compulsory insurance policies, will generally rank with other creditors of the company to be paid in due course by the provisional liquidator to the extent that funds are available.

Brownfield Sites

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the uptake has been, broken down by region of the advance payable tax credit for clearing and developing brownfield sites; and if he will make a statement. [9386]

Ruth Kelly: No regional estimates are available for the take-up of this measure.

Interest Rates

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Treasury *(a)* told the Bank of England about the co-ordinated interest rate cuts following the events of September 11 and *(b)* discussed British response with the Bank. [9772]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* As permitted by the Bank of England Act 1998 the Governor of the Bank, as chair of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), convened a special MPC meeting on 18 September. As with all MPC meetings the Treasury representative was invited to attend.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Treasury has recently varied the instructions to the Bank of England to allow reductions in interest rates to stimulate economic activity. [9773]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The Government set, and take responsibility for, the objectives of monetary policy as laid out in the remit given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Governor of the Bank of England, under the Bank of England Act 1998. The inflation target and the remit are renewed annually (last time being in March 2001), as required by the Act. The Government have issued no instructions other than the remit.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to help Working Families Tax Credit recipients who have been refused a mortgage because of the reluctance of mortgage providers to count WFTC payments as income. [9814]

Ruth Kelly: It is a discretionary matter for individual mortgage providers to decide whether or not to count WFTC as income when considering mortgage applications.

Winter Deaths

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many excess winter deaths have occurred in each year since 1979; and what the provisional figures for the winter of 2000–01 are. [9813]

Ruth Kelly: The information falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. David Willetts, dated 24 October 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question asking for the number of excess winter deaths since 1979 and for the provisional figures for 2000–01 (9813). I am replying in his absence.

The attached table shows these figures. Figures for 2000–2001 are provisional.

Excess winter deaths[1], all ages, all causes, England and Wales, 1979–2000, 2000–01[2]

Winter (December to March)	*Number of deaths*
1979–80	[3]30,110
1980–81	[3]32,900
1981–82	[3]42,380
1982–83	[3]42,820
1983–84	[3]30,240
1984–85	[3]47,380
1985–86	[3]49,330
1986–87	[3]26,370
1987–88	[3]32,970
1988–89	[3]21,160
1989–90	[3]47,200
1990–91	[3]37,940
1991–92	[3]34,850
1992–93	[3]25,650
1993–94	[3]25,900
1994–95	[3]27,290
1995–96	[3]40,190
1996–97	[3]47,680
1997–98	[3]22,900
1998–99	[3]46,840
1999–2000	[3]48,440
2000–01	[4]25,000

[1] Excess winter deaths are defined by the Office for National Statistics as the difference between the number of deaths during the four winter months (December to March) and the average number of deaths the preceding autumn (August to November) and the following summer (April to July)
[2] Provisional
[3] Rounded to the nearest 10
[4] Provisional, rounded to the nearest 100

Bank Accounts (Terrorists)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the bank accounts which have been frozen since 11 September on the ground of terrorist associations. [10080]

Ruth Kelly: The legislation implementing UNSCR 1373 in the UK does not empower the Government to disclose details of individual accounts frozen without the consent of the financial institutions holding the accounts of suspected terrorists.

The list of individuals and institutions covered by the freezing order has been published by the Bank of England Sanctions Unit.

Consultation Documents

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultation documents have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* HM Customs and Excise and *(c)* HM Inland Revenue since 1 April 2000; and if he will list in each case the opening and closing dates of the consultation. [9776]

Ruth Kelly: Details of HM Treasury and Inland Revenue consultation papers, including their opening and closing dates are available on their respective public internet websites. Customs and Excise (C&E) have issued four consultation documents since 1 April 2000. An up to date list of C&E consultation documents is expected to be listed on their public website at the end of December 2001.

Turkey

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans there are to reschedule Turkey's debts; and if he will make a statement. [9120]

Ruth Kelly: Turkey is implementing an IMF programme, supported by $19 billion of IMF resources, which is currently on track. The IMF Board has the flexibility to delay repayments on these loans, if circumstances require. Turkey continues to honour all its bilateral obligations, including to the UK Government.

Taxation

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what criteria he decides which *(a)* tax levies, *(b)* tax reliefs and *(c)* tax credits are administered by (i) HM Customs and Excise and (ii) the Inland Revenue. [9761]

Ruth Kelly: In general, direct taxes and associated credits and entitlements, are administered by the Inland Revenue, and indirect taxes and customs control systems are administered by HM Customs and Excise.

Further information on the administrative responsibilities of HM Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue are set out in their respective annual reports.

ISAs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the take-up rate of ISAs by each earnings quintile, since their introduction. [9754]

Ruth Kelly: Information by earnings quintile is not readily available. However, analysis from the 2000–01 NOP Financial Research Survey suggests that around a fifth of all ISAs and a quarter of mini cash ISAs are held by those earning less than £11,500 per year, compared with around one in five TESSAs and one in six PEPs.

Gambling

Ms Ward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact upon revenue of the implementation of the recommendations made in the gambling review report. [8617]

Mr. Boateng: The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is currently consulting on the gambling review report's recommendations and no decisions have been made about their implementation.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the total publicity and advertising budget for HM Customs and Excise was in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02; [9183]

(2) what the unit cost of administering indirect taxes per trader was in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 to the latest date for which information is available; [9176]

(3) what the total net administration costs of HM Customs and Excise were for the current financial year up to the most recent date for which figures are available; [9211]

(4) what the actual net programme costs of HM Customs and Excise were for the current financial year to the latest date for which figures are available; what his latest estimate is of the outturn for total net programme costs for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement; [9208]

(5) what the total net programme costs of HM Customs and Excise for the financial year 2000–01 were; [9209]

(6) what his latest estimate is for the total net administration costs of HM Customs and Excise for the financial year 2001–02; [9210]

(7) what the final outturn for the total net administration costs of HM Customs and Excise was for 2000–01. [9212]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Where available, final estimates of these costs will be published in the annual report of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise later this year.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of complaints against HM Customs and Excise were upheld by the Adjudication Office in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 to the most recent date for which information is available. [9175]

Mr. Boateng: The outcome of complaints investigated by the Adjudicator's Office in 2000–01 was set out in the Adjudicator's annual report, published on 11 July 2001. The outcome of complaints investigated in 2001–02 will be set out in the Adjudicator's 2002 annual report due to be published next year.

European Court of Justice Judgments

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for *(a)* UK tax law and *(b)* Government revenue of the 9 October Judgment of the European Court of Justice in Case C-409/98, Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise *v.* Mirror Group plc; and if he will make a statement. [9170]

Mr. Boateng: No change in UK tax legislation is needed as a result of this judgment. The impact on tax revenue will depend on the UK courts' decision on an issue which has been referred back to them by the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for *(a)* UK tax law and *(b)* Government revenue of the 4 October judgment of the European Court of Justice in Case C-326/99 "Stichting 'Goed Woren' *v.* Staatssecretaris van Financiën"; and if he will make a statement. [9168]

Mr. Boateng: As the judgment of the European Court of Justice in this Dutch case is in line with UK policy, it has no impact on UK tax legislation or revenue.

Smuggling

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many scanners to detect tobacco smuggling in freight containers are deployed by HM Customs and Excise; at which ports the scanners are located; and if he will make a statement. [9042]

Mr. Boateng: Customs have seven scanners in operation, another three will come into operation soon and a procurement exercise is in process to obtain more. It is Customs policy not to provide details of precise operational deployment. All Customs scanners are mobile and are deployed flexibly throughout the UK to ensure Customs can react to, and tackle, the smuggling threat as it changes.

Revenue Evasion

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total United Kingdom revenue evasion prevented by HM Customs and Excise was in 2000–01. [9179]

Mr. Boateng: The total United Kingdom revenue evasion prevented by HM Customs and Excise in 2000–01 will be published in the Department's annual report that will be laid before Parliament in due course.

Savings Ratio

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the savings ratio has been for each quarter since May 1992; [9751]

(2) what the savings ratio has been among families in the lowest income quintile in each year since May 1997. [9747]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Howard Flight, dated 25 October 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions on the savings ratio among families in the lowest income quintile in each year since May 1997, and the overall household savings ratio for each quarter since May 1992 (9747, 9751). I am replying in his absence.

The only data available on household expenditure and income by gross income for the lowest income quintile group are those collected in the Family Expenditure Survey and published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in "Family Spending". However, these data are not on a comparable basis to the National Accounts definition of expenditure and income.

The information for overall household savings ratios for each quarter since 1992 is available as part of the output of the quarterly National Accounts and is published quarterly in the ONS' First Release, "Quarterly National Accounts". The series is held on the ONS database, using the four digit code NRJS. All sources are available in the House of Commons library.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Signals Passed at Danger

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he

will publish the location of the five signals most often passed at danger in the last year for which figures are available. [7449]

Mr. Jamieson: The details of all signals passed at danger (SPADs) are contained in the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) monthly SPAD reports, copies of which are placed in the House Library and are also available on HSE's website at www.house.gov.uk/railway/spad/index.htm.

Unadopted Alleyways

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will introduce targets for the condition and safety of unadopted alleyways; and if he will make a statement; [7383]

(2) what assessment he has made of the number of unadopted alleyways in the United Kingdom; [7380]

(3) what plans he has to facilitate the improvement of unadopted alleyways; and if he will make a statement; [7385]

(4) if he will introduce standards and targets to encourage the adoption of unadopted alleyways; and if he will make a statement. [7384]

Ms Keeble: Recent figures are not available for the number of unadopted streets or alleyways. In 1972 there were some 40,000 private streets throughout the country.

Whether or not a street should be adopted is a matter for individual local authorities. They have the power to adopt such streets and to contribute towards the cost of making them up to an adoptable standard, where they deem that to be appropriate. An authority can also carry out urgent repairs to unadopted areas to prevent or remove danger to persons or vehicles, using powers conferred on them by section 230 of the Highways Act 1980, but without necessarily committing themselves to adoption. Any decision about whether to carry out urgent repairs is for the authority to make.

Transport Journeys

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in each year since 1995, in each region and nation of the UK, what the percentage change in the number of journeys undertaken by *(a)* car, *(b)* train, *(c)* bus, *(d)* light railways, *(e)* trams, *(f)* underground and *(g)* other forms of transport was; what estimates he has made of trends in journeys undertaken by each category until (i) 2010, (ii) 2020 and (iii) 2030; and if he will make a statement. [6949]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures for Great Britain are set out in the tables. Information is not available for all modes in the format requested. However, some greater detail for bus, rail, underground and light rail can be found in Transport Statistics Great Britain 2001 in the Library.

(a) Journeys by car

	Great Britain trips (million)	*Percentage change*
1994	35,500	—
1995	35,000	0
1996	36,500	3
1997	37,100	2
1998	37,200	0
1999	37,000	0
2000	36,600	–1

Source:
National Travel Survey

(b) National Rail

	Great Britain passenger journeys (million)	*Percentage change*
1994–95	735	—
1995–96	761	4
1996–97	801	5
1997–98	846	6
1998–99	892	5
1999–2000	931	4
2000–01	957	3

Source:
Strategic Rail Authority

(c) Bus

	Great Britain passenger journeys (million)	*Percentage change*
1994–95	4,420	—
1995–96	4,383	–1
1996–97	4,350	–1
1997–98	4,330	0
1998–99	4,248	–2
1999–2000	4,279	1
2000–01	[1]4,314	1

[1] Provisional

Source:
DTLR annual survey of PSV operators

(d) Light rail

	Great Britain passenger journeys (million)	*Percentage change*
1994–95	63.2	—
1995–96	67.8	7
1996–97	73.3	8
1997–98	79	8
1998–99	85	8
1999–2000	93.9	10
2000–01	119.5	27

Source:
DTLR survey of light rail operators

(e) Underground

	Great Britain passenger journeys (million)	*Percentage change*
1994–95	778.7	—
1995–96	798.3	3
1996–97	785.7	–2
1997–98	846.1	8
1998–99	880.6	4
1999–2000	941.7	7
2000–01	984.4	5

Source:
London Underground, Strathclyde PTE

(f) Other modes (including walking)

	Great Britain trips (million)	*Percentage change*
1994	20,400	—
1995	19,500	–4
1996	19,100	–3
1997	18,900	–1
1998	18,900	–0
1999	18,200	–4
2000	17,400	–5

Source:
National Travel Survey

Central Railway

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when he will make a statement on the Central Railway proposal; [8332]

(2) if he will make a statement on the specific recommendations made to Ministers by the Strategic Rail Authority regarding the Central Railway proposal. [8836]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has carried out, with the help of consultants, a high level review into Central Railway's proposals and has forwarded its report to my Department. The Government will take a view on the issues raised by the report and respond to Central Railway in due course.

All-Wales Rail Franchise

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the timetable is for the establishment of a single all-Wales rail franchise; and if he will make a statement. [8643]

Mr. Jamieson: An announcement will be made in due course.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Government's policy is on the establishment of a single all-Wales rail franchise; and if he will make a statement. [8644]

Mr. Jamieson: The draft Policy Statement on Passenger Rail Franchising issued on 16 July recognises that different approaches will be necessary to achieve the benefits we are looking for from different franchises.

The Strategic Rail Authority has proposed the creation of a single franchise for Wales. It is considering this alongside the other options for delivering benefits to rail passengers on Welsh routes.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect of Railtrack's financial problems on the establishment of a single all-Wales rail franchise; and if he will make a statement. [8642]

Mr. Jamieson: We would not expect the establishment of a Welsh franchise to be affected by the High Court's decision to place Railtrack plc in railway administration.

Car Safety

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what differences there are between the technical test requirements proposed by Working Group 17 of the EEVC (European Enhanced Vehicle-safety Committee) and those proposed by the European motor industry for *(a)* impact speed for a child's head, *(b)* mass of a child's head, *(c)* maximum tibia acceleration and *(d)* maximum knee bend angle; and what ways the different proposals can be expected to produce different test results for pedestrians hit by a car. [9044]

Mr. Jamieson: A comparison of the technical requirements is given in the table:

	WG17 proposal Phase 1	*Negotiated agreement Phase 2*	
(a) Child's head impact speed (km/h)	40	35	40
(b) Child's head mass (kg)	2.5	3.5	2.5
(c) Max tibia acceleration (g)	150	200	150
(d) Minimum knee bend angle (deg)	15	21	15

In comparison with the first phase of a negotiated agreement, the WG17 proposal offers greater protection against head injuries and reduced likelihood of leg injuries, a particular aspect being reduced knee injuries.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the draft timetable for the stages for implementing the proposals of Working Group 17 of EEVC. [9048]

Mr. Jamieson: The Commission are expected to make a decision on whether to accept the Industry proposal for a negotiated agreement in December this year. If this option is taken, pedestrian protection measures will start to be introduced in 2005, and the Working Group 17 proposals (or equivalent) will be fully implemented by 2015.

If the negotiated agreement route is not taken, the Commission may decide to propose a Directive. Such a Directive would need to be discussed through the European Council and Parliament through the Co-decision Procedure, and the implementation dates would depend on the timing and outcome of these discussions.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the change in number and intensity of pedestrian accidents if all cars in the *(a)* United Kingdom, and *(b)* EU had fronts that met the requirements of Working Group 17 of EEVC. [9046]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of pedestrian accidents would not be affected by implementation of the Working Group 17 (WG17) proposals. However, past research by TRL (Transport Research Laboratory) estimated that measures similar to those recommended by WG17 would reduce the total number of pedestrian deaths by 8 per cent. and serious injuries by 21 per cent. This was applicable to both the UK and the EU. Other studies suggest a wider range of possible benefits.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the points made in response to consultations on the alternative ways to reduce the consequences of car crashes to pedestrians. [9045]

Mr. Jamieson: We are currently considering the responses we have received. We plan to make the results of the consultation available when we have completed this process.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will decide between the safety proposals put forward by Working Group 17 of EEVC and the alternative proposals. [9047]

Mr. Jamieson: We are currently considering the responses we have received to our consultation on the Commission's proposal for a negotiated agreement with manufactures, and hope to have reached a conclusion by mid-November.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the research and development programmes that the Government have funded for the design and production of safer car fronts since 1979. [9069]

Mr. Jamieson: The bulk of the UK research into safer car fronts has been carried out under TRL contracts S220C/VF and S222C/VF (pedestrian protection test procedures and design) which cover the period between 1992 and 2002.

Related research on vehicle/pedestrian safety has taken place under TRL contracts S071M/VF (test requirements for bull bars) and S310B/VF (advanced adaptive safety systems).

Further work in this general area is being undertaken in three new projects under the Government's foresight programme. These include the SHORSEN and APVRU projects which look at advanced pedestrian detection systems, and PEDSALI, which examines the use of advanced materials for pedestrian-friendly bumpers.

Regional Air Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ensure that the forthcoming consultation on regional air services and air services in the south east of England and the subsequent White Paper include proposals on guaranteed access for air services from designated UK regional cities to Heathrow or Gatwick, for a minimum of three return services per day with the slots ring fenced by public service obligation status where appropriate; and if he will make a statement. [9353]

Mr. Spellar: The forthcoming consultation documents on regional air services and air services in the south-east of England will address the issue of regional connections to London. We are currently reviewing Government policy on air links from UK regions to London in response to recent representations about the importance of Inverness-Gatwick and Belfast International-London Heathrow services. The hon. Friend's suggestions will be taken into account.

Night Flights

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether his Department will appeal against the European Court ruling on night flights at Heathrow; and if he will make a statement; [9344]

(2) if the decision by the European Court on night operations at Heathrow will change Government policy on designation of airports for night operations; if he will consult those companies, groups and individuals who would be most affected by such a change in policy before making any decision; and if he will make a statement; [9357]

(3) what economic research contingent the Government have commissioned into the need for night flights into London and other UK airports; [9494]

(4) what discussions he has had with trade unions representing airline and airport employees following the decision of the European Court of Human Rights on night flights; and if he will make a statement; [9493]

(5) if the European Court ruling on night noise at Heathrow will influence the timing of his Department's decision on the application to impose a designation for night noise purposes on East Midlands Airport; whether this will affect the policy for night operations at other UK airports which are not designated for noise purposes; and if he will make a statement. [9356]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) and the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 875W, and the remarks by the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) during the debate about night flights on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 47WH. We are studying the judgment carefully before deciding what action, if any, may be necessary. The judgment cannot become final for at least three months from its date of publication on 2 October, and there will be no immediate changes to the present situation at Heathrow or elsewhere. It is not the right time to hold meetings with any interested parties, but this may be possible at a later stage.

Aer Lingus

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make representations to the Irish Government and the EU Transport Commissioner to ensure that any state aid paid to Aer Lingus is not used to subsidise air services from Dublin and that Aer Lingus should reinstate the services between Belfast and New York as part of its operating programme. [9351]

Mr. Spellar: In its recent Communication on the repercussions of the terrorist attacks in the United States on the air transport industry, presented to the EU Transport Council on 16 October, the European Commission set out guidelines on emergency aid measures. The Government are confident that the Commission will examine rigorously whether any proposed assistance offered by a member state to an airline is compatible with the EC treaty and with these guidelines.

A350

Mr. Grayson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road accidents occurred in the last 12 months on the A350 dual

carriageway between Chippenham and Junction 17 of the M5; and how many of them were caused by vehicles crossing the central reservation. [9383]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is available only for accidents involving personal injury. In the year 2000, there were two such accidents on the A350 dual carriageway between Chippenham and Junction 17 of the M4. Both of these accidents involved at least one vehicle crossing the central reservation.

Council Houses

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the availability of funding for council house modernisation and repair in local authorities where tenants have voted against stock transfers. [9624]

Ms Keeble: Resources for renovating and repairing council housing stock are provided through the Major Repairs Allowance, the credit approvals issued through the housing annual capital guideline and the maintenance allowance within Housing Revenue Account Subsidy. The levels of resources (£ million) for these for this year and next year agreed in the 2000 Spending Review are as follows:

£ million

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Capital works			
Major Repairs Allowance	1,600	1,512	1,403
Housing credit approvals	705	793	842
Revenue expenditure			
Maintenance allowance	1,915	1,805	1,685

It is for local authorities to decide, in consultation with their tenants, whether they wish to pursue the available options for generating increased investment in the housing stock. In addition to housing transfer, additional resources are available through the arms length management (£460 million available over the three years to 2003–04) and Private Finance Initiatives (£760 million over the three years).Where an authority has had an unsuccessful partial or whole housing transfer ballot it will be essential to understand the reasons why tenants voted against the transfer. There is no bar on these authorities revisiting transfer.

Foundations

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funding has been made available to foundations in advance of their annual budget for the delivery of help to home improvement agencies. [9545]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* "Foundations" operates as the national co-ordinating body for home improvement agencies under contract to my Department. Funding under the contract is provided in the form of quarterly payments made in arrears on the basis of evidence that the requirements of the contract have been fulfilled.

Storage Premises (Fires)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many fires have taken place in warehouse, distribution and other storage premises since 1990. [8233]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The table shows the total number of fires for each year from 1990 to 1999 for 'warehouses and other distribution' and 'outdoor storage' premises.

Fires in warehouses and other outdoor storage premises, UK 1990–99

Year	*Total*	*Warehouses and other distribution*	*Outdoor storage*
1990	2,192	744	1,448
1991	1,903	622	1,281
1992	1,782	551	1,231
1993	1,814	609	1,205
1994[1,2]	3,193	883	2,310
1995[1,2]	3,791	856	2,935
1996[1,2]	4,040	702	3,338
1997[1,2]	3,975	726	3,249
1998[1,2]	3,916	771	3,145
1999[1,2,3]	4,120	757	3,363

[1] Figures are based on sample data
[2] Including late call and heat and smoke damage incidents
[3] Provisional

The number of fires within these categories before 1994 is not directly comparable with data for later years. Since 1994 the statistics have included late calls and heat and smoke damage, and have also been estimates derived from samples.

Aircraft Air Filters

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of studies into the transmission of disease through the air filter systems of passenger aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [9615]

Mr. Jamieson: Consultants commissioned by the Government have reviewed published studies on the transmission of disease in aircraft cabins and have made two medium/low priority recommendations for further research. We are currently considering these recommendations. The House of Lords Select Committee Report on Air Travel and Health, on the basis of the evidence presented to it, concluded that

> "the modern aircraft cabin environment generally poses no greater risk of transmission of infection between its occupants than crowded situations elsewhere—and may, indeed, be safer than most of them".

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will seek an international agreement to speed up the replacement of air filters on passenger aircraft. [9616]

Mr. Jamieson: Since the use of aircraft cabin air filters is not mandatory, an international agreement on the timing of their replacement is inappropriate. It is for airlines to select a suitable maintenance regime that would ensure industry or in-house performance standards are met.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the replacement of aircraft air filters; and if he will make a statement. [9614]

Mr. Jamieson: Use of aircraft cabin air filters is not mandatory. Therefore it is for airlines to select an appropriate maintenance regime that would ensure industry or in-house performance standards are met.

Bypasses

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria his Department uses for the approval of bypasses. [9664]

Mr. Jamieson: All bids for new schemes whether bypasses or other classes of scheme are assessed using the New Approach to Appraisal developed during the Roads Review in 1998. NATA is based on the five criteria that underlie our transport policies: environmental impact, safety, economy, accessibility and integration. NATA favours no particular class of scheme nor is it our policy to give special preference to bypasses, although I fully recognise the environmental benefits which such schemes can bring about.

Radon

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide assistance to homes which have radon concentrations higher than the Action Level. [9599]

Ms Keeble: It is already possible to offer such assistance. Local housing authorities may provide discretionary Private Sector Renewal Grants to assist home owners with radon remedial works to their properties where the annual averaged concentration of the gas exceeds the Action Level.

Bye-law Applications

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many bye-law applications from local authorities there were in each of the past five years, broken down by category, indicating in each case if they were approved. [9666]

Dr. Whitehead: Local authorities are empowered to make a wide range of bye-laws for which confirmation is given by the Secretary of State responsible for the issues to which the bye-law relates. The information requested is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria his Department uses to judge bye-law applications from local authorities. [9665]

Dr. Whitehead: In considering applications from local authorities for confirmation of bye-laws regard is had to the relevant matters set out in Home Office Circular 25/1996 which include: that the bye-laws are within the powers of the enabling legislation and that any action required by the legislation, such as consultation with a named public body, has been taken; that they do not duplicate or conflict with the general law, existing bye-laws or any local Act or common law; that the nuisance they address merits criminal sanctions and that, to a reasonable person, the penalty available is proportionate; that they directly address a genuine and specific local problem and do not attempt to deal in general terms with essentially national issues; and that they do not conflict with Government policy.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has conducted into the applicability of the proposed not-for-profit Railtrack model for re-organising London Underground. [9893]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the 1997 election, London Transport and the Government, advised by PricewaterhouseCoopers, considered a number of different options for the future of the Tube—including the possibility of a not-for-profit private sector trust. We believed then, as we do now, that our modernisation plans are the best way forward for London Underground.

Public sector London Underground will continue to be responsible for running the railway. The operation of track, signals, trains and stations will remain in public hands. The public sector will also be responsible for managing the contracts to maintain and improve the Tube. London Underground is a not-for-profit organisation.

Our plans for the modernisation of the Tube will provide the massive long-term investment the underground needs to deliver a 21st century service. There will be more than £13 billion for investment and maintenance over 15 years, providing significant improvements in the quality, capacity and reliability.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the cost to date of advisers on the public-private partnership for London Underground. [10152]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1170W.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 93–94W, who was the author of the document which showed that one of Mr. Kiley's assistants had proposed changes to a draft report by Parsons Brinkerhoff; and in whose ownership this document is. [10223]

Mr. Byers: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. and learned Friend Lord Falconer of Thoroton in another place on 24 July 2001, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 1845.

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of the expenditure by his Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation; which expenditure programmes are allocated

with respect to this Index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if he will make a statement. [8934]

Ms Keeble: The table sets out Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions expenditure, which either partly or wholly, uses measures of multiple deprivation to decide allocation levels. This question covers a period during which three such measures have been employed by Government. These are:

The Indices of Deprivation 2000, published August 2000
The Index of Local Deprivation 1998, published 1998
The Index of Local Conditions 1991, published 1994

£ million

Programme	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Single Regeneration Budget	277.5	458.8	560.9	691.9	725.1	873	[1]—
Land and Property Programme	—	—	—	—	—	370	[1]—
New Deal for Communities	—	—	—	60	120	240	350
Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	—	—	—	—	200	300	400
Neighbourhood Management	—	—	—		45		
Housing Capital Allocations	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Housing Revenue Account Subsidy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Both these programmes will be subsumed into 'single pot' for Regional Development Agencies from April 2002. The Department for Trade and Industry will have effective responsibility for all grant in aid to RDAs from November 2001.

'The Single Regeneration Budget' was based on a competitive bidding process but also included an indicative regional allocation. The methodology for determining the regional 'indicative' allocations from Round 2 onwards was:

50 per cent. based on region's share of district level deprivation, as set out in the Index of Local Conditions 1991 for areas with above average deprivation;

50 per cent. based on region's share of 1993 population, again in areas with above average deprivation.

As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 there was a Public Service Agreement target that required 80 per cent. of the moneys to be spent in the 50 most deprived local authority areas as measured by the Index of Local Deprivation 1998.

'The Land and Property Programme' includes an element of the Indices of Deprivation 2000 for the period 2001–02 only. 80 per cent. of the budget was allocated on a criteria basis involving the use of seven indicators, one of which was based on the Indices of Deprivation 2000—a 'deprived wards' indicator which captured the number of people living in the most deprived local authority districts. The Indices element therefore represents only a small aspect of the allocation methodology. No other indices were used in previous years, nor will they be used in future years due to the commencement of the new single pot for Regional Development Agencies from April 2002.

'New Deal for Communities': The 1998 Index of Local Deprivation has been used as a basis for selection for Rounds 1 and 2 of this programme.

The overall ranking measuring degree of deprivation at the district level was used as the main indicator for selection as it was the most up to date and robust. To ensure a good geographical spread, a regional quota system was applied in addition.

'The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund' is distributed to authorities which figure in the 50 most deprived authorities against the six individual district level measures in the Indices of Deprivation 2000. This produces a list of 81 authorities, to which were added seven authorities not included in this list but which were in the 50 most deprived areas on any of the four measures under the Index of Local Deprivation 1998. The allocations are based on a standard amount per head of population living in the 10 per cent. most deprived wards nationally.

'The Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme' is targeted on areas selected from among authorities which include more than one ward in the worst 10 per cent. as measured by the Indices of Deprivation 2000, but excluding any local authority where there is a New Deal for Communities Partnership.

'Housing Capital Allocations': The needs indices used in the allocation of these resources to local authorities (Generalised Needs Index) and Registered Social Landlords (Housing Needs Index) include an element of targeting of resources to deprived areas, based on the Index of Local Conditions 1991. The way in which the indices are constructed and used means that the targeting does not allocate a specific amount of the available resources. The targeting accounted for 30 per cent. of the Generalised Needs Index (before adjustment for regional cost variations) in 2001–02. This was increased from 20 per cent. in earlier years as a result of the creation of Major Repairs Allowance to allocate resources for maintaining council housing; there is no targeting to deprived areas in these allocations. The targeting within the Housing Needs Index has been 15 per cent. throughout the period.

'Housing Revenue Account Subsidy': The maintenance allowance within this subsidy system includes a component based on the Index of Local Conditions 1991. This component has accounted for around 10 per cent. of the resources available for the maintenance allowance, which equates to around £200 million, throughout the period.

Alun Evans

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if Alun Evans, former Director of Communication in the DTLR, was the Head of Information for the purpose of managing departmental communications and recording special advisers' contacts with the media under the code of conduct for special advisers. [8225]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Yes.

Fireworks

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action is being taken by *(a)* the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* other parts of his Department to ensure that bulk fireworks entering the UK are taken to licensed storage facilities; and what checks are made at the port of entry. [9788]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* Neither DTLR nor HSE carries out routine checks at the port of entry on bulk fireworks entering Great Britain or on their destination. Any such arrangements would be a disproportionate burden on industry and would not be an effective use of enforcement resources.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from the firework industry on the control and monitoring of bulk supplies of fireworks entering the UK, with particular reference to checks at ports of entry. [9789]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* We have received no representations from the fireworks industry on the control and monitoring of bulk supplies of fireworks entering the UK. HM Customs and Excise undertakes intelligence led risk-based checks at ports of entry and where it has concerns it would notify HSE and/or the relevant local authority for the fireworks' destination.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from *(a)* the firework industry and *(b)* local authorities regarding reports of illegal storage of fireworks in (i) the west Midlands, (ii) Lancashire and (iii) Leicestershire; and what action he has taken in response to those representations. [9787]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* We have received no representations from the fireworks industry or from local authorities on reports of illegal storage of fireworks in the west Midlands, Lancashire and Leicestershire. However, I understand local authorities in Lancashire and Leicestershire have contacted HSE for advice about illegal storage of fireworks. I understand that enforcement action has been taken by local authorities.

Mayors

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he intends to direct local authorities to undertake local referendums to ascertain the public support for directly elected mayors in cases where council has decided to pursue another form of local government under the Local Government Act 2000. [10124]

Dr. Whitehead: The circumstances where my right hon. Friend may direct a local authority to undertake a local referendum to ascertain the public support for a directly elected mayor are specified in Schedule 2 to the Local Authorities (Referendums) (Petitions and Directions) (England) Regulations 2000. Simply that a council has decided to pursue a form of local government other than one that involves a directly elected mayor is not one of the specified circumstances. In any case where one or more of the specified circumstances prevails, my right hon. Friend will decide whether or not to direct a referendum, having regard to all the circumstances of that case.

Special Advisers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if *(a)* his special advisers and *(b)* his Department's press office commented on the report on engineering standards on the London Underground by Parsons Brinckerhoff Ltd. commissioned by Bob Kiley (i) before and (ii) after the report had been published by Transport for London and London Transport; [9902]

(2) if he will list the matters that his special advisers have *(a)* given to the press or briefed the press about and *(b)* commented on, relating to the conduct of Bob Kiley in his capacity as London Transport Commissioner or Chairman of London Transport, since the General Election; [9900]

(3) if he will list the matters that his Department's communications department have *(a)* briefed the press about and *(b)* commented on, relating to the conduct of Bob Kiley in his capacity as London Transport Commissioner or Chairman of London Transport, since the General Election. [9899]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* Press officers, and special advisers, brief the press and comment on matters relating to the range of the Department's responsibilities, in accordance with the guidance on the work of the Government information service.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the procedures for Ministers approving comments to the press made by *(a)* his Department's press office and *(b)* special advisers. [9901]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* Staff in the Directorate of Communication and special advisers are authorised to contact the media, clearing statements with Ministers as required, in accordance with the guidance on the work of the Government information service.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the record kept under clause 9 of the code of conduct for special advisers of contacts between his special advisers and the news media since July. [8222]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* All civil servants, including special advisers, are expected to keep departmental heads of information informed of contacts with media. Details of such contacts are for internal purposes only.

Jo Moore

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will publish the replies to the e-mail sent to officials in his Department by Jo Moore at 14.55 pm on 11 September; [9630]

(2) if he will publish the e-mails sent to officials in his Department by Jo Moore on the 11 and 12 September. [9631]

Mr. Byers: Under paragraph 2 of Part II of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information", it is not the practice to disclose details of internal communications.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if the Permanent Secretary to the DTLR had a meeting with the DTLR's press officer, Charlotte Morgan, about her conduct in relation to complying with requests from Ms Jo Moore; [9898]

(2) if the Permanent Secretary to the DTLR had a meeting with the DTLR's director of communications, Alun Evans, about his conduct in relation to complying with requests from Ms Jo Moore. [9897]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* It is not the usual practice to disclose details of internal meetings. This is in accordance with Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 98W, when *(a)* the Permanent Secretary and *(b)* he were told of the existence of Ms Moore's e-mail of 11 September to Alun Evans. [10222]

Mr. Byers: Under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it is not the practice to disclose details of internal communications.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 98W, if, based on a pro-rata full-time salary equivalent, Alun Evans' salary exceeded that of Jo Moore on 11 September. [10224]

Mr. Byers: Details of salaries and comparisons between them are confidential.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what guarantees the Government will give to credit ratings agencies in order to restore investment grade rating to the successor company to Railtrack; [9000]

(2) what evidence he has collated to suggest that a not-for-profit company will be able to raise capital in the markets to the same extent as Railtrack could. [9004]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 195–97W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date the concept of a not-for-profit company to take over the rail network from Railtrack was first considered by his Department. [8999]

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when *(a)* Ministers in his Department and *(b)* an official in his Department last contacted Railtrack before 6 October; and what was discussed. [8947]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Members to the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 954.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the changes to legislation or regulations affecting Railtrack since May 1997, indicating in each case the body responsible for the change. [8948]

Mr. Jamieson: The table lists the information requested.

Changes to legislation/regulations affecting Railtrack since May 1997

Legislation/regulations	*Body responsible*
The Railway Safety (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997 No. 553)—made on 28 February 1997, came into force on 10 May 1997	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the formal recommendation of the Health and Safety Commission under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
The Finance Act 1997	Her Majesty's Treasury
The Railways Regulations 1998 (SI 1998 No. 1340)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, to implement European Directives 95/18/EC and 95/19/EC
The Railways (Amendment) Regulations 1998 (SI 1998 No. 1519)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
The Competition Act 1998	The Department of Trade and Industry
The Railways (Rateable Values) (Amendment) Order 1999 (SI 1999 No. 1003)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Welsh Office
The Railway Safety Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 No. 2244)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the formal recommendation of the Health and Safety Commission under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
The Railways Act 1993 (Consequential Modifications) (No. 2) Order 1999 (SI 1999 No. 1443)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
The Health and Safety (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 2597)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
The Greater London Authority Act 1999	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
The Railways (Safety Case) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000 No. 2688)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the formal recommendation of the Health and Safety Commission under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
The Railtrack plc (Rateable Value) (Wales) Order 2000 (SI 2000 No. 555)	The National Assembly for Wales
The Railways (Rateable Values) (England) Order 2000 (SI 2000 949)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
The Railways (Interoperability) (Notified Bodies) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000 No. 1674)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
The Transport Act 2000	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
The Railways (Closure Provisions) (Exemptions) (St. Pancras) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No. 1768)	The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Changes to legislation/regulations affecting Railtrack since May 1997

Legislation/regulations	*Body responsible*
The Railway Pensions (Designation, Substitution and Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No. 2264)	The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
The Capital Allowances Act 2001	Her Majesty's Treasury
The Railway Administration Order Rules 2001 (SI 2001 No. 3352)	The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the capital projects to which Railtrack plc was committed at 1 April, indicating their estimated dates of completion. [8952]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack's 2001 Network Management Statement published in May this year listed its committed enhancement schemes, and expenditure plans for maintenance and renewal of the network, including investment. The Network Management Statement is available on Railtrack's website www.railtrack.co.uk. I shall also arrange for a copy to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he decided to seek to appoint an administrator for Railtrack. [8946]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 15 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 954.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce the proposed new structure for the successor company to Railtrack plc; and if he will consult on the options. [9779]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 195–97W.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money is to be made available to Railtrack plc in administration and its successor in the *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03 financial years; and when the next payment is due. [9782]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The Government have committed to provide the Railway administrators with the financial support necessary to ensure that the rail network can remain fully operational throughout the administration of Railtrack plc.

During administration, Railtrack plc are entitled to receive network grants from the Strategic Rail Authority to the amount and profile agreed as part of the Rail Regulator's October 2000 Periodic Review and the 2 April agreement between Railtrack and Government. A payment of £162 million will be paid as part of these agreements when requested by the administrators. The right to receive these network grant payments will be transferred to Railtrack's successor company.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what decision-making structure has been put in place to decide on new investment plans by Railtrack plc in administration. [9781]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The Government have committed to provide the railway administrators with the financial support necessary to ensure that operations continue on a 'business as usual' basis during administration.

Work on the development of new investment plans will continue on the same basis as before administration. The Strategic Rail Authority's forthcoming Strategic Plan will prioritise investment plans in terms of value for money offered to both rail users and the taxpayer. It will also outline its emerging plans on the framework for delivering major investments through Special Purpose financing vehicles.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he has given to Ernst and Young in connection with their appointment as Railtrack's administrators and on the successor company to which they will transfer Railtrack's operations and assets. [10190]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend has issued no such guidance.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for the streamlining of regulations following the creation of the proposed successor to Railtrack. [10193]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 15 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 954, as well as the written answer given on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 195–97W.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will set the performance targets for the successor company to Railtrack referred to in his statement of 15 October. [10194]

Mr. Jamieson: The setting of performance targets is the responsibility of the Rail Regulator. The Government have stated our intention to streamline the existing regulatory structure.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when Railtrack in administration and the Government will settle claims from the injured and the families of those killed in recent rail crashes. [10196]

Mr. Spellar: Claims against Railtrack plc (in Railway Administration) will continue to be dealt with through and in accordance with the Claims Allocation and Handling Agreement.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Government's estimate is of the costs of settling all the claims against Railtrack from *(a)* those injured and *(b)* the families of those killed in recent rail crashes. [10197]

Mr. Spellar: The apportionment of liability between the parties is yet to be fully settled.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government gave a guarantee to enable Railtrack in administration to borrow £800 million. [10198]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1230W.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role Ms Jo Moore played in the decision to take Railtrack into administration; and what advice she gave about how to break the news to the media. [9836]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 95W.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* other staff within his Department have been authorised to brief Labour hon. Members on the recent insolvency of Railtrack; and if he has given permission for (i) Mr. Dan Corry and (ii) Mr. Michael Dugher of his Department to appear as contact points for briefing Labour hon. Members on briefing documents sent out since 8 October to Labour hon. Members; and if he will make a statement. [9469]

Mr. Byers: The Code of Conduct for special advisers expressly provides that special advisers may help to brief Party MPs and officials on issues of Government policy. Mr. Corry and Mr. Dugher are special advisers.

Other staff have not been authorised to brief Labour hon. Members on the recent administration of Railtrack.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Asylum Appeals

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to improve the speed of the appeals process in asylum cases; and if she will make a statement. [9459]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) is working closely with its Home Office and Lord Chancellor's Department colleagues to improve the end-to-end processing time for asylum appeals.

The IAA has set up a new listing system; is making more effective use of judicial time; is reducing unnecessary adjournments and speeding up the service of decisions; and is introducing twilight working for administrative staff.

Dudley Magistracy

Ross Cranston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women (i) applied to join, (ii) were appointed to and (iii) left the Dudley magistracy in each of the last five years. [9623]

Mr. Wills: The table sets out the breakdown of applications, appointments and 'leavers' (resignations, retirements and deaths) for the Dudley bench for the last four years. The figures for applications received include those for Stourbridge and Halesowen bench as well because they are recorded for the Advisory Committee area as a whole and not broken down by bench. No breakdown is available for the years before that because the information was not recorded until my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor introduced a new, more comprehensive Annual Report form in 1998.

Breakdown of applications, appointments and 'leavers' (resignations, retirements and deaths) for the Dudley bench

	Applied[1]		Appointed		Left[2]	
Year	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
2000–01	17	18	4	7	5	6
1999–2000	30	14	8	6	3	4
1998–99	12	17	2	8	14	5
1997–98	23	12	5	3	8	0

[1] Includes Stourbridge and Halesowen
[2] Retired/Died/Resigned

Golden Jubilee

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the applicants for the grant of a Lord Mayoralty or Lord Provostship to mark Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [10823]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Applications for the grant of a Lord Mayoralty have been received from the following cities and are under consideration:

Bath
Cambridge
Carlisle
Chichester
Derby
Exeter
Gloucester
Lancaster
Lincoln
St. Albans
St. David's
Salford
Southampton
Sunderland
Wolverhampton
Worcester.

Death Certificates

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what special arrangements he has made for the issue of death certificates to relatives of UK citizens killed abroad following the terrorist attacks in the United States. [9274]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

The US authorities are allowing expatriate (ie non-resident in the USA) Next-of-Kin (NOK) of British victims to obtain death certificates by completing and signing an affidavit before a US Consular Officer in the United Kingdom. Police Family Liaison Offices in the UK are fully briefed to be able to help relatives with the procedures, and a group of American lawyers in London have offered their services on a pro bono basis if any relative needs help with the US requirements.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 26 October 2001

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Portcullis House

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee for how many days in the last six months the water feature in Portcullis House has had no water in it; and if he will make a statement. [10465]

Derek Conway: No record has been kept of the number of days but I recognise that they have been too many.

The contractor has had to carry out a number of tasks during the defects period. After the original contractor for the courtyard stone (which included the water feature) went into liquidation, there was some delay to the work but during the summer the inadequate chemical dosing pumps were replaced and the spread of algae has been stopped. A leak in the tank under the stone table is now awaiting repair. Discussions are taking place with the company that has taken over the business to arrange for all the outstanding snags to be put right under the terms of the contract.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Council what percentage of *(a)* House of Commons staff and officers and *(b)* hon. Members' staff are in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit. [10627]

Mr. Robin Cook: The costs of House of Commons staff is borne on the Administration Vote, which is the responsibility of the House of Commons Commission and the cost of Members' staff is borne on the Members Vote. I am informed the figures for September 2001 are:

(a) Staff of the House (including casuals) 1.2 per cent.;

(b) Members' staff (including casuals) 1.3 per cent.

WALES

Rail Services

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions regarding the establishment of a single all-Wales rail franchise; and if he will make a statement. [8641]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend meets regularly with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to discuss a range of issues affecting Wales.

The Assembly Minister for the Environment, Sue Essex, and I have also met the Minister for Transport to discuss the future structure of rail services in Wales.

Student Finance

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what discussions he has had with the Education Minister of the National Assembly for Wales regarding the recommendations of the Rees report on student finance; [8639]

(2) what representations he has made to the Department for Education and Skill's review of student finance in the context of the Rees report on student finance; and if he will make a statement. [8640]

Mr. Touhig: Discussions on the report have taken place at ministerial level between the Assembly and UK Government Departments.

Following the Rees report the Assembly took immediate action to tackle student hardship in Wales by putting £20 million into student access and hardship funds for this year. The Assembly is giving further consideration to the other recommendations in the report.

The Government are committed to reforming the student funding system. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has announced a review of student support arrangements which will look at student support and tuition fees.

Hospitals (Staff-patient Communication)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what measures are in place to improve the capacity of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses to communicate with and understand patients in hospitals in the Principality; [9492]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the capacity of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses to communicate with and understand patients, and vice versa, in hospitals in the Principality; [9490]

(3) if he will ask the Welsh Executive to undertake a customer satisfaction survey on the capacity of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses to communicate with and understand patients, and vice versa, in hospitals in the Principality. [9491]

Mr. Touhig: The health service in Wales is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

On 2 February 2001 the Assembly published "Improving Health in Wales", which sets a programme of action for the next 10 years. It includes a commitment that training will be made available to staff in effective communication with patients and handling their concerns positively.

The Assembly is also committed to ensuring that there is continuous feedback from the public about the services they receive from the national health service in Wales.

Departmental Properties

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the total running costs for buildings used, owned or rented by his Department for each nation and region of the UK, and estimate the average cost per square metre for properties used by his Department as a whole, and by region and nation of the UK. [6813]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Office rents accommodation in Cardiff Bay which, over the last 12 months, has cost some £99,000 or about £355 per sq m. The Department also owns Gwydyr House in London which, in 2000–01, cost some £420,000 or about £670 per sq m. The figure for Gwydyr House includes a major refurbishment project carried out during the year.

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what *(a)* the overall wastage level from the Territorial Army and *(b)* the target level was in each of the last 5 years; and if he will make a statement; [8910]

(2) what *(a)* the required trained strength, *(b)* the actual trained strength and *(c)* the percentage shortfall of the Territorial Army was in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [8911]

(3) how many members of the Territorial Army achieved their bounty in training years *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [8912]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence defines Territorial Army (TA) Personnel who have passed all their annual individual and collective training requirements as "Fit for Role". Figures showing the strength of the TA are reported quarterly to the House of Commons Defence Committee and are available in the Library of the House.

Wastage figures and the numbers of TA Personnel who are assessed as "Fit for Role" are presented in the table.

	Wastage			*Numbers Fit for Role (FFR)*		
	Overall wastage	*Target wastage*	*Percentage*	*Numbers assessed as FFR*	*Target FFR level*	*Percentage shortfall*
2001	10,834	10,077	25	23,857	24,185	1.4
2000	13,084	10,861	25	19,589	26,068	25
1999	15,530	12,610	25	24,914	30,245	18
1998	12,444	13,893	25	n/a	33,344	n/a
1997	15,010	16,860	30	n/a	33,722	n/a

Notes:
1. Outflow and FFR numbers are calculated annually on 1 April.
2. FFR data for 1997 and 1998 are not available.
3. The outflow target was revised in 1998, at the start of the SDR TA re-structuring exercise.
4. The shortfall in FFR numbers is due to SDR reductions in the TA.

The numbers of TA personnel who were assessed as "Fit for Role" in 1997 and 1998 are not available at this time. Officials are investigating this and I will write to the hon. Member once I know the outcome and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House. In terms of bounty, the numbers of TA personnel who achieved their bounty in training years 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are as follows:

	Numbers
1998–99	31,721
1999–2000	26,005
2000–01	24,019

Armed Forces

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* trained strength and *(b)* trained requirement is of the (i) Army, (ii) Naval Service and (iii) Royal Air Force. [10599]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the Tri Service Personnel monthly publication "UK Armed Forces Strengths and Requirements—TSP3" which is held in the Library of the House.

Sovereign Bases

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to make a statement on the implications of the case of Lt. Colonel Surinder Nath Saggar of Brompton on Swale, North Yorkshire. [10501]

Mr. Ingram: The Tribunal's written decision was received on 12 October 2001 and legal advice has been sought on the implications. Once that advice has been considered the position is clearer, I will write to the right hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases have been brought against the Ministry of Defence under the Race Relations Act 1976 by service men serving on sovereign bases overseas; and what the outcome of each case was. [10504]

Mr. Ingram: There has been only one such claim. This claim was brought by Lt. Colonel Surinder Nath Saggar and was dismissed by the Thornaby on Tees Employment Tribunal for lack of jurisdiction on 18 September 2001.

Service Men (Commonwealth and Republic of Ireland)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men are from *(a)* Commonwealth countries and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland. [10394]

Mr. Ingram: The table details the current nationality of those serving in the Army at 1 September 2001 from Commonwealth countries and the Republic of Ireland.

	Commonwealth countries	*Republic of Ireland*
Officers	160	22
Soldiers	1,535	195
Total	1,695	217

Data for the Royal Navy and the RAF could be provided only at disproportionate cost as details on nationality are not held centrally.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he has put in place to protect his Department's and armed services personnel from mail that may be contaminated with chemical or biological weapons. [10601]

Mr. Ingram: In common with other Government Departments, the Ministry of Defence has for many years had guidance in place on how to recognise and deal with suspect letters and parcels containing explosive devices. In the wake of current events in the United States, the Cabinet Office has prepared additional guidance on the handling of suspect CB-contaminated mail. This guidance has been widely disseminated within MOD to civilian and service personnel. The potential threat, and the guidance and other precautionary measures required, are being kept under constant review, and full account is being taken of the developing situation in the United States.

RAF Pilots

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the fully trained and operational requirement is for *(a)* RAF pilots to fly Sea Harriers and *(b)* Fleet Air Arm pilots to fly Harrier GR7; and how many there are at present in each case. [10598]

Mr. Ingram: Joint Force Harrier (JFH) operates Harrier GR7 flown by RAF pilots and Sea Harrier FA2 flown by RN pilots. GR7 is a ground attack aircraft, whereas FA2 is predominantly air defence. Each complements the other so that JFH has a rounded operational capability. Both RN and RAF aircrew are capable of operating from aircraft carriers in their own aircraft type, and both work closely together when embarked in carriers and when ashore. There is, though, no operational requirement for pilots of one Harrier aircraft type to fly the other. If there was a requirement for GR7 pilots to fly the FA2 or vice versa this could be achieved once operational conversion training had been completed. However, there exists an RAF/RN-wide pilot exchange programme which shares operational experience by providing flying tours with the other service. On this programme, currently there are *(a)* two RAF pilots flying the Sea Harrier, both from the Tornado F3, and *(b)* one RN (but non-Sea Harrier) pilot training to fly the Tornado GR4.

Defence Logistics Organisation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the sum provided was for the Defence Logistics Organisation at the start of the current financial year; and what the latest projected outturn figure is. [10602]

Mr. Ingram: Under Resource Accounting and Budgeting, the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) was issued with two Expenditure Limits at the start of the current financial year: for Current Expenditure and Capital Expenditure. Together they amount to Estimates provision of £4,033 million for the logistic support of the armed forces. In the normal course of business there are adjustments to these limits as the year unfolds, which will be finalised in time for inclusion in the spring Supplementary Estimates. We would expect the DLO expenditure to be within the Estimates provision at the year end.

Gulf War Veterans (Pensions)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many former service men who served in the Gulf are in receipt of war pensions; and if he will indicate the rank of the pensioner and the number in receipt of pensions who were injured by enemy action. [7101]

Dr. Moonie: As at 31 August, 4,111 awards of disablement pension had been made to Gulf War Veterans, although of these, only 1,038 were awarded for Gulf-related illnesses. The remaining 3,073 were for conditions that either occurred during the Gulf veterans' service career elsewhere than the Gulf or were for conditions not particular to the Gulf.

Statistics are not held on either the former rank of the war disablement pensioner or whether the award of the pension was as a result of enemy action.

Apache Helicopter

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 4W, on the Apache helicopter programme, *(a)* how many personnel are being trained in the US, *(b)* what training is being provided and *(c)* what the cost is to the defence budget. [10483]

Mr. Ingram: Sixteen army helicopter pilots are undergoing what is known as conversion training in the US at a cost of £3.15 million. This training, including the use of simulators, will qualify them to fly the US Apache AH-64A model; they will then undertake a short conversion in the UK to the UK's Apache AH Mk1 model. The cost of this US training is being met from liquidated damages the Department has received from its training contractor and from existing funds that would otherwise have been paid to that contractor for training courses which it cannot yet produce (as a result of the delay to the Full Mission Simulator).

Army (Light-armoured Capability)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will identify the components which make up the Future Rapid Effects System; [10225]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Army's future light armoured capability. [10158]

Dr. Moonie: The Army's light-armoured vehicle capability will be provided within the Future Rapid Effects System (FRES). The exact components of FRES have yet to be decided, but it is likely to include such platforms as an armoured personnel carrier, guided weapons platform, command vehicle, reconnaissance platform, ambulance and repair and recovery vehicle. FRES will draw heavily on a number of technologies developed through the TRACER programme.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will provide a substantive reply to the question from the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall, to which a holding reply was sent on 9 July. [9689]

Dr. Howells: The Department did not issue any holding replies to the hon. Member on 9 July. The only named day question tabled by the hon. Member for answer on 9 July was to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about the artificial reef project off Whitsand Bay. That question was answered by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 10 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 485W.

Marconi Transmission Centenary

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans her Department has made to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first successful wireless transmission across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. [8713]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 250–51W.

Gambling Review

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many responses she has received following publication of Sir Alan Budd's gambling review; and how many of these refer to recommendation 70. [9968]

Dr. Howells: The consultation period for the report of the Gambling Review Body closes on 31 October. We have so far received about 1,500 responses, the great majority relating to recommendation 70.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the likely impact of implementing recommendation 70 in Sir Alan Budd's gambling review. [9969]

Dr. Howells: We shall make such an assessment following the closure, on 31 October, of the consultation period on the report of the Gambling Review Body.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what dates *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have visited the Millennium Dome since 8 June. [10621]

Dr. Howells: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor any other DCMS Minister has visited the Millennium Dome since 8 June 2001. Responsibility for the Dome passed from the New Millennium Experience Company to English Partnerships on 1 July 2001.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how the foot and mouth disease relief funding announced on Thursday 18 October will be allocated; [10096]

(2) which Regional Development Agencies will receive additional funding as part of the extension of the Business Recovery Fund announced on 18 October. [10099]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* Five Regional Development Agencies will receive a share of the extra £15 million extension of the Business Recovery Fund provided by DEFRA:

	£ million
North West	7.0
North East	1.5
Yorkshire	2.0
West Midlands	1.5
South West	3.0

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when farmers who have been promised compensation relating to foot and mouth disease will receive it; when outstanding monetary payments in respect of contracts with his Department will be made; and what formula is used for calculating such payments. [8155]

Mr. Morley: The Department aims to pay compensation to farmers for animals slaughtered for foot and mouth disease control as soon as possible, subject to the checks necessary to protect public funds. At present there are just 33 payments outstanding at HQ.

Turning to contractors, our target is to pay those we employ within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice. Given the large number of suppliers of goods and services which the Department has contracted—all of whom expect to be paid promptly—this target has proved difficult to meet. However, the time taken to process invoices is being reduced.

There is a duty to ensure proper, effective and efficient use of public money. This means that the Department cannot pay invoices for goods and/or services that are not accompanied by accurate supporting information as to the nature and extent of the goods and services supplied. Unfortunately this information is not always provided by some of the suppliers we have employed. This has made the Department's task much harder, and is often one of the main reasons for delays.

Invoices submitted to DEFRA by contractors are scrutinised individually to assess their validity. There is no standard formula to calculate payments.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will provide financial help to assist farmers with feeding animals over the winter period on farms affected by foot and mouth disease. [6208]

Mr. Morley: My officials are in touch with the Arthur Rank Foundation and with industry bodies about the work of the ARF's National Fodder Bureau and Government match funding for this charitable work.

Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps English Nature is taking *(a)* to ensure that Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve is not damaged by the Lunesdale Hunt and *(b)* to control the effects of hunting. [9602]

Alun Michael: Following incidents at Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve in February this year, which were brought to the attention of the Lancashire constabulary, English Nature wrote to the chairman of the Lunesdale Hunt requesting a full explanation of the incidents, and withdrew permission for the Hunt to enter the Reserve. A meeting with the chairman of the Hunt in March was postponed due to the foot and mouth outbreak. English Nature hope this will be held shortly, and will discuss the operation of the Hunt in the vicinity of National Nature Reserves generally and Gait Barrows in particular.

I understand the physical damage to the site has since recovered.

Energy Efficiency

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the overall improvements in energy efficiency as reported by each energy conservation authority in England for the last year for which figures are available. [10212]

Mr. Meacher: The latest reported figures by energy conservation authorities in England for the overall percentage improvements in domestic energy efficiency were given in my reply to my hon. Friend on 30 November 2000, *Official Report*, columns 757–58W.

Energy conservation authorities have now reported on their overall improvements to 31 March 2001. We are currently analysing this information and will make it available at the earliest opportunity.

Bovine TB

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to take further steps to control the spread of bovine TB. [9805]

Mr. Morley: In its response to the First Report of the Agriculture Select Committee session 2000–01, the Government stated that they were

> "minded to develop a range of policy options. If appropriate these might be tested out possibly on a 'pilot' basis in areas outside the present trials, in order to gain experience that would help Ministers reach an eventual decision on a national TB policy".

Future policy options will be discussed with stakeholders at the January meeting of the stakeholder group, the TB Forum.

Combined Heat and Power

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment her Department has made of the implications for the Government's Climate Change Strategy of electricity generation from combined heat and power. [9937]

Mr. Meacher: Combined heat and power continues to play an important role in the UK's climate change programme. The UK's current installed CHP capacity of around 4,700 MWe is estimated to save around 4 million tonnes of carbon equivalent (MtC) per year. The carbon savings from increased use of CHP are reflected within those for a range of other policies within the programme, particularly the climate change levy, climate change agreements and community heating.

Biomass Energy

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase the use of biomass as a fuel for energy production. [9946]

Mr. Meacher: We support the development of short rotation coppice and miscanthus for energy production through the Energy Crops Scheme. This is one of the integrated set of measures in the England Rural Development Programme and the scheme makes £29 million of funding available to farmers over seven years. In addition we promote the use of forest material, for example through planting grants under the Woodland Grant Scheme and the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, and woodland maintenance grants under the WGS. Market opportunities are key to future uptake and we are working closely with Government Departments and other bodies to develop power generation, combined heat and power and heat markets in order to increase the use of biomass.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* meat and bone meal, *(b)* coppiced wood and *(c)* other biomass was burnt in order to provide a direct source of useful energy (i) five years ago and (ii) at the present time; and how much he predicts will be used for this purpose in five years time. [9272]

Mr. Meacher: Five years ago the use of these materials for industrial-scale energy production was minimal. Current estimated usage in England is as follows:

650,000 tonnes of meat and bone meal (over the next three years)

short-rotation coppice from 1,500 hectares of farmland

200,000 tonnes of straw, 720,000 tonnes of chicken litter and 330,000 oven dried tonnes of forest biomass per annum.

Usage in five years' time will depend on market developments and the success of a range of Government and other initiatives. For example, the Energy Crops Scheme, which is part of the England Rural Development Programme, could support the establishment of 20–25,000 hectares of short-rotation coppice and miscanthus on farmland over the seven years of the programme. The Government see biomass as playing an important and increasing role in the development of renewable sources of heat and power generation.

Landfill

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to use the methane gas emitted from landfill sites as a potential fuel source. [9948]

Mr. Meacher: The Landfill Directive requires landfill gas to be collected from all landfills receiving biodegradable waste, and for the collected landfill gas to be treated and, where possible, used. If the collected gas cannot be used to produce energy it must be flared.

Electricity Consumption

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance is available to businesses to reduce electricity consumption; and if she will make a statement. [9204]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* There are a number of measures available to assist business consumers to reduce their use of energy, including electricity. The Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme offers best practice advice and support to organisations in the private and public sectors, in turn helping them to reduce their electricity consumption.

Combined heat and power is one example of a high energy efficiency technology which almost doubles the overall efficiency of fuel utilisation and can help business reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions. Measures were introduced in April 2001 to help encourage investment in new combined heat and power.

An important component of the UK's Climate Change Programme is the Carbon Trust. Set up as a not-for-profit organisation by the Government and the devolved Administrations, the trust is encouraging the use of low-carbon technologies and resources in the business sector. The trust is expected to recycle approximately £100 million of climate change levy revenue over a three year period. The Carbon Trust will develop programmes to support new and emerging low-carbon technologies. It will also take on management of the Government's Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme and the Enhanced Capital Allowance scheme that provides a fiscal incentive to businesses to improve energy efficiency. This scheme gives 100 per cent. first year capital allowances for companies which invest in approved energy saving equipment.

Dog Ban Bye-laws

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is towards bye-law applications seeking to ban dogs from *(a)* beaches, *(b)* public parks and *(c)* other areas; and if she will make a statement. [9667]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities are able to apply to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the confirmation of bye-laws to control dogs. These bye-laws can ban dogs from *(a)* beaches, *(b)* public parks and *(c)* other areas.

In considering bye-laws for confirmation the Secretary of State must be satisfied that the proposals are reasonable. All dog ban areas must be fully enclosed and gated. This should not only prevent stray dogs from entering, but provide a physical barrier to make it clear to dog owners where the ban area begins and end. The maximum fine under bye-laws is £500.

Application of a dog ban bye-law is likely to be considered unreasonable if there are no alternative areas locally where dogs can be exercised freely. It is a matter for each local authority to decide if they wish to adopt bye-laws in the light of local priorities and resources.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many bye-law applications from local authorities her Department has turned down that sought to ban dogs from *(a)* beaches, *(b)* public parks and *(c)* other areas, for each of the last five years, indicating her reasons for those decisions. [9668]

Mr. Meacher: Details on the number of bye-law applications from local authorities that have been turned down that sought to ban dogs from *(a)* beaches, *(b)* public parks and *(c)* other areas is only available since July 1999. Since this time, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has rejected three dog ban bye-law applications on procedural grounds.

Incinerators

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many incinerators have been built in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [8087]

Mr. Meacher: There are many hundreds of incinerators for sewage sludge, hazardous waste, clinical waste, production waste from factories, etc. Generally, the larger plant are regulated by the Environment Agency and details of their locations are available on the Environment Agency's public register. Other plant that are part of another process regulated by the Agency may not be shown separately on the register. Smaller plant are regulated by local authorities.

The Environment Agency reports that there are 11 municipal waste incinerators currently operational in England. Some of these are newly built and some were refurbished to meet new emission standards introduced in 1996. The Environment Agency does not keep records of when plant are built but it is believed that in the last five years the numbers of incinerators starting or restarting (following refurbishment) are:

1996—3
1997—2
1998—2
1999—0
2000—1
2001—1.

Waste Management

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to change the amount of household municipal waste generated in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [8083]

Mr. Meacher: Tackling the amount of waste produced is the first priority in the hierarchy for waste management decisions set out in the Government's Waste Strategy 2000. Measures aimed at encouraging waste minimisation include Government support for the National Waste

Awareness Initiative to encourage householders to reduce their household waste and guidance to local authorities on their powers under the Waste Minimisation Act 1998.

The Government have implemented the Packaging Directive and a voluntary agreement on newsprint. Further legislation on electrical and electronic equipment and batteries will follow and a voluntary agreement on direct mail and promotions (junk mail) is planned. These are all designed to reduce the amount of waste arising from these products and their impact on the household waste stream.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to *(a)* strengthen regulations and *(b)* transpose European Community directives with regard to waste incineration; and if she will make a statement. [9121]

Mr. Meacher: The Waste Incineration Directive (2000/76/EC) requires transposition by 28 December 2002. The Directive sets challenging targets which will apply to new incinerators from 28 December 2002 and to existing incinerators from 28 December 2005. Options for implementation, including proposals for amending regulations, are being developed, and will be consulted on in due course.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to alter paragraph 19 of the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994; and if she will make a statement. [8609]

Mr. Meacher: We are currently reviewing several of the exemptions provided in Regulation 17 of and Schedule 3 to the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994, including two exemptions subject to allegations of abuse (paragraphs 9 and 19). We propose to amend these exemptions to encourage genuine waste recovery operations, to preclude their use for "sham recovery", and to ensure that human health and the environment are protected.

We intend to issue a consultation paper with draft regulations later this year.

London Waste

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the implications are for her policy on waste disposal of the recent court case against London Waste. [9249]

Mr. Meacher: Neither the Environment Agency nor my Department are aware of any court cases against London Waste in the last three years.

Milk Bottles

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on proposed EU plans to prohibit the recycling of milk bottles. [9073]

Mr. Meacher: We are not aware of any such proposals.

The EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste 94/62/EC, as well as requiring certain recovery and recycling targets to be met, also encourages re-use of packaging. This includes drinks containers such as milk bottles. The UK Regulations implementing the Directive also encourage re-use by allowing obligated businesses to exclude from the calculation of their tonnage recovery and recycling obligation, tonnages of packaging that are being re-used. Milk bottles are re-used for between 10 and 40 trips, so this provision will apply to the proportion of milk bottles that are being reused.

We expect a proposal from the European Commission next month for revised targets in 2006. A further review may also address, among other things, ways of further encouraging re-use of packaging. We are not aware that the proposed revisions will in any way threaten the UK doorstep milk delivery service.

Reconstituted Building Materials

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to encourage the use of reconstituted building materials. [9947]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Government published their strategy for more sustainable construction, "Building a Better Quality of Life", in April 2000. Last week we published a review of progress 'Building a better quality of life—a strategy for more sustainable construction: Report on Progress 20001', which is available on the DTI website at www.dti.gov.uk/construction/sustain/sustainableconstruction.htm

One of the priorities identified in the strategy is the need to minimise the impact on the consumption of natural resources through the reduction in waste. The re-use and recycling of waste, often as building materials, is encouraged through a number of economic instruments such as the landfill tax, the forthcoming aggregates levy and the climate change levy. These measures promote the use of reconstituted building materials in construction by encouraging the minimisation of waste going to landfill and reducing the demand for primary aggregates.

My Department also commissions research—much of it in collaboration with the industry—into the re-use and recycling of waste materials in construction.

Campylobacter

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of retailed chickens were positive for *(a)* campylobacter and *(b)* campylobacter serotypes of public health significance in the last 12 months. [9607]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

A survey of chicken on retail sale in the United Kingdom conducted this year on behalf of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) found 50 per cent. of retailed chickens were positive for campylobacter. Preliminary results of the survey can be found on the FSA's website (www.foodstandards.gov.uk/news/chicken.htm). The identification of the campylobacter serotypes will not be complete until spring 2002.

Food Safety Inspections

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on how food products from those parts of the

EU where regulation is poorly applied will be inspected by the relevant UK authority when breaches of food safety are found. [9432]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Food products from the European Union, which are freely distributed within the Community, are not subject to any special checks within the United Kingdom. Foods imported from the EU are subject to the same controls and enforcement activity as UK produced food. Where problems are known, checks can be made on EU goods in transit (including at the border) and at destination. Where foods produced within the EU are found to be in breach of EU law, the Community and "competent authority" in the producer's member state is informed via the rapid alert or single liaison arrangements of the Official Control of Foodstuffs Additional Measures Directive (93/99/EEC).

In the case of meat and meat products, which are subject to veterinary checks, any breaches of EU law are reported in a letter to the Chief Veterinary Officer of the producer's member state, which is copied to the Community, under Directive 89/662.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Staff Secondments

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* secondments there were from her Department to a business in the private sector, and *(b)* secondments there have been from the private sector to her Department in each of the last five years; and if she will provide a list of (i) the companies involved and (ii) the location of the companies. [8345]

Ms Hewitt: From the records held centrally in the Department, the total number of inward secondments from the private sector and outward secondments from my Department to the private sector commenced in each of the last five years from 1 May 1997 up to the current date, together with the names of the companies involved in each year are in the table that has been placed in the Library.

It is not possible from central records to give the location in each case and attempting to do so from other sources would first require individual checking of each of the 341 record files, many of which are now in archives. If there are specific companies on which the hon. Member would like information regarding their location I would be happy to help.

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the expenditure by her Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation; which expenditure programmes are allocated with respect to this Index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if she will make a statement. [8939]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) was announced by the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on 22 August 2000. The following expenditure programmes by my Department are allocated with reference to this index:

£ million

Programme	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*[1]
Phoenix Fund	1.748	[2]15	19
SBS Core Services funding[3]	n/a	7.5	10
RDAs[4]	n/a	n/a	430

[1] The figures for 2002–03 are estimates
[2] The 2001–02 figure for the Phoenix Fund is an estimate
[3] The SBS Core Services funding is delivered through the Business Links network. The amount shown is solely that part of the budget referring to the IMD; the majority of the budget is determined by the number of local businesses. SBS Core Services funding was not allocated on a deprivation basis in 2000–01
[4] DTI will have effective responsibility for all grant in aid to Regional Development Agencies from November 2001. Certain RDA expenditure programmes remain with DTLR until April 2002.

In addition, while Structural Funds are not allocated on the basis of deprivation, eligibility for the urban strand of Objective 2 of the European Structural Funds in 2000–06 was in part designated using the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation (the predecessor of the 2000 IMD). Areas eligible for the Structural Funds used this index as one of a series of indicators (e.g. unemployment rate, industrial decline, etc) in designating Objective 2 status. Also within the Structural Fund Programmes, the IMD was used to target resources to meet the needs of the most needy communities in urban and rural area.

Some DTI programmes take account of factors which are associated with deprivation: for example, the Regional Innovation Fund of £54 million allocated to RDAs in 2001–02 took account of unemployment, GDP and R&D spending.

From April 2002, the RDAs will be funded through a single pot, which will take account of the IMD as well as related factors such as labour market indicators. The figure shown here for 2002–03 is for the roughly 28 per cent. of the £2,550 million single pot which depends directly on the IMD.

As part of the Government's fuel poverty strategy a working group was set up to look at issues surrounding extension of the gas network. This working group is currently considering how the Index of Multiple Deprivation may be used in combination with other information to prioritise areas where serious consideration should be given to extending the gas network, or taking other measures to improve domestic heating and energy efficiency, with a view to alleviating fuel poverty.

Policy Advice

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what role the Institute of Management and the Institute of Directors play in contributing to policy decisions. [10094]

Ms Hewitt: Both institutes are regularly consulted by my Department about policy issues.

Stem Cell Research

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many stem cell lines are available for research in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the United States of America. [8178]

Ms Hewitt: The National Institute of Health in the US has published a list of 64 potential human embryonic cell lines that can be used in the US to conduct research using public funds. These cell lines were derived in the US, Sweden, Australia, India and Israel. A small number of these lines are being actively studied by researchers in the UK, although information about the import and use of stem cell lines in the UK is not collected centrally.

Liberalisation of Trade in Services Committee

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the Liberalisation of Trade in Services Committee in the last 12 months. [10277]

Ms Hewitt: The Liberalisation of Trade in Services Committee, a committee of International Financial Services, London (an independent member-based organisation funded by UK-based financial and related services firms), was established in 1982 as a means for the Government to consult the private sector on international trade in services. Over the past 12 months the committee has met twice at chairman/CEO level and four times at working level. Officials from the Treasury, DTI and FCO have attended as observers. Members of the Committee, one of several private sector bodies that have made representations to my Department calling for liberalisation in this area, also met my noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment in early September.

Foreign Investment

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for each year between 1979 and 2001, what was *(a)* the total and *(b)* the proportion in world terms of accumulated foreign investment in (i) Britain, (ii) the eurozone and (iii) the remaining developed countries. [10132]

Ms Hewitt: The two tables show the value of inward direct investment into the UK, the eurozone and other developed countries, and also the percentage these values represent of total world investment.

Inward direct investment position

$ million

Year	*UK*	*Eurozone*	*Other developed countries*	*World*
1980	63,014	115,639	196,315	605,805
1985	64,028	164,534	317,719	893,567
1990	203,894	514,014	680,075	1,888,672
1995	199,760	876,778	975,201	2,937,539
1999	367,598	1,357,010	1,629,093	5,196,046
2000	482,798	1,764,299	1,963,197	6,314,271

Inward direct investment position

Percentage of world total

	1980	*1985*	*1990*	*1995*	*1999*	*2000*
UK	10	7	11	7	7	8
Eurozone	19	18	27	30	26	28
Other developed countries	32	36	36	33	31	31

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many full-time staff are employed by each of the English regional development agencies. [8634]

Alan Johnson: The average number of staff employed by each of the English regional development agencies is as follows:

	Number
One North East	244
North West Development Agency	237
Yorkshire Forward	220
East Midlands Development Agency	124
Advantage West Midlands	164
East of England Development Agency	83
South East of England Development Agency	122
South West of England Development Agency	167
London Development Agency	77

Note:
Staff numbers are staff-in-post averages (not full-time equivalents) taken over the course of the year ending 31 March 2001, as stated in the agencies' annual reports for 2000–01, except in the case of the LDA where the figure refers to the staff complement for April to June 2001.

Fireworks

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the firework industry regarding illegal storage of fireworks in *(a)* the west midlands, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* Leicestershire; and what action she has taken in response to those reports. [9793]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Department has received no representations from the fireworks industry regarding illegal storage of fireworks in the west midlands, Lancashire and Leicestershire.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what checks are undertaken *(a)* at ports of entry to ensure that bulk supplies of fireworks entering the UK are destined for licensed storage facilities and *(b)* to ensure that such supplies reach those facilities. [9790]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* HM Customs and Excise is responsible for undertaking intelligence-led, risk-based checks at ports of entry. Where it has concerns about fireworks reaching licensed storage facilities, it notifies the Health and Safety Executive and/or the relevant local authority.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from *(a)* the firework industry and *(b)* local authorities on (i) the 14-day rule allowing storage of fireworks for private use and (ii) the enforcement of fireworks safety and storage regulations. [9792]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Department has received no representations on the 14-day rule nor the enforcement of fireworks safety and storage regulations.

Salesmen (Vulnerable People)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government are

taking to protect *(a)* dementia sufferers and *(b)* other vulnerable groups from door to door and telephone salespeople. [10154]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Consumer Protection (Cancellation of Contracts Concluded away from Business Premises) Regulations 1987 (as amended in 1998)—known as the Doorstep Selling Regulations—and the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 protect all consumers when goods or services are sold door to door or over the telephone.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations the Government have received from *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals, calling for greater protection of (i) dementia sufferers and (ii) other vulnerable groups from door-to-door and telephone salespeople. [10153]

Miss Melanie Johnson: During the past year (i) no representations have been received for greater protection of dementia sufferers in respect of door to door and telephone sellers; (ii) one representation has been received from an individual for greater protection of vulnerable groups generally from pressure selling; (iii) no other representations have been received.

HEALTH

Food Labelling

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are planned to ensure that food imported into the United Kingdom meets UK standards on food labelling. [8430]

Ms Blears: Food labelling rules are harmonised at European level and implemented here by the Food Labelling Regulations 1996. They apply to all food sold in the United Kingdom, wherever it comes from, and are supplemented by a range of guidance notes that aid consistent application and enforcement.

NHS International Scheme

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have been treated in European countries under the NHS international scheme this year. [8668]

Ms Blears: Under European Commission Regulation 1408/71, it has long been possible for individual patients to be referred to all countries of the European Economic Area for specific treatment, at the expense of the sending country. A system of prior authorisation applies. Between 1 January 2001 and 16 October 2001, 920 such referrals were authorised.

Following recent rulings of the European Court of Justice, national health service bodies now have the power to commission treatment overseas, as part of their wider efforts to reduce waiting times. However, as far as we are aware no contracts have yet been signed to fund treatment for NHS patients in mainland Europe.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what finance his Department is able to make available to NHS patients travelling to EU countries for treatment under the NHS international scheme in the current financial year. [8669]

Ms Blears: There is no separate finance for national health service patients travelling to European Union countries for treatment. The E112 scheme allows NHS patients to travel abroad specifically to receive treatment in European Economic Area countries on the same conditions as the host country's own insured people, subject to a prior authorisation regime. There were 1,100 such authorisations in 2000. There is no set annual budget for this scheme.

Following recent rulings of the European Court of Justice, NHS bodies now have the power to commission treatment in EEA countries, as part of their wider efforts to reduce waiting times. However, NHS bodies meet any costs arising from such commissioning from their own budgets.

Strategic Health Authorities

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will delay consideration of the candidates for the chairmanship of the new strategic health authorities until after he has confirmed the boundaries of these authorities; and if he will make a statement. [8630]

Ms Blears: The recruitment and appointment of chairs to the new health authorities is a matter for the National Health Service Appointments Commission. I understand that they have already begun the recruitment and selection procedure. However, they will not be able to make substantive appointments until the consultation period has ended, the boundaries of the authorities have been agreed, and the relevant Establishment Orders have been agreed by Parliament.

Multiple Sclerosis Drugs

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on NICE's report on glatiramer acetate for multiple sclerosis. [9053]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) Appraisal Committee further considered the evidence on the use of beta interferon and glatiramer acetate for multiple sclerosis sufferers on 25 September 2001. NICE has subsequently issued a provisional appraisal determination (PAD) to interested parties for comment.

The institute has stated that, to allow sufficient time to take proper account of the extensive comments received on the PAD, it now intends to issue the final appraisal determination to consultees towards the end of October this year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects NICE to publish its final appraisal determination on the appraisal of glatiramer acetate and beta interferon for multiple sclerosis; [8709]

(2) when the Government expect NICE to publish its Final Appraisal Determination on the appraisal of glatiramer acetate and beta interferon for multiple sclerosis. [9415]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1028W.

IT Systems

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total *(a)* revenue and *(b)* capital expenditure on the Read codes version 3 in each of the last five years. [9410]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The detailed information required is not yet available and will be placed in the Library as soon as it has been obtained from both the National Health Service Information authority and Leicestershire health authority.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated *(a)* revenue and *(b)* capital expenditure planned to be spent on Read codes in financial years (i) 2001–02, (ii) 2002–03 and (iii) 2003–04. [9411]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The estimated central revenue expenditure per year on Read codes is £600,000 for each of the years 2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04. The estimated central capital expenditure over the same period is zero.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been agreed for financial compensation from SNOMED if the SNOMED CT coding system is not delivered to the NHS on time. [9399]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* There are no plans to seek compensation because the third and final payment will not be made in full until SNOMED CT Release: June 2002 is delivered.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure on coding departments in NHS trusts in the last financial year for which figures are available. [9401]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Approximately 1,500 to 2,000 clinical coders are employed by national health service trusts.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what stage of development SNOMED clinical terms project has now reached; when he expects the project to produce a final version; and if he will make a statement. [9409]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* SNOMED CT is being developed collaboratively with the College of American Pathologists. The terms of the agreement underpinning this work are such that overall responsibility for product delivery is with the SNOMED International Authority, a committee of the College of American Pathologists.

An interim, internal product is scheduled to be delivered to the National Health Service Information Authority by 10 December 2001. SNOMED CT 'first release to support implementation testing' is scheduled to follow in January 2002. This first release is to enable a programme of evaluative work to be undertaken in the NHS and is synonymous with a beta release.

A subsequent release is scheduled for June 2002. The naming convention for releases is month-year, for example, this would be referred to as the June 2002 release. It is synonymous with a version 1. This will be the final version of the joint development project. Further releases are planned to follow every six months.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has made for compensation to be paid to NHS trusts and suppliers who have invested in Read based IT systems. [9414]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* No compensation is planned. National health service trusts have been forewarned that they will need to develop a strategy at local level for moving to the NHS preferred systems based on SNOMED CT. The pace of this migration will be the subject of further guidance as the results of the implementation testing programme become clear.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the target date for the SNOMED system to produce automatic mappings to ICD and OPCS codes. [9402]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The development of SNOMED CT includes (for United Kingdom users) mapping tables from SNOMED CT to ICD10 and OPCS4 codes. It is intended that these tables will be fully populated for inclusion in the 'First Release' scheduled for January 2002.

A feasibility study is being carried out as part of SNOMED development work to investigate automated cross mapping. Full automation from terms to codes requires additional contextual information held in the clinical record. As such, automation will be dependent upon establishing the rules base and sophisticated electronic records.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given existing users of Read codes about the use of legacy data following their adoption of the SNOMED clinical terms system. [9412]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Subject to successful development and testing of SNOMED, clinical terms users and suppliers have been advised not to develop new Read code based systems from April 2003 and that users of existing systems, based on other coding schemes including Read codes, should develop a strategy at local level for moving to the national health service preferred system based on SNOMED clinical terms. SNOMED CT "First Release" will include guidance (documentation) on the use of legacy data in the context of SNOMED CT.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total *(a)* revenue and *(b)* capital expenditure to date on (i) the SNOMED CT system, (ii) the SNOMED RT system and (iii) earlier version of the SNOMED system; and if he will make a statement. [9413]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Involvement to date has focused on development of SNOMED CT and related expenditure is capital. The agreement commits the national health service to contributing $3 million for each of the three years beginning April 1999. The contribution is made up of the value of work supplied with any shortfall being a cash payment. Additional costs arise from funding NHS representatives on joint boards. For 2001–02 this was estimated to be approximately £160,000.

SNOMED RT was released by the College of American Pathologists in May 2000. Their total revenue and capital expenditure on this product is not known.

The United Kingdom has no centrally collated information regarding the use of and expenditure on earlier versions of SNOMED.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government received advice from CISCO about IT policy in the NHS; and if he will place copies in the Library. [9407]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* CISCO have, like other major national and international technology suppliers, been invited from time to time to provide advice to the Government. During the summer of 2001, CISCO carried out an "E-Compliant Network" study for the national health service. The report of this study was published on the website of the NHS Information Service. A copy will be placed in the Library.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts he now expects to achieve EPR level 3 by 2004; how many have already purchased relevant systems; and how many have now submitted outline business cases. [9408]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Currently five sites have full EPR level 3 functionality while many more have implemented elements of the EPR on route to meeting level 3.

We are currently reviewing the way EPR level 3 can be assessed in the light of operational experience, which show that national health service trusts choose different routes to EPR based on local priority. It is important that these decisions are made on the basis of local circumstances. We are implementing an on-line performance management arrangement.

There are some 62 outline business cases at various stages of the approval process and a further nine have already been approved.

NHSnet

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of GPs' surgeries were intended to be connected to NHSnet by the target date of March 2001; what proportion were connected; what proportion were connected at the latest date for which figures are available; what proportion of GPs now connected use the system in practice; and if he will make a statement. [9404]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Our Information Management and Technology strategy for the national health service, "Building the Information Core—Implementing the NHS Plan", published in January 2001 gave the target of 95 per cent. of general practitioners practices in England to be connected to NHSnet by end of March 2001.

At that date 93.6 per cent. of practices in England had an NHSnet line installed. At the latest date for which figures are available 97 per cent. of practices in England have an NHSnet line installed.

Nationally, 77 per cent. of practices in England have completed acceptance tests which include demonstrating that local staff are able to use e-mail over NHSnet. Although usage of NHSnet is monitored centrally, the extent to which individual practices use e-mail depends on local work practices and information on usage is not available centrally.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when in the last year key services forming part of NHSnet failed for more than 24 hours consecutively; what the causes of such failures were; and if he will make a statement. [9405]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* There have been no failures of NHSnet services lasting more than 24 hours in the past year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the back up system for NHSnet performed to expectations during recent losses of service. [9406]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Yes. On Saturday 1 September, NHSnet services were temporarily affected by a power surge at a data centre that damaged equipment. Backup systems were brought into use immediately and an operational service was restored within minutes. During the following week, configuration problems were identified that caused network congestion and delay to messages. Immediate corrective action was taken.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Services for the Deaf

Kate Hoey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many quality marked community legal service providers are able to provide interpreting services for deaf clients; and what plans she has to increase this number. [9876]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are 1,276 quality marked community legal service providers able to provide interpreting services for deaf clients through a British sign language interpreter or text phone services. Most providers, particularly those providing specialist help, are able to appoint an external expert such as a sign language interpreter. We are working to increase the numbers of providers who offer such services. The Legal Services Commission is working with the London learning and skills council to help support small and ethnic groups achieve the quality mark. A pilot is being run in two London boroughs and includes disability groups. All Community Legal Service Partnerships' needs assessments are identifying where there is a need for improved access to services for the deaf.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money has been granted to Railtrack in total; and if he will make a statement. [7965]

Mr. Jamieson: In 1994–95 and 1995–96, when Railtrack was still in the public sector, grants of £32 million and £34 million were paid towards the cost of maintaining level crossings. Since its privatisation in

1996 the company has recovered those costs, and other costs, through access charges paid by passenger train operating companies (TOCs) and freight operating companies (FOCs). So, although no grant was paid direct to the company between 1996–97 and 2000–01, the company's profitability in those years was contingent on public money. Some 90 per cent. of its income is paid to it in access charges by TOCs and FOCs, most of which are supported by public money.

In addition, in accordance with the terms of Railtrack's 2 April agreement with Government, Railtrack received £337 million of network grant on 1 October 2001; and the company, or its successor body, will receive £162 million of network grant in 2001–02 in respect of the (October 2000) final conclusions of the Rail Regulator's periodic review of access charges.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if Railtrack will honour its outstanding debts to its creditors; and if he will make a statement. [8992]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have committed themselves to provide the railway administrators with sufficient funds to allow them to continue to pay trade creditors as invoices fall due for payment. We have also committed ourselves to provide sufficient funds to pay non-default interest, lease rentals and scheduled repayments to finance creditors for an initial period of 45 days. This will continue for the finance creditors who have signed up to certain standstill arrangements until a transfer scheme is proposed.

We intend to enable a proposal to be made to the railway administrators which would, if accepted, result in the transfer of both the business of the company and the debt of the finance creditors participating in the standstill to a new company limited by guarantee. The new company would be financially sound and have a credit rating of at least BBB and potentially higher. Indebtedness would be transferred on broadly the same economic terms, applicable in the absence of default, as applied immediately before administration. Lenders should not lose any principal or interest.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has received an undertaking from the Treasury to guarantee finance required by the successor company to Railtrack to invest in the rail network. [8996]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not received, or asked for, such an undertaking.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the nature of the approaches made by West LB relating to Railtrack. [9002]

Mr. Jamieson: West LB has written to my Department setting out in broad terms its proposals for a scheme to take Railtrack plc out of administration. It will be for West LB to consider how to develop its proposals and whether or not to submit them to the railway administrator, who is responsible for making proposals on how to move the company out of administration.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he first advised *(a)* Treasury officials and *(b)* officials in his Department that his preferred option was to put Railtrack into administration. [8696]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Having reviewed all the relevant papers and considered all the options, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions decided not to accept Railtrack's proposal for additional funding on 5 October. Officials in my Department and in HM Treasury were subsequently informed of my right hon. Friend's decision and of his intention to petition for a Railway Administration Order.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date he first obtained legal advice regarding the possibility of putting Railtrack into administration. [8691]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Since the date on which Railtrack made its request for additional funding, my right hon. Friend has taken a wide range of advice, including legal advice, on all the options available to him and their possible consequences.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings his officials held with Ernst and Young to discuss whether Railtrack plc should be put into administration; and when these meetings were held. [10191]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* My officials had regular meetings with representatives of Ernst and Young after an initial meeting on 23 August and their subsequent engagement as advisers.

Social Housing (Rural Areas)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on plans to speed up the development of social housing in rural areas. [8529]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* We recognise the importance of affordable housing in maintaining balanced and successful rural communities. We are taking a number of measures to improve the delivery of social housing in rural areas.

Last year just under 4,400 homes were approved in larger rural areas and market towns through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development programme and local authority funding. This was in addition to 1,321 homes provided by the same means in small settlements of fewer than 3,000 people.

Our overall strategy is to ensure that the housing needs of people living in rural areas are properly identified; to increase investment in new social housing; to maximum delivery of affordable housing through the planning system; and to make the best use of existing property. We expect to deliver around 9,000 affordable homes annually in rural areas by 2003–04 through these measures, as announced in the Rural White Paper.

We expect all local authorities to develop housing strategies that address the need for affordable housing. In addition, we want local authorities to make better use of the planning system to secure more affordable homes as

part of mixed developments in markets towns and villages. We will issue shortly a consultation paper on the review of the planning system. The fundamental objective of the review is to improve the efficiency of the system.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate *(a)* the number of council houses sold in south Gloucestershire in each of the last 10 years and *(b)* the number of new social rented houses built in South Gloucestershire over the same period. [10476]

Ms Keeble: The information is as follows:

(a) Council houses sold in south Gloucestershire[1] in the last 10 years:

1996–97: 91

1997–98: 113

1998–99: 184

1999–2000: 177

2000–01: 183

For 2001–02 the council is estimating 175.

(b) New social rented houses built:

1996–97: not available

1997–98: not available

1998–99: 65

1999–2000: 99

2000–01: 89

For 2001–02: 89 are planned.

[1] South Gloucestershire was created on 1 April 1996.

Regional Bodies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what are the administrative costs of *(a)* regional development agencies, *(b)* Government offices for the regions and *(c)* regional chambers are for each region, (i) this year and (ii) projected for the next financial year. [8955]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment and the Regions on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 137W.

We have not issued the RDAs with allocations for next year. The RDAs will be submitting proposals for their administration to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in their corporate plans.

The Cabinet office oversees the work of the Regional Co-ordination (RCU) and the Government offices, for which the total administrative running cost budget for the financial year 2001–02 is £101.63 million and £98.63 million for 2002–03. There is an annual resource planning exercise that will allocate the sums between individual Government offices and the RCU. This has commenced and is due for completion in December. Programme budgets administered by the Government offices are the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for the relevant sponsor Departments.

The regional chambers were designated by the Secretary of State following the establishment of regional development agencies in 1999. They have been established voluntarily by bodies representing the interests of each region. Their running costs are a matter for the chambers and their members. The Government have however allocated £500,000 this year to each regional chamber, with an additional £1 million for chambers to use collectively, to help them establish a stronger strategic and scrutiny role within the regions.

Regional Air Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the consultation for Regional Air Services and the South East and East of England Air Services reviews will be published; and when he expects to issue the White Paper on Government Policy for UK Aviation. [9358]

Mr. Spellar: We expect consultation to commence early next year on both the Regional Air Service programme and South East airport options.

Responses to the major public consultation exercise outlined, along with responses received on the future of Aviation National Consultation document published last December, will inform the preparation of the Air Transport White Paper. We plan to issue the White Paper in the second half of next year.

National Air Traffic Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will made a statement on the NATS investment programme and the safety of the UK air traffic management system. [9339]

Mr. Spellar: NATS are reviewing their long-term investment plan to take account of the impact of the 11 September terrorist attacks on the aviation industry. They are due to report on the new Business Plan, which includes the long-term investment plan, in November 2001. Safety will remain paramount for NATS in producing the Business Plan and long-term investment plan.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will made a statement on the timetable for opening the new NATS en-route centre at Swanwick; and if the project is within budget; [9338]

(2) if NATS has enough qualified air traffic controllers for the transition from West Drayton to Swanwick. [9342]

Mr. Spellar: Yes.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Chief Executive of NATS about whether the Airline Group has sufficient financial resources to meet NATS' present and future investment requirements; and if he will make a statement. [9343]

Mr. Spellar: My officials are having regular discussions with the NATS Chief Executive about the financial resources available to NATS.

Bombardier

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ensure that subsidies paid to Bombardier in Belfast cannot be used by that company to cross-subsidise its Belfast City Airport subsidiary; and if he will make a statement. [9350]

Mr. Spellar: This would be an issue for CAA or the competition authorities to investigate in response to any complaint.

East Midlands Airport

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to control aircraft noise at night from East Midlands airport by designating the airport under section 80 for the purposes of section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 in line with the request from North West Leicestershire district council. [10481]

Mr. Spellar: The representations received in relation to the request from North West Leicestershire district council are currently being considered and I shall announce the decision in due course, following further representations.

Public Assets (Borrowing)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to amend the rules covering borrowing against public assets; and if he will make a statement. [10408]

Mr. Raynsford: We announced on 21 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 250W, our intention to abolish the present system of local authority capital controls. The new system will permit authorities to borrow without prior Government approval. Each authority will decide how much to borrow, taking account of the revenue resources it can afford to make available to service debt, and acting in accordance with a professional code being developed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. This increased flexibility to invest in their communities will allow authorities to deliver better value for money over the whole range of services, including housing. There is no proposal to remove the present prohibition on the mortgaging of local authority capital assets. The potential seizure of the property by a creditor would threaten the delivery of essential services. Loans are secured on all the revenues of the authority and that will remain the position. Legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Driving Standards Agency

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the annual gross cost of the Driving Instructors Agency is; and what the income generated by the agency in test fees and other income was in the latest year for which figures are available. [10604]

Mr. Spellar: The Driving Standards Agency's annual report and accounts for 2000–01 show:

	£ million
Annual gross cost (expenditure)	76.849
Income (test fees)	78.222
Income (other)	2.115

Copies of the annual report and accounts are available in the House Libraries.

Right to Buy

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review the capping of the discount available to residents wanting to buy their homes; and if he will make a statement. [10537]

Ms Keeble: We have no plans to alter the Right to Buy discount limits introduced in February 1999.

Boundary Commission

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the timetable for *(a)* publication and *(b)* implementation of the Boundary Commission proposals for England and Wales. [10418]

Mr. Raynsford: The Boundary Commissions for England, and for Wales, are independent bodies who will submit separate reports to the Secretary of State on completion of their general reviews of parliamentary constituencies in England and Wales.

The Boundary Commission for England has indicated in its annual report for 2000–01 that it expects to complete the fifth general review between five and six years after the February 2000 start. The Boundary Commission for Wales, in its annual report for 1999–2000, indicated its intention to commence the review in February 2003 and complete it in 2005.

As soon as possible after the Boundary Commission has submitted its reports to him, the Secretary of State is required to lay the reports before Parliament. If the reports recommend alterations to the existing constituencies, a draft Order in Council giving effect to the recommendations, with or without modifications, must also be laid. The order is subject to affirmative procedure of both Houses of Parliament. The new constituencies take effect at the following general election. On the basis of the Commissions' intentions, the Secretary of State does not expect to lay the reports before Parliament before 2006.

Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussion has taken place with business about the proposed EU Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive; and if he will make a statement. [10300]

Mr. Raynsford: The Health and Safety Executive has consulted widely with business on the Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive, including with the CBI and the TUC. It has also had discussions with several industry associations and has responded to a large number of inquiries from individual businesses.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Government's policy is towards the EU Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive; and if he will make a statement. [10301]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government welcome the Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive and support the common position reached by the Council of Ministers on 25 June. We believe implementation of the directive

will result in significant improvements in health. The Government intend to defend the common position against amendments proposed by the European Parliament which would cause significant problems for industry.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what non-financial requirements will be made of the purchaser of the Millennium Dome; [10624]

(2) what criteria have been established to determine the success of bids to buy the Millennium Dome. [10625]

Ms Keeble: We want to get the best deal for the taxpayer. Therefore, any sale of the Dome will be required to provide a worthwhile and sustainable future for the Dome and value for money. We will also want to be assured that bidders' proposals can be successfully delivered.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what his estimate is of the value of the Millennium Dome and site; [10623]

(2) when he will publish details of plans to sell the Millennium Dome. [10626]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 21W.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the costs of the Millennium Dome since the closure of the Millennium Experience. [10622]

Ms Keeble: Since the closure of the Millennium Experience on 31 December 2000, the expenditure incurred on the Dome by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) and English Partnerships (EP) is as follows:

Dome running costs[1]—£3.3 million

Decommissioning[2]—£9.6 million.

The lease of the Dome site to NMEC ended on 30 June 2001, and reverted to English Partnerships (EP) as planned. All costs incurred by NMEC following the end of the Millennium Experience will be paid from the grant already approved by the Millennium Commission. EP will recover their Dome related costs from eventual sale proceeds.

[1] Includes rates, utilities, security, maintenance and insurance.

[2] Costs incurred in preparation for the future use of the Dome.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date *(a)* he, *(b)* other Ministers and *(c)* officials in his Department, first spoke to *(a)* representatives of Legacy plc, *(b)* representatives of the Wellcome Trust, *(c)* the Duke of Westminster or his colleagues and *(d)* any other party to discuss the acquisition of the Millennium Dome, following the failure of the Nomura deal. [10688]

Ms Keeble: To reveal details of any discussions could compromise the negotiating process and would be against the public interest. It is of course open to any interested party to make their interest known.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kuranze Ranch, Kenya

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will take to assist Mrs. Eileen Williams' attempts to secure the title to land owned by her late parents at Kuranze Ranch in Kenya. [9255]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are concerned at the length of time it is taking for the Kenyan authorities to resolve this matter. Our High Commission in Nairobi and the High Commissioner personally have maintained a close interest in Mrs. Williams' case and will continue to do all they properly can to seek an outcome which is equitable to Mrs. Williams.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held in Brussels on 17 October; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [10370]

Peter Hain: The General Affairs Council met on 17 October in Luxembourg to discuss the EU's response to international terrorism. The GAC declared its total solidarity with the United States and confirmed its wholehearted support for the action taken in the context of legitimate defence and in accordance with the UN Charter and the UN Security Council Resolution 1368.

The GAC reiterated the importance of a multilateral and global approach under the United Nations' aegis in order to strengthen the international coalition in its fight against terrorism in all its aspects. It identified emergency humanitarian aid in Afghanistan as an absolute priority and undertook to mobilise without delay aid amounting to more than euro 320 million. The GAC supported the efforts of the UN specialised agencies and expressed its concern at the difficulties of access and of convoying humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. The GAC appealed to the countries of the region to facilitate by all means possible the humanitarian operations for hosting fresh flows of Afghan refugees and will implement the necessary means to assist them in doing so.

The GAC agreed on the following points to guide the Union's future proceedings on Afghanistan, once it is freed of the al-Qaeda network and of its terrorists:

the establishment in Afghanistan of a stable, legitimate and broadly representative Government, expressing the will of the people;

the essential role of the UN in seeking a peace plan for Afghanistan;

maintaining absolute priority for emergency humanitarian aid;

a plan for the reconstruction of the country;

the regional dimension of the stabilisation of Afghanistan.

The GAC committed the EU to making contact without delay with the international community and in particular the Secretary-General of the United Nations and his personal representative, Mr. Brahimi, in order to contribute effectively to the UN effort.

The GAC decided to intensify the European Union's relations with the countries neighbouring Afghanistan in order to contribute to the stability of the region. Particular reference was made to Pakistan, India, Iran and the countries of central Asia. The GAC also expressed its determination to continue a close and co-ordinated political dialogue with its Arab and Muslim partners.

The GAC emphasised the urgent need to relaunch the middle east peace process. The Presidency issued a separate statement condemning in the strongest terms the assassination of the Israeli Minister for Tourism, Rehavam Ze'evi.

The GAC stated that the Union would be more effective in developing the common Foreign and Security Policy and making the European Security and Defence Policy operational as soon as possible.

The GAC welcomed the fact that, in all the Council's configurations, work on stepping up the fight against terrorism was progressing satisfactorily and had already produced initial results. It noted in particular the following:

the measures which had already been taken, in particular pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1373, against the sources that fund terrorism, such as the political agreement on the Directive against money laundering, application in full of the FATF measures and freezing the assets of persons and organisations linked to the Taliban;

work in progress to draw up a list of terrorist organisations; the Council believed that regular meetings of the intelligence services were vital if terrorism is to be combated successfully; the Council approved a system of indicators making it possible to evaluate the commitment and the co-operation of third countries in the fight against terrorism;

the progress already made in the examination of the Commission proposals on the European arrest warrant and terrorist offences and the establishment of a co-ordinated EU position in the context of the conclusion of a general UN convention on international terrorism; the Council requested that consideration should be given to any measure facilitating mutual assistance with third countries concerning the pursuit of terrorists or terrorist organisations;

the many current contacts with the USA, including the Troika meeting scheduled for 19 October.

The GAC also welcomed the Presidency's road map setting out all the initiatives and work carried out by the Council and listing those responsible for implementation, the time frames and progress made.

Baltic States

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what dates the *(a)* President and *(b)* Prime Minister of (i) Latvia, (ii) Estonia and (iii) Lithuania visited the UK in the last five years; what future visits are planned; and if he will make a statement. [9988]

Peter Hain: Former President Meri of Estonia visited the UK in February 1998 and again in March 2000. President Vike-Freiberga of Latvia visited the UK in October 2000. There have been no prime ministerial visits from the countries concerned in the last five years.

Programmes of future visits are kept under regular review.

Sudan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the USA on the subject of Sudan. [10682]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have frequent discussions with the USA about Sudan. We welcome the appointment of Senator John Danforth as US Special Envoy to Sudan, and we look forward to working closely with him in the pursuit of peace.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has collated on how many Sudanese are refugees in neighbouring countries; and how many are refugees in camps in those countries. [10681]

Mr. Bradshaw: According to the US Committee for Refugees, there were approximately 465,000 Sudanese refugees or asylum seekers at the end of 2000. Approximately 200,000 Sudanese refugees were recorded in Uganda, 70,000 in Ethiopia, 70,000 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 55,000 in Kenya, 35,000 in Central African Republic, 20,000 in Chad, and some 12,000 in Egypt.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Sudanese Government on the cases of the human rights activists Ghazi Suleiman and Ali Mahmoud currently detained by that Government. [10679]

Mr. Bradshaw: Following representations to the Sudanese authorities by the UK and the EU both Ghazi Suleiman and Ali Mahmoud were released on 17 February 2001.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish evidence he has received that links the Sudanese Government to the East African embassy bombings. [10683]

Mr. Bradshaw: HMG did not say that the Sudanese Government were involved in the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the access of non-governmental organisations to the Sudan. [10680]

Mr. Bradshaw: Many British and other NGOs are performing outstanding humanitarian work in Sudan with strong political and financial support from HMG. We work closely with Operation Lifeline Sudan, North and South, and with the UN, ICRC and NGOs over access for humanitarian operations in Sudan. We regularly urge the Government of Sudan to stop denying access for humanitarian operations. We urge both the Government and the SPLM to improve the conditions within which humanitarian organisations work. We also aim to expand their access by visiting areas not usually accessible. For example our Ambassador in Khartoum visited Blue Nile state last month, the first diplomat to do so for some three years. Local UNICEF representatives said that his visit would help them gain access and establish a new office in that state.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with the Sudanese Government on the imposition of Sharia law in largely Christian areas. [10678]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly discuss freedom of religion with the Government of Sudan and lobby on individual cases of abuses. Sharia law is by and large not imposed on mainly Christian areas such as south Sudan, although there are federal laws which infringe on religious freedom (eg Islamic banking system). The situation is worse for Christians in predominantly Muslim areas, such as around Khartoum, where they face implementation of Islamic punishments. We have maintained strong pressure on the Government of Sudan to change their policies in this respect and there has been limited progress over the last year and a half. We are also actively promoting inter-religious dialogue between religious leaders in Sudan and the UK.

Freedom of religion was the main topic of discussion at the EU-Sudan dialogue meeting on 23 October. Our Ambassador will host a meeting of EU Heads of Mission with the Minister of Religious Guidance and Endowments next week.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Kenya-based peace secretariat to discuss a peace deal in the Sudan. [10691]

Mr. Bradshaw: We keep in close touch through our diplomatic representatives in Khartoum and Nairobi. We have also recently agreed additional funding for IGAD's work on the Sudan peace process.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Sudanese Government to encourage it to co-operate with the International Committee of the Red Cross. [10693]

Mr. Bradshaw: We consistently urge the Government of Sudan to co-operate with all the humanitarian agencies, including ICRC. The British Government provide significant funding to ICRC operations in Sudan.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policies towards the Sudan; and what plans he has to help encourage the Sudanese Government towards the restoration of political parties there. [10690]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our priorities for Sudan remain to support the peace process, to promote respect for human rights and to ensure efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance. We continue to promote democratic transformation. We regularly urge the Government of Sudan and other authorities to improve freedom of political association and assembly, and to remove legislation and end practices limiting other popular freedoms. This is also a core focus of the EU-Sudan dialogue, which the UK is currently chairing as local EU Presidency.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Sudanese Government on *(a)* female genital mutilation, *(b)* slavery, *(c)* people trafficking, *(d)* child labour and *(e)* torture. [10694]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly discuss these issues with the Sudanese authorities, including jointly with our European partners in the EU-Sudan dialogue. The Foreign Secretary raised human rights in his meeting with the Sudanese Foreign Minister on 21 September. We also fund project activity to promote constructive approaches to address these issues. We have, for example, provided funding to a large UNICEF programme targeting female genital mutilation. The issue of abductions was raised at the EU dialogue on 23 October and we have given significant funding to Save the Children (UK) for its work with the Committee for the Eradication of Abduction of Women and Children, and through the EU to UNICEF.

We have pushed hard for the ratification of the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT) and raised it most recently at the EU-Sudan dialogue on 23 October. Ratification of CAT is now being considered by the Council of Ministers before being submitted to the National Assembly. We also regularly lobby on individual reports of torture and other abuses, working closely with the Sudanese Victims of Torture Group.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed the human rights record of Sudan with the Sudanese Government. [10692]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 21 September when my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met the Sudanese Foreign Minister in London. The promotion of human rights remains one of our priorities in Sudan and our Embassy in Khartoum is in constant touch with the Government of Sudan. Human rights are also a key focus of the EU-Sudan dialogue, which met most recently on 23 October.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent contact he has had with representatives of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army or the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement. [10689]

Mr. Bradshaw: We keep in regular contact with SPLA/M through our Embassy in Khartoum and our High Commission in Nairobi. We have also invited Dr. John Garang to visit London.

Moluccas

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the situation in the Moluccas; [10684]

(2) if he will take steps to clarify the approach of the United Nations towards the Moluccas. [10685]

Mr. Bradshaw: There have been some optimistic signs in Maluku in recent months. However, we continue to monitor events in the province closely. The United Nations has made several assessment visits to Maluku since 1999. It has found concrete evidence of only a small number of conversions, including the most highly reported case in Kasiui and Tior. Many of the Christians evacuated from the province in January are now reported to be voluntarily returning to their homes. Also, many

Muslims and Christians who fled their villages to escape the violence are returning and Muslim leaders in some villages have asked for help in encouraging Christians to return.

The Department for International Development (DFID) has pledged more than £4 million to help establish the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Conflict Prevention and Recovery Unit in Jakarta. The unit will build capacity in conflict reduction and recovery in the provinces torn apart by ethnic conflict, particularly in north Maluku. These new initiatives will complement DFID-supported humanitarian relief programmes by addressing the causes underlying conflict—abuse of power, alienation and loss of access to and control of resources essential for every day life. We will continue to work with the Indonesian authorities and UNDP to promote a reconciliation, begin wider reconstruction work and to offer practical assistance where appropriate.

The UK's message to the Indonesian Government has been consistently clear: a long-term solution to regional conflicts can be achieved only through political negotiation and consultation with the people. I raised these issues with Hamzah Haz, the Indonesian Vice President when we met in Jakarta on 27 August.

Nigeria

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the inter-religious conflict that has erupted in the Jos area of Nigeria. [10687]

Mr. Bradshaw: From 7 to 12 September there was serious fighting in the Jos area where ethnic (Hausa/Berom) and religious (Muslim/Christian) divisions coincide. Religious leaders on both sides have told us they consider the fundamental cause of the clashes to be traditional tribal rivalries about land and local politics.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Nigerian Government on the imposition of Sharia law in parts of the country. [10686]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our High Commission in Abuja has regular discussions with a cross-section of authorities and civil society about developments in northern Nigeria, including the imposition and implementation of Sharia law.

The constitutionality of the introduction of the Sharia penal code by individual states is currently the subject of a Nigerian court case.

Selim Ferhan Onal

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will make a decision on the appeal for admittance made by Selim Ferhan Onal. [10538]

Mr. Bradshaw: This is not a matter for the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. All appeals against the refusal of entry clearance are heard by independent adjudicators from the Lord Chancellor's Department.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the target group for stakeholder pensions is as set out in the 1998 Green Paper, "Partnership for Pensions". [10592]

Mr. McCartney: As stated in the 1998 Pensions Green Paper stakeholder pension schemes are open to everyone, but are particularly targeted at moderate and higher earners who do not have access to an occupational pension or to a cost-effective personal pension.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the targets he has set in respect of the New Deal. [9336]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department's Public Service Agreement sets the following targets: (1) to reduce child poverty by a quarter by 2004; (2) to increase employment over the economic cycle; (3) to increase the employment rates of disadvantaged groups, reducing the difference between their employment rates and the overall rate.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the total advertising costs for anti-benefit fraud campaigns in financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; [7577]

(2) if he will estimate the total advertising cost for the Targeting Fraud campaign. [7578]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: "The Informal Economy—A Report by Lord Grabiner QC" (published March 2000), proposed that we test the use of advertising as a tool for changing public attitudes towards benefit fraud. We responded by piloting the Targeting Fraud advertising campaign in the north-west. Expenditure on this was £2.2 million spanning the financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. The success of the pilot campaign led to the launch of the national Targeting Fraud campaign. The initial spell of advertising in March 2001 cost £4.6 million and a forecast £9 million will be spent on the campaign running from September 2001 to March 2002.

Around £400,000 is currently spent each year to promote the National Benefit Fraud Hotline, including the Shared Fraud Hotline pilot.

These campaigns are part of a long-term strategy to reinforce our message that benefit fraud is wrong, unfair and will not be tolerated.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what checks are undertaken on benefit claimants who arrive in the UK from abroad to establish if they have been found guilty of benefit fraud in the country they have left. [10479]

Malcolm Wicks: A conviction for benefit fraud in another country does not affect entitlement to benefits in this country. Therefore this would not be checked when a claim to benefits is made.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if private fraud investigators contracted by local authorities have the same access to Department for Works and Pensions staff as in-house local authority fraud investigators. [10480]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department's staff work with contracted out local authority fraud investigators in the normal way as long as we are satisfied that proper protocols are observed and that all legislative constraints are adhered to.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he intends to take to combat fraudulent benefit claims from people who spend the majority of the year abroad, once compulsory automated credit transfer is introduced. [10414]

Malcolm Wicks: Automated Credit Transfer (ACT) is already chosen by nearly 40 per cent. of benefit recipients to access their benefit payments via bank accounts.

The introduction of ACT as the Department's normal method of payment should result in the virtual eradication of Order Book and Giro fraud losses.

The Department has undertaken research to assess the level of fraudulent benefit claims from people who are abroad; contrary to the regulations for certain benefits. Research shows that where there are instances of fraud, it is low both in number and value.

Deciding on counter-measures will depend on whether research reveals there are significant extra risks associated with ACT and their exact nature and extent. Research is on-going, and the situation will continue to be under review.

Cheney Pension Scheme

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the progress of investigations into the Cheney Pension Scheme and the actions of Kevin Gordon Sykes. [9653]

Mr. McCartney: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked Sir Gerald Hosker KCB QC to conduct an independent inquiry into the handling within Opra of the Cheney case and to report his findings to Ministers. We have received the report which contains a number of recommendations involving changes to Opra's procedures and legislation. Because of on-going police investigations it cannot be published until those investigations and any subsequent judicial processes are at an end. I will report further to Parliament at that time. In addition my right hon. Friend will shortly be announcing the Quinquennial Review of Opra, which will take a fundamental look at the delivery of Opra's functions and services.

To address weaknesses in the system highlighted by the Cheney Case, Opra has also conducted its own internal review and, as a result of this and the Hosker recommendations, has introduced the following changes to its casework handling procedures:

introduced specialist teams

improved risk assessment procedures: higher risk cases are given the greatest attention

developed improvements to the computer database, including computer based recording of all casework activity

introduced regular routine searches of the database on key individuals involved in a case

commissioned a major IT project to automate data matching.

I shall keep the House informed.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to introduce legislation to continue invalid care allowance for up to eight weeks after the death of the person being cared for; and if he will make a statement. [10536]

Maria Eagle: We propose to make this change by Regulatory Reform Order. The necessary consultation ended on 15 October 2001. We will lay the order as soon as practicable and it will be considered by the Deregulation Committee thereafter. Following a period of 60 days, it will be laid before the House using the Superaffirmative Procedure. A similar procedure will be followed in the other place.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the level of Housing Benefit payable to under-18 year olds; and if he will make a statement. [10534]

Malcolm Wicks: Most 16 and 17-year-olds are eligible for Housing Benefit in the same way as all people aged under 25. The amounts allowed under the scheme to meet day-to-day living expenses before housing costs are reviewed each year and approved by Parliament through the uprating order.

The level of Housing Benefit payable to people aged under 25 is subject to the Single Room Rent rules which restrict the amount of rent which can be met. As part of our reform of Housing Benefit, the definition of the Single Room Rent was broadened from 2 July this year to reflect better the type of accommodation available in the market to young single people.

16 and 17-year-olds leaving local authority care are not entitled to Housing Benefit. Social services departments have a statutory responsibility to fund the housing costs of these young people, where appropriate.

We have no plans to review the current rules.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if Jobcentre Plus offices will be set targets for reducing the number of people dependent on Incapacity Benefit. [10478]

Malcolm Wicks: No.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women claiming Incapacity Benefit and its predecessors received credits only in each year from 1984. [8963]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Thousand

Year ending	Men	Women
31 March 1984	30	27
30 March 1985	23	22
5 April 1986	30	28
4 April 1987	40	38
2 April 1988	51	59
1 April 1989[1]	70	87
31 March 1990	95	110
30 March 1991	126	137
4 April 1992	160	160
3 April 1993	201	185
2 April 1994	233	207
12 April 1995	277	235
29 February 1996[2]	320	260
28 February 1997	341	273
28 February 1998	372	293
28 February 1999	395	315
29 February 2000	419	331
28 February 2001	447	358

[1] From 2 October 1988 the national insurance contribution test for Sickness Benefit had to be satisfied in the last two relevant tax years before the claim instead of the last one.
[2] Incapacity Benefit replaced Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit on 13 April 1995.
Note:
All figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
Source:
Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of claims to Sickness Benefit up to and including 1995. After this date figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample of the Incapacity Benefit computer system and will exclude a small number of clerically held cases.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if an Incapacity Benefit claimant taking part in the New Deal for Disabled People in a pilot area for the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulation 2001 will *(a)* see the same personal adviser and *(b)* attend the same venue, for a work focused interview. [10477]

Malcolm Wicks: People already claiming Incapacity Benefit in a Jobcentre Plus or work focused interview area are unaffected by the regulations. The only people to be affected are those making new or repeat claims. In these cases, people eligible for the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) will normally be given information about NDDP and details of local Job Brokers at their work focused interview. If they wish to take part in NDDP further support will be provided by their chosen Job Broker.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which categories of Incapacity Benefit recipients will be automatically exempt from work focused interviews. [10409]

Malcolm Wicks: From Monday 22 October Jobcentre Plus interviews are a condition of benefit entitlement for all people making new or repeat claims to Incapacity Benefit in Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices. The Jobcentre Plus interview regulations provide for the waiver or deferment of the interviews in certain circumstances. Information on the circumstances in which a waiver or deferral may be appropriate is set out clearly in the Jobcentre Plus guidance, a copy of which is in the Library.

Benefit Payments (Automated Credit Transfer)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if all benefit recipients will be able to choose their frequency of payment once automated credit transfer becomes compulsory; and which payment options will be offered. [10415]

Malcolm Wicks: From 2003, customers will be able to receive payments on a weekly, fortnightly, four-weekly, thirteen-weekly or yearly basis. The precise frequency will depend on the payment rules which apply to the particular benefit they are receiving.

This means, in particular, that, for the first time, retirement pensioners will be able to receive weekly payments by ACT.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit recipients who did not receive their benefit via automated credit transfer when their current claim began have voluntarily opted to be paid this way in the last year for which records are available, broken down into recipients of each benefit. [10416]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested.

TREASURY

Independent Insurance

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the former employees of Independent Insurance; what assessment he has made of the employment rights of insurance company employees in the light of the collapse of Independent Insurance; and if he will make a statement. [9422]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

I have received a number of representations about redundancy payments for former employees of Independent Insurance. The Department's Redundancy Payments Service has agreed to make redundancy payments under the provisions of the Employment Rights Act 1996, to the former employees and nearly all these payments have been made. Employees of insurance companies have the same rights as other employees under the 1996 Act.

Scottish Transport Group Pension Fund

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to use money paid to the Exchequer from the Scottish Transport Group pension fund to make payments to Scottish Transport Group pensioners; and if he will make a statement. [4574]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 18 July 2001]:* While there is no legal entitlement for Scottish Transport Group pension scheme members to share in the pension surplus at wind up, Scottish Executive Ministers, following agreement with Treasury Ministers, will make ex gratia payments to eligible pension scheme members when the scheme is would up of around £100 million.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what way the circumstances of the National Bus Group pension fund differ from those of the Scottish Transport Group pension fund as far as taxation of the surpluses thereof is concerned. [9214]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* A surplus from a pension fund scheme can carry a tax liability. A tax charge is provided for under section 601 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988. It applies to all payments to an employer from the funds of an exempt approved pension scheme, as the Scottish Transport Group schemes are and the National Bus Company schemes were.

The tax payable on payments to pensioners will depend on the nature of the payment and the personal tax circumstances of the individual. Payments to Scottish Transport Group pensioners have not yet been finalised by the Scottish Executive.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact which the climate change levy has had on employment in the manufacturing sector since its introduction. [8855]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy only became operational in April this year and the first payments are still being received by Customs and Excise. While it is too early for a full assessment, the levy is operating in the planned revenue neutral manner.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress made in implementing the new IT infrastructure for HM Customs and Excise. [9184]

Mr. Boateng: The implementation of Customs' new IT infrastructure is proceeding to plan. By the end of October 2001, 16,000 personnel computers and laptops will have been installed in over 200 offices nationwide, accessible to more than 80 per cent. of Customs' staff.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of telephone calls to designated inquiry points in HM Customs and Excise were answered within 20 seconds in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 to the most recent date for which information is available. [9181]

Mr. Boateng: In the year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 HM Customs and Excise answered 55 per cent. of calls to designated inquiry points within 20 seconds.

From 2 April 2001, Customs' new National Advice Service (a "virtual" call-centre linking six sites with a single inquiries number) has been in place to improve the speed and quality of responses to inquiries. By the half year point 60 per cent. of calls were answered within 20 seconds; and by the end of the financial year the Department expects to be answering 80 per cent. within that time.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of *(a)* the financial year 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 to the most recent date for which information is available, how many Customs officers have (i) been recruited by HM Customs and Excise, (ii) retired from HM Customs and Excise and *(c)* left HM Customs and Excise for reasons other than retirement. [9187]

Mr. Boateng: There are no separate recruitment, retirement and resignation figures for staff employed on customs work. Staff for all areas of work in the Department are recruited through common recruitment arrangements.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will increase the number of Customs and Excise officers in the Orkney and Shetland Isles. [9220]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* There are no current plans to deploy additional staff in these locations. Staff deployments are kept constantly under review by the Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise and are based on risk and results.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs officers are in post at each port in the United Kingdom. [9186]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise Law Enforcement comprises a Detection function of over 3,000 officers, an Investigation function of just under 2,000 officers and an Intelligence function of more than 1,000 officers. These officers are located at ports, airports, inland locations and in flexible national teams which can be deployed to any location. In addition there are just over 1,500 officers employed on the control of imported/exported goods covering all major ports and airports. Customs constantly review resource deployment in the light of risk and results. It is not Customs policy to identify actual staffing resources at individual locations as this may assist criminals in identifying Customs' operational methods and would enable them to bypass Customs' controls.

Environmental Taxation

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much environmental taxation has been collected by the Treasury in each of the past five financial years broken down by type of tax. [9026]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The Government publish figures for revenue receipts for all taxes in the pre-Budget report and the Budget.

Child Pornography

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many detections of indecent or obscene material featuring children were made by Customs and Excise in 2000–01. [9213]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Information on detections of obscene material made during 2000–01 will shortly be published in Customs' annual departmental report.

Dredging

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much income has been raised by the Crown Estates from dredging licences issued in respect of dredging offshore in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9654]

Mr. Andrew Smith: the income derived from dredging licences issued for the last five years as published in the Crown Estates' annual report is as follows.

	£ million
2001	13.8
2000	13.3
1999	12.16
1998	12.8
1997	14.3

Public Expenditure (Scotland)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for each year since 1979, what the total sum was, in real terms, of public expenditure spent by the *(a)* Scottish Office, *(b)* Scotland Office and *(c)* Scottish Executive that was negotiated externally from the block grant and Barnett formula; and what was for each year (i) the single largest item of such expenditure and (ii) the total amount of such expenditure. [10126]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This information is not readily available. Moreover, coverage of the block grant arrangements has changed over the period since 1979, which makes comparisons over this period difficult. However, information on Scottish public expenditure back to 1995–96 was published in Chapter 8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses in April 2001. Information for earlier years was published in previous editions of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses.

Productivity

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding the effect on UK productivity of *(a)* the regulatory burden on business and *(b)* the climate change levy. [R] [10255]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor discusses a wide range of issues, including regulation, with Government colleagues and takes into account relevant economic, social and environmental factors when forming taxation policy.

Tax Revenues

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if tax revenues predicted for the current financial year are so far on target; and if he will identify specific shortfalls or surpluses. [10261]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Updated public finance forecasts will be made available in the forthcoming pre-Budget report.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Collins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce conclusions on the proposals for extended relief for business rates and VAT for businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak, as set out in the Haskins report. [9629]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Inland Revenue have worked jointly to respond to the needs of businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. A joint helpline was set up on 21 March 2001 to offer immediate advice, and this was followed by the publication of a special tax bulletin giving further information. The majority of contacts were from businesses experiencing financial difficulties, and were assisted by deferring liabilities or agreeing time to pay.

A programme of proactive support was also established. In affected areas, both Departments telephoned businesses identified as likely to need support and attended many meetings set up by support agencies.

The Revenue departments will continue to take a sympathetic approach to businesses which have been affected by FMD, and are aware that some businesses will continue to suffer problems throughout the autumn and winter.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Yeovil on 20 July 2001 [ref 200]. [9964]

Mr. Boateng: I very much regret that Treasury Ministers are not yet in a position to provide the hon. Member with the information he is seeking. However, the Economic Secretary will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Self-assessment Tax Returns

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the data for each month since 1 October 2000 on how many self-assessment tax returns were *(a)* issued, *(b)* received, *(c)* waiting to be processed and *(d)* processed; and if he will make a statement. [8137]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested is as detailed:

Self-assessment tax returns

Tax year/date	*Issued*	*Received*	*Processed*	*Waiting to be processed*
1999–2000				
1 October 2000	9,159,211	4,263,614	2,778,869	1,484,745
29 October 2000	9,221,121	4,907,091	3,736,857	1,170,234
26 November 2000	9,281,440	5,330,866	4,643,537	687,329
31 December 2000	9,335,823	5,859,044	5,288,979	570,065
28 January 2001	9,416,617	7,219,404	6,113,168	1,106,236
25 February 2001	9,502,295	8,612,114	7,160,650	1,451,464
25 March 2001	9,532,442	8,750,042	8,323,890	426,152
2000–01				
29 April 2001	8,761,593	243,350	76,410	166,940
27 May 2001	8,852,094	629,980	328,328	301,652
1 July 2001	8,940,513	1,323,115	864,497	458,618
29 July 2001	8,990,292	1,943,901	1,350,597	593,304
2 September 2001	8,989,043	2,798,153	1,966,795	831,358
30 September 2001	9,152,255	4,241,952	2,677,145	1,564,807

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Brady: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the persons who accompanied her on her visit to Brazil from 30 July to 1 August; and what was the cost of the visit. [9888]

The Solicitor-General: Neither I nor the Attorney-General have visited Brazil, either between 30 July and 1 August, or at all since our appointment in June 2001 this year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Policing (Bromley)
Child Curfew Orders

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many curfew orders have been imposed on young people in the London borough of Bromley. [9995]

Mr. Denham: No applications have been received to impose child curfew schemes under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Sections 48 and 49 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, which took effect on 1 August 2001, have recently extended the upper age limit to 15 and allowed the police, as well as local authorities, to initiate schemes. Local areas are assessing the implications of these changes.

Religious Hatred

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend offences which involve aggravation by racial hatred to include aggravation by religious hatred; and if he will make a statement. [9896]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Government intend to bring forward proposals to extend the law on racially aggravated offences, to cover offences aggravated by religious hostility.

The Government have also announced their intention to propose this change as part of a package of measures to strengthen the incitement to racial hatred provisions contained in Part III of the Public Order Act 1986 and in particular to extend those provisions to the incitement to religious hatred.

Metropolitan Police Numbers

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many officers were serving in the Special Branch of the Metropolitan police on *(a)* 1 August and *(b)* 1 October; [9726]

(2) how many police officers there were in the Metropolitan police force area in *(a)* March 1997 and *(b)* March 2001; what the difference between these two figures adjusted for boundary changes is; and if he will make a statement; [9719]

(3) how many police were available for active duty in the Metropolitan police force area in *(a)* March 1997, *(b)* March 1999, *(c)* March 2000, and *(d)* March 2001; and if he will make a statement. [9727]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* On 31 March 1997 the Metropolitan police had 26,677 police officers and on 31 March 2001 there were 24,878. I am told by the Commissioner that 466 police officers were seconded to the forces of Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey when the boundary change took effect on 1 April 2000. 253 of these officers have now returned to the Metropolitan police and the remainder should have returned by March 2002. They will return as and when replacements are recruited by the three forces.

The effects of the boundary change were incorporated into the police funding formula and the overall transfer was in terms of financial resources, not of officers. Where data on police numbers are used in the formula, a notional transfer of 887 from the Metropolitan police to the three county forces was applied. Because it is for police authorities and chief constables to decide how resources are utilised, it is not appropriate to convert the notional transfer directly into a full-time equivalent strength for the Metropolitan police immediately prior to the boundary changes.

I am told by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the force had 538 Special Branch officers on 1 August and 552 on 1 October 2001.

The number of officers available for active duty cannot be provided by the Metropolitan police. Figures in the table are those for ordinary duty[1] for the periods requested.

Year	*Strength*
31 March 1997	26,677
31 March 1999	26,073
31 March 2000	25,485
31 March 2001	24,878

Police numbers in the Metropolitan police have been increasing since September 2000. Between 30 September 2000 and 31 March 2001 police strength increased by 183. This was the largest single increase in police numbers in the force for more than a decade. The overall reduction between March 2000 and March 2001 largely reflects the impact of boundary changes in April 2000.

[1] Ordinary duty is equal to the strength of the force.

Police Reform

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his proposals for the future role of police constables. [9720]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Government will publish later this year a White Paper setting out their proposals for reform of the police service. The reforms will further enhance the professionalism of constables, ensure that they are well trained, well equipped and appropriately rewarded and enjoy strong leadership and effective management.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his proposals for the use of non-police personnel for policing tasks. [9721]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The police reform process is considering ways in which police support staff might carry out certain functions currently undertaken by police officers, for example, some tasks in the custody suite.

Security Situation (Funding)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the

Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about extra funding to cover the present security situation; and if he will make a statement. [9725]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has met the Commissioner and the Chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) on several occasions, during which policing the light of the security situation since 11 September has been discussed.

Operational policing is a matter for the Commissioner and it is for the Authority and the Commissioner to decide how best to manage individual issues within the Authority's budget. However, my right hon. Friend does appreciate the impact of the additional resources that the Commissioner and the MPA are providing to counter the increased risks to security, and is considering with them the financial implications.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what extra funds are available for the extension of CCTV programmes in *(a)* town centres and *(b)* urban areas. [8444]

Mr. Denham: Under Round 2 of the Crime Reduction Programme Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Initiative, 142 town centre schemes have been allocated funding to date, with a further eight still under consideration. Of these, 80 are extensions to existing CCTV schemes.

130 urban area schemes have been allocated funding to date, with a further 13 still under consideration. Of these, 13 are extensions to existing CCTV schemes.

There will be no further opportunities to apply for CCTV funding under this initiative. We are considering how best to build on the lessons of the Crime Reduction Programme in developing new crime reduction initiatives that could provide future funding for CCTV.

Criminal Records Bureau

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Records Bureau will start operating; on what date it was planned to start operating; what the reasons are for the delay; and if he will make a statement. [8452]

Mr. Denham: The establishment of the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) has long been recognised as a complex and challenging project. This was acknowledged in the report of the Home Affairs Committee published on 28 March, which also perceived that the crucial consideration should be to ensure that the service that the CRB will provide is both robust and effective, rather than aim for a particular date to begin operating.

The registration process began on 1 May. The target date for commencing the issue of Standard and Enhanced Disclosures has been kept under review as the project has progressed. Latterly, the target date was November. But, in the light of an independent review, it has been decided to add two further stages prior to the commencement of live operations. These will enable the CRB's disclosure service to be rigorously tested in a simulated operational environment, in order to provide added confidence in the bureau's state of preparedness to begin delivering a high standard of service.

It remains the intention to introduce the service on a phased basis. Subject to the testing outlined, it is expected that the CRB will start processing applications at the beginning of March 2002 in respect of cases which are subject to police checks under present arrangements; and all other applications for Standard and Enhanced Disclosures at the beginning of April.

Special Constables (West Midlands)

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables *(a)* were recruited to and *(b)* left the West Midlands force in each of the last five years. [9620]

Mr. Denham: The recruitment and wastage figures for West Midlands special constabulary for the period March 1997-March 2001 are set out in the table.

	Recruitment	*Wastage*
1997	398	350
1998	213	243
1999	145	206
2000	115	116
2001	120	150

Source:
Figures supplied by Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate

Home Office funded research into the premature wastage of special constables, completed last year, found that the primary reasons for leaving were often external to the service. However, the research identified some underlying management factors contributing to the decision to resign.

Recommendations aimed at reducing the wastage included making improvements to: the flexibility of duties and hours offered; the management structure within which specials operate; the quality of training provided locally; and to local efforts to monitor and prevent wastage.

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and as part of the police reform process we are looking at radical improvements in the management, welfare and deployment of special constables.

Sporting Events (Fireworks)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to make it a criminal offence for members of the crowd at sporting events to set off fireworks; and if he will make a statement. [9481]

Mr. Denham: The police already possess extensive powers for tackling the setting off of fireworks at sporting events, including powers under the Public Order Act 1986. This matter was examined as part of a recent review of cricket disorder when it was decided not to extend football-related legislation to other sporting events, none of which have comparable disorder problems.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of those under antisocial behaviour orders have breached the terms of the orders since the commencement of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [9488]

Mr. Denham: An estimate of the percentage of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) which have been breached will be included in the review of ASBOs which we are aiming to publish in due course.

Gatwick Airport

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from Sussex police concerning budgetary implications of additional policing requirements at Gatwick Airport; and if he will make a statement. [9091]

Mr. Denham: I have not received any representations. Gatwick Airport is a designated airport under the provisions of the Aviation Security Act 1982. As such the policing arrangements are subject to agreement between the Sussex police and Gatwick Airport Ltd.

Hijacking (Stansted)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the passengers from the plane hijacked from Afghanistan to Stansted who were neither charged in relation to the hijacking nor are family members of those charged, and who made claims for asylum *(a)* have had decisions made on their claims, *(b)* have had their claims accepted or been granted exceptional leave to remain, *(c)* are still waiting for decisions on their claims or *(d)* are being held in detention. [8731]

Angela Eagle: 39 passengers, who were neither charged in relation to the hijacking nor are family members of those charged, claimed asylum. All 39 have had decisions made on their claims for asylum. Four have been granted asylum (plus 13 dependants) and 35 (plus five dependants) have had their applications refused. None of those refused asylum are being held in detention.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Teacher Vacancies Survey

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will publish the results of the telephone survey about vacancies conducted by her Department during September. [8404]

Mr. Timms: The results of the DfES sample telephone survey have been published. I refer the hon. Member to my response issued today to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). The results of the survey are also available on my Department's website: www.dfes.gov.uk.

Early Years Education

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received from Leicestershire about early years development funding in this financial year; and if she will make a statement. [9077]

Mr. Timms: We have received a number of representations from MPs and members of the public with regard to the provision of free early education for three-year-olds in Leicestershire. In 2001–02 Leicestershire has been allocated £3.1 million of Government funding to create around 2,600 free early education places for this group. Additional Government funding is being progressively allocated to all local authorities so that, by September 2004, all three-year-olds will have access to a free place. This is on top of any funding made available by local authorities themselves.

In the first term of this financial year, Leicestershire has committed more funds than it had agreed with the Department that the Government would supply for that term. This is an issue for the local authority itself to resolve but we are working with it to provide what assistance we can within the existing budget.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many places were provided in early years settings for *(a)* three-year-olds and *(b)* four-year-olds; how many were taken up; and how many children were identified by the local early years plan as in need of early years education, broken down by local education authority, in the last 12 months. [9905]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* Not all the data requested are available centrally.

Since September 1998, all four-year-olds have had access to a free early education place. The table shows, by local education authority area, the number of free early education places for three-year-olds that the Government will fund during the financial year 2001–02. These places are in addition to those already made available by local authorities from their own resources. Information on the number of places taken up will be collected in the spring term 2002.

Number of free early education places for three-year-olds that the Government will fund during the financial year 2001–02 by local education authority area

LEA	*Places allocation*
Barking and Dagenham	446
Barnet	250
Barnsley	885
Bath and North East Somerset	413
Bedfordshire	689
Bexley	1,000
Birmingham	6,800
Blackburn with Darwen	887
Blackpool	1,091
Bolton	923
Bournemouth	1,033
Bracknell Forest	661
Bradford	1,410
Brent	1,017
Brighton and Hove	1,503
Bristol, City of	1,017
Bromley	1,189
Buckinghamshire	1,670
Bury	504
Calderdale	806
Cambridgeshire	1,529
Camden	831
Cheshire	963
City of London	12
Cornwall	2,104
Coventry	1,575
Croydon	990
Cumbria	808
Darlington	197
Derby	687
Derbyshire	3,155
Devon	1,811
Doncaster	731
Dorset	1,274
Dudley	699
Durham	1,181
Ealing	743
East Riding of Yorkshire	244
East Sussex	1,656
Enfield	1,362
Essex	4,410
Gateshead	640
Gloucestershire	3,486
Greenwich	890
Hackney	1,489
Halton	611
Hammersmith and Fulham	595
Hampshire	5,119
Haringey	807
Harrow	434
Hartlepool	115
Havering	1,253
Herefordshire	384
Hertfordshire	610
Hillingdon	704
Hounslow	688
Isle of Wight	556
Isles of Scilly	19
Islington	979
Kensington and Chelsea	695
Kent	5,267
Kingston upon Hull, City of	627
Kingston upon Thames	85
Kirklees	1,605
Knowsley	45
Lambeth	1,646
Lancashire	5,008
Leeds	1,815
Leicester	1,762
Leicestershire	2,638
Lewisham	1,566
Lincolnshire	1,071
Liverpool	1,430
Luton	1,237
Manchester	867

Number of free early education places for three-year-olds that the Government will fund during the financial year 2001–02 by local education authority area

LEA	Places allocation
Medway	2,266
Merton	151
Middlesbrough	166
Milton Keynes	834
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,052
Newham	1,116
Norfolk	1,885
North East Lincolnshire	629
North Lincolnshire	729
North Somerset	688
North Tyneside	394
North Yorkshire	2,392
Northamptonshire	957
Northumberland	591
Nottingham	956
Nottinghamshire	1,210
Oldham	1,086
Oxfordshire	1,977
Peterborough	695
Plymouth	1,318
Poole	1,039
Portsmouth	1,229
Reading	250
Redbridge	956
Redcar and Cleveland	30
Richmond upon Thames	304
Rochdale	1,076
Rotherham	1,186
Rutland	40
Salford	394
Sandwell	591
Sefton	750
Sheffield	2,565
Shropshire	748
Slough	378
Solihull	197
Somerset	1,704
South Gloucestershire	953
South Tyneside	382
Southampton	2,042
Southend-on-Sea	633
Southwark	995
St. Helens	725
Staffordshire	1,132
Stockport	197
Stockton-on-Tees	336
Stoke-on-Trent	563
Suffolk	2,693
Sunderland	796
Surrey	3,264
Sutton	657
Swindon	646
Tameside	608
Telford and Wrekin	1,444
Thurrock	547
Torbay	426
Tower Hamlets	591
Trafford	197
Wakefield	658
Walsall	394
Waltham Forest	1,562
Wandsworth	1,726
Warrington	1,350
Warwickshire	1,575
West Berkshire	421
West Sussex	2,534
Westminster	918
Wigan	1,583
Wiltshire	1,762
Windsor and Maidenhead	318
Wirral	1,487

Number of free early education places for three-year-olds that the Government will fund during the financial year 2001–02 by local education authority area

LEA	Places allocation
Wokingham	572
Wolverhampton	394
Worcestershire	1,166
York	1,073

Education Spending

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of total spending on education in the UK is devolved to schools and colleges. [9166]

Mr. Timms: This Government have increased total spending on education in the UK by over £12 billion (33 per cent.) since taking office. Of the amounts which are relevant to schools and colleges 79 per cent. of the total expenditure is currently devolved to schools and colleges in England. The figures for other countries are a matter for the devolved Administrations.

Education Funding

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average pupil funding per head was in each local education authority in each of the last three years. [10075]

Mr. Timms: The table gives, for the financial years 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 the funding that was treated as delegated to schools by local education authorities in England.

England—delegated funding to schools

£ per pupil

LEA name	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
Barking and Dagenham	2,382	2,587	2,855
Barnet	2,558	2,635	2,901
Barnsley	1,858	2,158	2,387
Bath and North East Somerset	2,216	2,373	2,471
Bedfordshire	2,178	2,354	2,488
Bexley	2,081	2,265	2,469
Birmingham	2,446	2,718	2,887
Blackburn with Darwen	2,139	2,469	2,613
Blackpool	1,955	2,220	2,445
Bolton	2,036	2,258	2,381
Bournemouth	2,117	2,354	2,458
Bracknell Forest	2,073	2,236	2,388
Bradford	2,026	2,363	2,591
Brent	2,714	2,823	2,973
Brighton and Hove	2,157	2,352	2,631
Bristol City	2,337	2,532	2,696
Bromley	2,167	2,333	2,482
Buckinghamshire	2,015	2,143	2,327
Bury	1,949	2,169	2,264
Calderdale	2,076	2,238	2,463
Cambridgeshire	1,869	2,141	2,337
Camden	2,957	3,323	3,676
Cheshire	2,107	2,239	2,370
Cornwall	1,936	2,141	2,366
Coventry	2,268	2,445	2,614
Croydon	2,313	2,561	2,656
Cumbria	2,118	2,336	2,477
Darlington	1,988	2,149	2,350
Derby City	2,024	2,242	2,450
Derbyshire	1,998	2,170	2,294
Devon	2,026	2,146	2,349
Doncaster	2,109	2,298	2,430

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

England—delegated funding to schools

£ per pupil

LEA name	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Dorset	1,984	2,177	2,446
Dudley	2,115	2,255	2,296
Durham	2,068	2,278	2,527
Ealing	2,398	2,616	2,945
East Riding of Yorkshire	2,095	2,242	2,415
East Sussex	2,120	2,337	2,521
Enfield	2,403	2,602	2,805
Essex	2,203	2,371	2,535
Gateshead	2,039	2,311	2,612
Gloucestershire	2,035	2,181	2,286
Greenwich	2,736	3,114	3,357
Hackney	2,772	3,283	3,459
Halton	2,163	2,473	2,651
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,928	3,239	3,508
Hampshire	2,122	2,280	2,407
Haringey	2,547	2,892	3,157
Harrow	2,337	2,555	2,716
Hartlepool	1,994	2,251	2,493
Havering	2,311	2,454	2,694
Herefordshire	1,953	2,192	2,313
Hertfordshire	2,179	2,338	2,481
Hillingdon	2,457	2,557	2,680
Hounslow	2,515	2,667	2,928
Hull City	2,064	2,340	2,613
Isle of Wight	2,104	2,435	2,597
Islington	2,760	3,055	3,381
Kensington and Chelsea	3,150	3,554	3,728
Kent	2,148	2,339	2,513
Kingston upon Thames	2,272	2,386	2,633
Kirklees	2,104	2,358	2,503
Knowsley	2,178	2,462	2,778
Lambeth	3,048	3,219	3,494
Lancashire	2,045	2,235	2,442
Leeds	2,135	2,369	2,560
Leicester City	2,135	2,338	2,621
Leicestershire	2,045	2,186	2,262
Lewisham	2,802	3,098	3,311
Lincolnshire	2,091	2,279	2,385
Liverpool	2,232	2,631	2,845
Luton	2,231	2,510	2,656
Manchester	2,214	2,625	2,870
Medway Towns	2,119	2,360	2,549
Merton	2,308	2,546	2,694
Middlesbrough	2,039	2,361	2,617
Milton Keynes	2,115	2,285	2,523
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,113	2,408	2,529
Newham	2,234	2,678	3,021
Norfolk	2,151	2,305	2,446
North East Lincolnshire	2,120	2,377	2,494
North Lincolnshire	2,028	2,261	2,448
North Somerset	2,072	2,171	2,274
North Tyneside	2,037	2,192	2,441
North Yorkshire	2,127	2,339	2,450
Northamptonshire	2,163	2,320	2,446
Northumberland	2,031	2,177	2,416
Nottingham City	2,316	2,541	2,797
Nottinghamshire	2,107	2,254	2,371
Oldham	2,173	2,409	2,530
Oxfordshire	2,095	2,286	2,423
Peterborough City	2,116	2,474	2,605
Plymouth City	2,138	2,331	2,486
Poole	2,068	2,283	2,400
Portsmouth	2,333	2,547	2,683
Reading	2,144	2,420	2,564
Redbridge	2,337	2,512	2,752
Redcar and Cleveland	2,023	2,285	2,482
Richmond upon Thames	2,219	2,377	2,620
Rochdale	2,005	2,216	2,463
Rotherham	2,039	2,367	2,482
Rutland	2,264	2,401	2,542
Salford	2,030	2,511	2,599
Sandwell	2,100	2,339	2,583
Sefton	2,104	2,399	2,585
Sheffield	2,047	2,318	2,430
Shropshire	2,019	2,197	2,332
Slough	2,431	2,644	2,809

England—delegated funding to schools

£ per pupil

LEA name	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Solihull	2,031	2,164	2,277
Somerset	2,103	2,272	2,417
South Gloucestershire	2,044	2,190	2,352
South Tyneside	2,033	2,250	2,532
Southampton	2,276	2,502	2,672
Southend-on-Sea	2,351	2,587	2,685
Southwark	2,701	3,183	3,365
St. Helens	2,024	2,275	2,507
Staffordshire	2,001	2,120	2,237
Stockport	1,960	2,140	2,272
Stockton on Tees	2,084	2,352	2,521
Stoke-on-Trent	2,007	2,246	2,466
Suffolk	2,163	2,325	2,440
Sunderland	2,098	2,271	2,489
Surrey	2,112	2,294	2,473
Sutton	2,295	2,466	2,605
Swindon	1,975	2,233	2,285
Tameside	1,995	2,218	2,397
Telford and Wrekin	2,137	2,284	2,428
Thurrock	2,217	2,390	2,586
Torbay	2,049	2,232	2,391
Tower Hamlets	3,044	3,595	3,858
Trafford	2,044	2,220	2,397
Wakefield	1,893	2,169	2,349
Walsall	2,127	2,300	2,456
Waltham Forest	2,652	2,896	3,201
Wandsworth	2,801	3,080	3,302
Warrington	2,044	2,219	2,351
Warwickshire	2,069	2,266	2,382
West Berkshire	2,163	2,376	2,518
West Sussex	2,148	2,293	2,510
Westminster	2,816	3,288	3,622
Wigan	2,160	2,349	2,505
Wiltshire	2,026	2,185	2,260
Windsor and Maidenhead	2,174	2,386	2,548
Wirral	2,091	2,279	2,542
Wokingham	2,099	2,282	2,424
Wolverhampton	2,204	2,389	2,566
Worcestershire	1,966	2,167	2,301
York	2,102	2,256	2,399
England	2,162	2,373	2,546

Special Educational Needs

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children received a statement of special educational needs in *(a)* Nottinghamshire and *(b)* England in the last year. [9999]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of children for whom statements were newly made in 1999 in Nottinghamshire LEA and England were 121 and 37,077 respectively.

Information for the calendar year 2000 will be available in the Statistical Bulletin "Special Educational Needs in England: January 2001" due to be published in November 2001.

School Sports

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action is being taken to increase the level of *(a)* curricular and *(b)* extra curricular sports activities in schools. [9028]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The White Paper: "Schools: achieving success" sets out our commitment to physical education and school sport. We have pledged that all children will be entitled to two hours of high quality PE and school sport, within and beyond

the curriculum. To help deliver this, we have 333 School Sport Co-ordinators (of a total of 1,000) in place who are working to increase the quality and quantity of after-school sport and inter-school competition in their areas and to enhance links between the schools and their communities. £150 million has been committed to rebuild primary school sports and arts facilities, and a further £581 million will be used to improve both primary and secondary schools sports facilities in every local education authority.

Sport is the most popular after-school activity among pupils at Key Stages 2 and 3 (over a third of pupils involved at KS2, a quarter at KS3), and the second most frequent at Key Stage 4. £160 million is available through the New Opportunities Fund and nearly £70 million through the Standards Fund this year for study support projects, with a further £75 million available in 2002–03. We are looking at ways in which we can build on these initiatives to increase the support we give to PE and school sport within and outside the curriculum.

Emergency Contraception

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her written answer of 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1188W, on the morning-after pill, *(a)* how many times school nurses have issued emergency contraception and *(b)* how many girls have been given emergency contraception by school nurses, broken down by the age of the girl. [9924]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not held centrally.

Blenheim High School

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the discussions that have taken place between Department officials, Surrey county council and Blenheim high school in Epsom about funding the future expansion of the school. [8830]

Mr. Timms: Following the decision to end grant maintained status, and after consultation with external partners, transitional regulations were put in place to fund capital work at grant maintained schools where obligations had been entered into or decisions taken by the Funding Agency for Schools or the Secretary of State before 1 September 1999. These transitional regulations enabled the Department to meet outstanding commitments for capital funding approved before this date.

Officials visited Blenheim high school in Epsom with a representative from Surrey local education authority on 1 August 2001. It was agreed that any shortfall in accommodation needed to implement the proposals published by the Funding Agency for Schools for the establishment of the school could be funded under the transitional regulations. Surrey local education authority has now provided details of its view of the shortfall and a proposal to address this. The proposal is currently being considered by the Department.

In addition to the possible shortfall in funding by the Funding Agency for Schools, proposed further future expansion of the school is the subject of an application for additional places made by Surrey local education authority in the current schools capital allocation round. Decisions will be announced by the Department in December 2001.

Teachers (Disabilities)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers with disabilities have entered the profession in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [8839]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not held centrally.

School Bus Travel

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for the introduction of *(a)* free school bus travel and *(b)* school busing. [8422]

Mr. Timms: Approximately 800,000 pupils in England receive free transport to and from school every day; that is virtually 100 per cent. take up by those entitled. This is provided by local education authorities either contracting dedicated school buses, or by providing pupils with travel passes that enable them to use scheduled public transport.

Free transport is always necessary for a pupil of compulsory school age who attends the nearest suitable school if it is beyond statutory walking distance. Statutory walking distances are two miles for pupils aged under eight and three miles for those aged eight and over. LEAs may help in other cases if they wish, but it is for each authority to decide whether or not to do so.

These arrangements have been in place for many years and we have no plans to change them.

School Counselling Services

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance is provided for head teachers and school governors on the provision of counselling services based in schools. [8104]

Mr. Timms: We very much recognise the benefit of counselling for pupils facing specific difficulties, although we have not issued guidance to head teachers and governors on the provision of counselling services in schools. Schools can contact their local education authority for information about local services.

The Department's latest guidance on mental health mentioned school-based counselling, and highlighting the importance of pupils' emotional well-being is a key aspect of the national healthy school standard. In addition, learning mentors and Connexions personal advisers in schools look at young people's concerns, work with them to identify solutions, and where necessary access specialist help to allow them to overcome barriers to learning.

We recognise that recent international events may have caused pupils to become anxious or frightened. We are currently finalising new guidance which will advise schools to look for signs of stress or unease in children and, where appropriate, arrange counselling with a suitably qualified person.

Teachers (Maintained Schools)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of teachers in maintained schools who left their employment at a school during the course of each of the last four academic years. [7262]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Teachers who left service in the maintained schools sector in England are as follows:

	Leavers in the year prior to:			
	March 1997	*March 1998*	*March 1999*	[1]*March 2000*
Retired	16,800	16,600	8,000	8,800
Left service for reasons other than retirement	18,900	22,600	23,700	26,200
Total leavers	35,700	39,200	31,700	35,000

[1] Provisional

The most recent data available are for March 2000.

Some teachers who left service will return after a career break.

Refurbishment Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* building and *(b)* refurbishment projects are planned by her Department in (i) the current year and (ii) the next financial year; and what the costs will be of each project. [6597]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Two of the non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) sponsored by the Department, namely the Learning and Skills Council and the National College of School Leadership, are involved in new building projects and the expected cost of each over the next two years is as follows:

The Learning and Skills Council

Current year £325,000

Next year £4.5–5 million

The National College for School Leadership

£16.5 million across two years.

Departmental Properties

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the number, value and location of properties newly leased in each of the last five years by her Department, including and distinguishing between the Department itself, its next step agencies and its non-departmental public bodies, differentiating between purchases made as a result of the creation of new bodies and those purchases made by established bodies. [7812]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number, value and location of properties newly leased by the Department in the last five years are listed in the following table:

Year	*No.*	*Value (£)*	*Location*	*Departmental/non-departmental public bodies*	*Reason for purchase (creation of new bodies/by established bodies)*
1996–97	Nil				
1997–98	Nil				
1998–99	1	113,594.00	Oxford	Training Standards Council	New
Total		113,594.00			
1999–2000	6	200,000.00	London	Departmental	Established
		73,493.00	London	General Teaching Council	New
		203,650.00	Manchester	Disability Rights Commission	New
		63,280.00	Edinburgh	Disability Rights Commission	New
		100,000.00	Glasgow	Student Loans Company Ltd	New
		2,200,000.00	London	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	New
Total		2,840,423.00			
2000–01	50	223,272.00	Birmingham	General Teaching Council	New
		43,816.00	Cardiff	Disability Rights Commission	New
		47,684.00	Coventry	Adult Learning Inspectorate	New
		100,829.00	Nottingham	National Council for Schools Leadership	New
		102,000.00	Bedford	Learning and Skills Council	New
		185,000.00	Birmingham	Learning and Skills Council	New
		143,650.00	Bournemouth	Learning and Skills Council	New
		131,698.00	Peterborough	Learning and Skills Council	New
		125,000.00	Middlewich	Learning and Skills Council	New
		157,208.00	Coventry	Learning and Skills Council	New
		49,900.00	Workington	Learning and Skills Council	New
		125,000.00	Derby	Learning and Skills Council	New
		165,000.00	Plymouth	Learning and Skills Council	New
		50,400.00	Truro	Learning and Skills Council	New
		288,276.00	Chelmsford	Learning and Skills Council	New
		149,490.00	Gloucester	Learning and Skills Council	New
		340,000.00	Manchester	Learning and Skills Council	New
		220,000.00	Liverpool	Learning and Skills Council	New
		123,675.00	Fareham	Learning and Skills Council	New
		60,192.00	Newport, IOW	Learning and Skills Council	New
		760,000.00	St. Albans	Learning and Skills Council	New

Year	No.	Value (£)	Location	Departmental/non-departmental public bodies	Reason for purchase (creation of new bodies/by established bodies)
		155,000.00	Hull	Learning and Skills Council	New
		401,875.00	West Malling	Learning and Skills Council	New
		170,000.00	Preston	Learning and Skills Council	New
		170,885.00	Leicester	Learning and Skills Council	New
		68,500.00	Lincoln	Learning and Skills Council	New
		334,000.00	London, Camden	Learning and Skills Council	New
		320,000.00	London, Stratford	Learning and Skills Council	New
		292,110.00	London, Palmers Green	Learning and Skills Council	New
		254,400.00	London, Croyden	Learning and Skills Council	New
		389,356.00	London, Hounslow	Learning and Skills Council	New
		202,000.00	Abingdon	Learning and Skills Council	New
		261,000.00	Norwich	Learning and Skills Council	New
		132,250.00	York	Learning and Skills Council	New
		51,600.00	Cramlington	Learning and Skills Council	New
		143,750.00	Nottingham	Learning and Skills Council	New
		61,040.00	Telford	Learning and Skills Council	New
		219,779.00	Sheffield	Learning and Skills Council	New
		120,000.00	Stoke on Trent	Learning and Skills Council	New
		88,685.00	Ipswich	Learning and Skills Council	New
		198,416.00	Woking	Learning and Skills Council	New
		293,500.00	Brighton	Learning and Skills Council	New
		116,500.00	Middlesborough	Learning and Skills Council	New
		106,005.00	Oldbury, W Mids	Learning and Skills Council	New
		175,590.00	Gateshead	Learning and Skills Council	New
		260,760.00	Bristol	Learning and Skills Council	New
		395,000.00	Bradford	Learning and Skills Council	New
		180,310.00	Swindon	Learning and Skills Council	New
		474,895.00	Reading	Learning and Skills Council	New
		85,500.00	Newton Aycliffe	Learning and Skills Council	New
Total		9,714,796.00			

Sixth Form Funding

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the formula used to calculate the new funding arrangement for school sixth forms in *(a)* Worcestershire and *(b)* other shire counties for 2002–03. [10218]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Teacher Salaries

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will take steps to ensure that the UK upper secondary school teachers starting salary meets the OECD mean average; and if she will make a statement. [8314]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* School teachers' pay is based on recommendations made by the independent School Teachers' Review Body. They will take account of all relevant factors before recommending any changes. We consult all key stakeholders, including trade unions and employer representatives, before implementing changes.

State and Independent Schools (Shared Facilities)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she has introduced to encourage the sharing of facilities between state and independent schools; and what assessment she has made of the impact of these measures. [9595]

Mr. Timms: Our independent/state school partnerships programme promotes collaborative working between the independent and maintained school sectors. Over 150 projects, involving over 500 schools and 50,000 pupils, have received a total of £3 million since 1998. Each project is different and individual projects have covered most areas of the curriculum and included a wide range of different schools. Some projects encourage schools to share facilities. An external evaluation of the programme by Leeds University school of education in 1999 found that it was achieving its objectives and contributing to raising standards in a cost-effective way.

Worcestershire Local Education Authority

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to make special additional payments to the Worcestershire local education authority for the 2002–03 financial year. [9349]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Worcestershire local education authority will benefit from the general increases in funding for 2002–03: a 6 per cent. increase in education standard spending; a further £85 million in standards fund grant; and a 2.75 per cent. increase in the direct grants to schools. We have no current plans to make payments in addition to these general increases.

Teacher Training

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what extra training has been made available for teachers intending to teach one of the new vocational GCSEs. [9593]

Mr. Timms: A comprehensive training and support programme, due to be launched through a series of regional conferences, will be available to ensure teachers are well-prepared for, and supported during, the delivery of the new GCSEs.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many post-graduate teacher training places were available in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01 for each secondary age subject; how many of the places were filled in each subject area; how many students failed to complete the course; and how many students commenced teaching in the year they qualified. [8905]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The number of post-graduate initial teacher training places in secondary subjects that were available in England in each of the four years was as follows:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Mathematics	2,247	2,126	1,710	1,876
English	2,159	2,259	1,961	1,971
Science	3,304	3,013	2,383	2,686
MFL	2,368	2,301	2,102	2,051
Technology	3,093	2,874	2,837	2,137
History	928	900	797	920
Geography	930	999	1,046	1,090
Physical Education	1,563	1,450	1,048	1,192
Art	962	1,101	957	863
Music	605	600	585	636
Religious Education	685	752	625	655
Other	325	508	539	534
Total secondary	19,169	18,883	16,590	16,611

Source:
Teacher Training Agency (TTA)

Trainees that started post-graduate initial teacher training (places filled) in secondary subjects in England in the years 1997–98 to 2000–01 were as follows.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Maths	1,178	928	1,109	1,143
English	2,083	1,980	1,883	1,913
Science	2,438	2,058	2,149	2,222
Modern Foreign Languages	1,734	1,606	1,431	1,612
Technology	1,186	1,083	1,192	1,469
History	964	898	816	913
Geography	834	734	841	881
PE	763	690	525	612
Art	896	896	785	844
Music	448	462	480	532
RE	602	603	515	564
Other	297	356	283	319
Total secondary	13,423	12,294	12,009	13,024

Notes:
1. English includes drama
2. Technology includes design and technology, ICT and business studies
3. Other includes economics, classics, other social sciences and other subjects

Source:
Teacher Training Agency, Survey of ITT Providers

Further places were available on employment-based routes for graduate trainees. The Government do not set targets by phase or subject for the numbers of places available to employment-based training in England. The numbers of graduate trainees starting employment-based training in England were as follows:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Maths	10	32	71	112
English	38	50	77	154
Science	17	29	62	165
Modern Foreign Languages	41	63	62	145
Technology	50	61	56	167
History	8	7	12	34
Geography	4	2	7	21
PE	9	9	14	36
Art	10	8	9	17
Music	16	23	20	48
RE	11	16	15	38
Other	21	11	14	20
Total secondary	235	311	419	957

Notes:
1. The table shows entrants to the Graduate Teacher Programme: and the former Overseas Teacher and Licensed Teacher Schemes
2. English includes drama and performing arts
PE includes dance
3. Other includes economics, classics, other social sciences and other subjects

Source:
Teacher Training Agency

The number of students who failed to complete the course is not collected centrally.

The following table presents the numbers that entered teaching in maintained schools in England by March following the year in which they gained qualified teacher status (QTS), by secondary subject.

	ITT completers			*ITT completers in service at the following March*			*In service at March as percentage of previous year's completers*		
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Mathematics	2,035	1,767	1,694	1,354	1,225	1,253	67%	69%	74%
English	4,247	4,170	4,244	3,087	2,931	3,165	73%	70%	75%
Science	3,457	3,203	3,028	2,230	2,073	2,129	65%	65%	70%
MFL	1,573	1,563	1,456	1,034	1,012	961	66%	65%	66%
Technology	1,748	1,518	1,356	1,118	934	909	64%	62%	67%
History	1,783	1,618	1,554	1,162	1,017	1,037	65%	63%	67%
Geography	1,659	1,527	1,396	1,124	951	929	68%	62%	67%
PE	1,939	1,865	1,764	1,212	1,118	1,138	63%	60%	65%
Art	1,571	1,442	1,507	966	848	952	61%	59%	63%
Music	805	726	819	569	507	608	71%	70%	74%
RE	1,030	965	1,001	702	692	717	68%	72%	72%

	ITT completers			ITT completers in service at the following March			In service at March as percentage of previous year's completers		
	1997	1998	1999	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
Other	4,301	4,437	4,314	3,169	3,318	3,268	74%	75%	76%
Total Secondary	26,148	24,801	24,133	17,727	16,626	17,066	68%	67%	71%

Note:
Subjects relate to the first subject of ITT qualification
Source:
Database of Teacher Records

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many trainees commenced the graduate training programme and registered training programme in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) September 1999, (ii) January 2000, (iii) April 2000, (iv) September 2000, (v) January 2001 and (vi) April 2001; and what subjects they were trained in. [8843]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of trainees starting the Graduate Teacher and Registered Teacher Programmes in England are shown in the table. Trainees in secondary schools are shown by the subject they trained in.

Recruitment to the Graduate Teacher' and Registered Teacher Programmes—September 1999 to April 2001

	1999–2000				2000–01			
	September	January	April	Total	September	January	April	Total
Primary	123	195	175	493	370	292	252	914
Secondary								
Maths	24	15	34	73	38	41	33	112
English	20	17	43	80	40	72	44	156
Science	25	12	25	62	67	51	49	167
MFL	10	17	36	63	70	38	37	145
Technology	15	12	34	61	48	65	57	170
History	6	2	4	12	8	16	10	34
Geography	–	2	5	7	10	5	6	21
PE	7	2	7	16	9	13	15	37
Art	3	2	4	9	7	6	4	17
Music	12	4	4	20	15	18	15	48
RE	4	5	6	15	15	10	13	38
Other	4	4	6	14	5	6	9	20
Total secondary	130	94	208	432	332	341	292	965
Overall total	253	289	383	925	702	633	544	1,879

Note:
Including participants in the overseas-trained teacher scheme from 2000–01
Source:
Teacher Training Agency

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many undergraduates have started full-time teacher training courses each year since September 1998 broken down by subject. [8841]

Mr. Timms: The number of people recruited on to full-time undergraduate initial teacher training (ITT) in England for each year since 1998–99 are presented in the following table:

	Academic year		
Primary/Secondary/Phase subject	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Primary			
Primary	6,694	6,689	6,564
Secondary			
Mathematics	192	198	147
English	153	149	116
Science	221	223	191
Modern Foreign Languages	51	38	23
Technology	599	518	385
History	0	0	0
Geography	13	30	18
Physical Education	801	666	593
Art	7	20	7
Music	31	38	28
Religious Education	17	14	9
Other	0	0	0
Total secondary	2,085	1,894	1,517

Source:
Teacher Training Agency (TTA)

Asset Management Plans

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the results of the local authority Asset Management Plans will be published. [9088]

Mr. Timms: The Department will be publishing in November analyses of premises information drawn from LEAs' Asset Management Plans.

Special Schools

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils with special educational needs attended or are attending special schools in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, (c)1997, (d) 1998, (e) 1999, (f) 2000 and (g) 2001. [8890]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table.

Proportion[1] of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) attending special schools in England, 1995–2001[2]

Position in January each year	*Maintained special schools*	*Non-maintained special schools*
1995	40.6	2.4
1996	38.5	2.2
1997	37.2	2.1
1998	36.3	1.9
1999	35.2	1.8
2001[2]	34.4	1.8
	33.9	1.7

[1] The number of pupils with statements expressed as a percentage of the number of pupils with statements in all schools.

[2] Estimates have been made for January 2001 because the data for SEN are known to be incomplete.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if any special schools have notified her Department that they are under immediate threat of closure. [8889]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The Department has no record of any special school notifying it that they are under immediate threat of closure.

Under arrangements introduced in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, decisions on statutory proposals for the reorganisation of special schools are now a matter for each local education authority's school organisation committee. However, the Department often does receive representations from schools, parents and others when local education authorities are considering special school reorganisations.

Teacher Recruitment

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many extra full-time qualified teachers have been recruited into the profession since 1997. [8899]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The number of full-time qualified regular teachers in the maintained schools sector in England increased by 3,650 between January 1997 and January 2001. Full-time and part-time qualified regular teachers rose by 8,310 (fte) during the same period.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the Government will provide additional financial support to Surrey county council to help it to tackle teacher shortages. [8833]

Mr. Timms: The Government have put in place a £33 million recruitment and retention fund to help schools to put in place local recruitment and retention initiatives. In 2000–01, Surrey received £650,000 from the recruitment and retention fund. We are currently working on the allocation of funding for 2002–03 and will make an announcement in due course.

Teacher Vacancies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teaching places in the United Kingdom are vacant. [8834]

Mr. Timms: In January 2001, local authorities reported that there were 4,980 vacancies for full-time teachers in the maintained schools sector in England.

Responses to a sample survey of schools conducted by my Department in September 2001 indicated that there were about 2,000 vacancies in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England, the comparable January figure was 4,700.

The supply of teachers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the devolved Administrations for those countries.

The figures quoted from both sources use the standard DfES definition of a teacher vacancy, which excludes posts filled by a full-time teacher on a contract of one term or more.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools across the country in September. [8898]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* There were about 1,000 (0.6 per cent.) full-time teacher vacancies in maintained nursery and primary schools, and about 1,000 (0.6 per cent.) in maintained secondary schools in England in early September 2001.

These figures were obtained from a telephone survey of nearly 1,500 schools conducted by DfES. Teacher vacancies are measured using the standard DfES definition, which excludes posts filled by a full-time teacher on a contract of one term or more.

The survey shows that the vacancies in secondary schools were similar to those recorded in a telephone survey of a sample of secondary schools in September 2000.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children attending *(a)* language, *(b)* sports, *(c)* technology and *(d)* arts specialist schools have SEN statements. [8400]

Mr. Timms: The latest year for which we have complete special educational needs data is January 2000.

Special educational needs data for January 2001 are incomplete.

Percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs, January 2000

	Schools designated as specialist as at September 2001
Language specialist schools	1.7
Sports specialist schools	3.0
Technology specialist schools	2.6
Arts specialist schools	2.6

Classroom Assistants

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many classroom assistants are employed in primary schools in England and Wales; and what proportion have formal qualifications. [8829]

Mr. Timms: In January 2001 there were 63,176 full-time equivalent teaching assistants employed in maintained primary schools in England. Information on formal qualifications of teaching assistants is not collected centrally.

For information on teaching assistants in Wales, I refer the hon. Member to the National Assembly for Wales.

School Funding

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the average amount of funding per student received by *(a)* specialist schools and *(b)* community schools, in the current academic year. [8883]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Information about funding of pupils is not collected separately for specialist and community schools. Specialist schools receive additional grant of £123 per pupil per year up to 1,000 pupils and for pupil numbers above 1,200.

Catch-up Provision

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will publish an analysis of findings from the Government's pilot programmes of catch-up provision and summer schools; [8880]

(2) what changes have been made to the Government's strategy for 11 to 14-year-olds in the light of findings from the pilot programmes on catch-up provision; [8879]

(3) what percentage of children who took part in the Government's pilot programmes of catch-up provision achieved level 4 in key stage 2 tests at the end of the programme; [8882]

(4) what assessment she has made of the findings of the pilot programmes of catch-up provision for those children who do not achieve level 4 at key stage 2. [8881]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* All 205 pilot schools used the year 7 progress tests in English and mathematics this year. Our initial analysis confirms that there is still further work to do with children who need additional help: 29 per cent. of eligible pupils who sat the test attained level 4 in English, and 11 per cent. in mathematics.

We are looking in more detail at the results of the pilot schools. We will also have Ofsted's report on the first year of the key stage 3 pilot in November. On the basis of these findings, we will be in a position to decide what, if any, changes should be made to the strategy.

Advanced Skills Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many advanced skills teachers are working in primary, secondary and special schools, or are centrally employed broken down by subject. [8837]

Mr. Timms: Advanced skills teachers in post in the maintained schools sector in England in January 2001 by phase and main teaching subject were as follows:

	Primary	*Secondary*	*Special*	*Total*
Primary Curriculum	30	[1]—	[1]—	30
Mathematics	10	40	[1]—	50
Information technology	10	10	[1]—	20
Science	10	60	[1]—	70
Modern foreign languages	[1]—	30	[1]—	30
English	10	40	[1]—	60
Drama	[1]—	10	[1]—	10
History	[1]—	10	[1]—	10
Geography	[1]—	20	[1]—	20
Religious education	[1]—	10	[1]—	10
Design and technology	[1]—	30	[1]—	30
Art	[1]—	10	[1]—	10
Music	[1]—	10	[1]—	20
Physical education	[1]—	10	[1]—	10
Special Educational Needs	10	10	10	20
Humanities	[1]—	10	[1]—	10
Early years	10	[1]—	[1]—	10
Personal, Social and Health Education	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10
Other and combined subjects	50	50	10	110
No subject specialism recorded	10	20	[1]—	30
Total	160	380	20	560

[1] Less than five

Notes:

1. Totals may not appear to equal the sum of their component parts due to rounding
2. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10

Since AST assessments resumed in April 2001 a further 361 teachers have been successfully assessed as ASTs, 142 for primary schools, 200 for secondary schools and 19 for special schools.

Teacher Statistics

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* full and *(b)* part-time overseas teachers were employed in (i) primary, (ii) secondary and (iii) special schools in each of the last four years for which figures are available. [8844]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not held centrally.

Illiteracy

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people are illiterate in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England. [8344]

John Healey: Lord Moser's 1999 report, "A Fresh Start", notes that perhaps as many as 7 million people (roughly one in five adults) in England have difficulties with functional literacy and numeracy. These adults have a wide range of needs, varying from those who cannot read and write or perform the simplest calculations, to those who simply need to brush up rusty skills. We are commissioning a new survey next year to provide an up-to-date assessment of the scale of basic skills need in England.

The Government have recognised the vital importance to individuals and the economy of improving adult basic skills. The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, "Skills for Life", was launched in March this year by the Prime Minister. Our target is to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of 750,000 adults by 2004.

Literacy in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

Devolved Administrations

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is with regard to *(a)* ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly committees; and to what categories of document she gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (1) Scottish parliament, (2) Welsh Assembly, (3) Northern Ireland Assembly and (4) House of Commons Select committees. [7005]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1004–05W by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office.

Civil Servants (Retirement Age)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the compulsory retirement ages which apply to employees of her Department and of executive agencies and other public sector bodies for which it is responsible, broken down by grade or job title. [7228]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Within my Department, all staff below the Senior Civil Service can choose when they retire between age 60 up to a maximum retirement age of 65. This is subject to satisfying fitness and efficiency requirements. Staff in the Senior Civil Service grades retire at age 60.

In executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department, normal retirement ages are:

age 60 for the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the Learning and Skills Council, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority;

age 65 for the Construction Industry Training Board, Engineering Construction Industry Training Board, Higher Education Funding Council for England, Investors in People UK Ltd. and the National College for School Leadership;

age 63 for the Student Loans Company;

age 65 for staff who are members of the London Pension Fund Authority in the British Educational and Communications Technology Agency, and age 60 for those who are members of the Teachers Pension Scheme; and

for the Teacher Training Agency, retirement age depends on individual contracts.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 29 October 2001

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Rail Projects

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which schemes will be completed within the period of the 10-Year Plan for rail; and if he will make a statement on the adequacy of funding of the programme. [8875]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government, through their 10-Year Plan, remain committed to delivering a better, safer and more reliable railway network for the 21st century, and are prepared to spend over £30 billion over the next 10 years to achieve substantial improvements.

We look to the Strategic Rail Authority's forthcoming strategic plan to prioritise investment projects that deliver the greatest value for money for both rail users and the taxpayer. Investment is continuing on the west coast route modernisation project, Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the installation of the train protection warning system, each of which is integral to the Government's objectives for rail.

A449

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the A449 in Worcestershire will cease to be a trunk road; and if he will make a statement. [8983]

Mr. Jamieson: The de-trunking of the A449, previously programmed by the Highway Authority for April 2004, is on hold pending the outcome of the west midlands area multi-modal study.

Electoral Pilot Schemes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will publish a list of submissions by local authorities to participate in electoral pilot schemes in local elections or local by-elections in the forthcoming 12 months; [8957]

(2) what steps his Department is taking to minimise electoral fraud in the pilot schemes for new electoral arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [8960]

Mr. Byers: Local authorities have been invited to submit details of proposed electoral pilot schemes for approval by the Secretary of State by 31 December 2001. We intend to publish a list of those applications as soon as possible after that date.

The invitation to local authorities indicates that the Secretary of State will approve only schemes which meet a number of criteria, one of which is that they must maintain or increase current levels of security.

Car Safety

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the effects of implementing EEVC-WG17 on *(a)* child and *(b)* adult pedestrian casualties in absolute and in percentage terms. [9049]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport Research Laboratory is currently examining this issue on our behalf, and as soon as figures are established we will make them available.

Belfast/London Air Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ensure that there is continuity of service throughout the day between Belfast International and London Heathrow; and if he will make a statement. [9340]

Mr. Spellar: This Government recognise the importance of air links between Belfast and London. There are 29 air services scheduled for each weekday between Belfast and London operating on a commercial basis.

Regional Air Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action has been taken by his Department to introduce Public Service Obligation protection for the slots used for services to and from the UK regions at Heathrow and Gatwick airports; and if he will make a statement. [9341]

Mr. Spellar: The use of Public Service Obligations is governed by EC Regulation 2408–92 on access for Community air carriers to intra-Community air routes. Any application for the imposition of a PSO from the relevant authorities will be carefully considered while taking the criteria set out in the regulation into account.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the White Paper for UK Aviation will include proposals for at least one new runway at *(a)* Heathrow and *(b)* Gatwick and that such a runway be designed for and a significant proportion of the slots created by such an additional runway capacity be designated for UK regional air services; and if he will make a statement. [9346]

Mr. Spellar: The South East and East of England Study (SERAS) is examining a wide range of options at existing airports and new sites. We expect the study to be completed towards the end of this year, and to be followed by a full public consultation on the short-listed options early next year. Decisions made following the consultation will feed into an Air Transport White Paper which we aim to publish in the second half of next year.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who the representative of the Scottish Executive is on the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. [9013]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* Neighbourhood renewal is a devolved matter for Scotland. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal applies only to deprived areas in England.

The Scottish Executive will be publishing a Neighbourhood Renewal Statement for Scotland—due at the end of the year—which will set out a programme of action to regenerate disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Scotland.

We shall be seeking to ensure close contact between the English and Scottish approaches to Neighbourhood Renewal.

Road Safety

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what evidence his Department has received concerning the link between speed cameras on roads and improved road safety; and if he will make a statement. [9051]

Mr. Jamieson: The results of the first year's operation of the speed camera funding scheme provide further evidence of the link between the presence of speed cameras and improved road safety. The number of people killed or seriously injured dropped by 18 per cent. across the eight pilot areas as a whole and by 47 per cent. at the camera sites compared with the average over the previous three years. On average the number of drivers speeding at camera sites dropped from 55 per cent. to 16 per cent.

National Air Traffic Services

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if it is his policy that National Air Traffic Services operated at Manchester will be moved to Atlantic House, Prestwick; [9440]

(2) if he will list the options being considered by National Air Traffic Services to rationalise its functions throughout the United Kingdom; [9438]

(3) if the Civil Aviation Radar Installation Service will be moved from Prestwick to Gatwick Airport as part of the engineering review of National Air Traffic Services. [9439]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of its long term investment plan, NATS intends progressively to move to a two-centre strategy with modern facilities at Swanwick in Hampshire and Prestwick in Ayrshire. As part of that strategy, the existing area control centres at West Drayton and Manchester will close in the latter part of this decade. The current plan is that the majority of the task undertaken by Manchester will be moved to Prestwick, with the remainder moving to Swanwick. These plans are under detailed evaluation to find the optimum division of operational tasks between Swanwick and Prestwick.

Coastguard Service

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many representations the Government have received from *(a)* individuals in the coastguard service and *(b)* others calling for greater coastguard cover around south-east Scotland in the last 12 months. [9662]

Mr. Jamieson: Other than from the hon. Member on behalf of a constituent there have been no representations to the Government in the last 12 months for greater coastguard cover around south-east Scotland.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government will take to maintain a comprehensive coastguard service for south-east Scotland. [9663]

Mr. Jamieson: There is already a comprehensive coastguard service available for south-east Scotland, which includes a 24 hour search and rescue capability, 17 rescue teams, and the provision of appropriate helicopters and lifeboats.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the latest estimate is of the cost of building the next phase of the channel tunnel rail link between Ebbsfleet and King's Cross. [8694]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 502W.

Station Refurbishment

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what funding will be made available from the Government for the planned improvements to Bexhill and Cooden Beach stations; [9861]

(2) when the refurbishments to Bexhill station will be completed. [9862]

Mr. Jamieson: The internal structural repairs at Bexhill station have been completed. South Central are negotiating with Railtrack start dates and costs for the next phase of the refurbishment work: replacement of windows and refurbishing the waiting room. It is hoped to complete this phase in late spring 2002. South Central is also in discussion with Railtrack about improvements to the platform ramps and reglazing work at Cooden Beach, as well as the funding arrangements for the work at both stations.

GoVia

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact of the recent Railtrack developments on the timetable and content of GoVia's existing franchise and the timetable and content of GoVia's proposed franchise. [9894]

Mr. Jamieson: The recent Railtrack developments will not impact on the existing or new franchise. The Strategic Rail Authority will negotiate a new franchise agreement with GoVia in line with the heads of terms that have already been signed.

Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ask Lord Cullen to review his recommendations set out in "The Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry, Part 2" report to take account of Railtrack plc being replaced by a Government-owned non profit-making company. [9825]

Mr. Spellar: No. The future ownership of Britain's railways was not part of Lord Cullen's remit.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he informed Lord Cullen of the possibility of Railtrack being placed in railway administration and being replaced by a non profit-making company prior to the publication of "The Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry, Part 2" report. [9826]

Mr. Spellar: No.

Transport Plan

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how he intends to deliver the planned private investment in the railway set out in the 10-year transport plan. [9838]

Mr. Spellar: The Government intend to propose that a private sector company limited by guarantee should succeed Railtrack. This new company would be financially sound and structured so that it would achieve at least a BBB—and potentially higher investment grade credit rating. We are confident that this credit rating, combined with income from track access charges and network grants, would enable the new company to deliver the 'Railtrack elements' of private investment included within the 10-Year Plan.

We are confident that private sector investment will continue to be raised as planned for the completion of the channel tunnel rail link and for substantial new investment in rolling stock. We have envisaged for some time that major enhancement projects would be taken forward by standalone special purpose vehicles. The Government are continuing to develop their framework for establishing these vehicles.

Stingray Camera System

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the total cost of the Stingray camera system for combating vehicles excise duty evasion. [9884]

Mr. Jamieson: The cost of 11 Stingray camera systems, the vans in which the systems are housed, plus a fault monitoring and security system was £1.1 million. Use of the systems is expected to result in recovery of some £9 million per annum.

Housing

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much land owned by English Partnerships designated for affordable housing units has been sold without a requirement for the same number of affordable housing units to be built; how much of such land has been designated for affordable low cost housing in Chorley; and how much of such land has been sold for housing in Chorley in each of the last three years. [10095]

Ms Keeble: There is no difference between the number of affordable housing units earmarked for a particular English Partnerships (EP) site and those actually built. This is because the housing provider has a contractual obligation to provide the same number of affordable housing units as initially agreed between EP and the local authority.

No land has been designated for affordable housing in Chorley over the last three years. EP's main land ownership in Chorley is at Eaves Green. Chorley borough council considers the site unsuitable as a location for affordable housing as it is on the urban edge and remote from the town centre. EP's other land holdings in Chorley are currently "safeguarded" under the current local plan which means that development on them is precluded for the timeframe of the plan.

Pedestrian Protection

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the organisations consulted by his Department in the recent consultation on pedestrian protection; and if he will place in the Library a summary of the responses received. [9975]

Mr. Jamieson: We consulted the following:

Association of Chief Police Officers
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)
Aston Martin Lagonda Ltd.
Automobile Association
Bentley Motors Ltd.
BMW (GB) Ltd.
BRAKE
Bristol Cars Ltd.
British Medical Association
British Motorcyclists Federation
Caterham Cars Ltd.
Child Accident Protection Trust
Chrysler Jeep
Chrysler Jeep Imports UK
Citroen UK Ltd.
Colt Car Company Ltd.
Consumer Association
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
County Surveyors' Society
Cyclists' Touring Club
Daewoo Cars Ltd.
Daihatsu UK Ltd.
Department for Education and Skills
Department of Health
Department of Trade and Industry
Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee
DoE Northern Ireland
Driving Standards Agency
Fiat Auto UK Ltd.
Ford Motor Co. Ltd.
Freight Transport Association
General Motors
Hawk Cars
Health and Safety Executive
Highways Agency
Home Office
Honda UK
Hyundai Car UK Ltd.
Isle of Man
Jaguar Cars Ltd.

KIA Cars (UK) Ltd.
Lada Cars
Lamborghini Cars
Land Rover
Local Authority Road Safety Officers Association
Local Government Association
Lotus Cars Ltd.
Mazda Cars (UK) Ltd
McLaren Cars Ltd.
Mercedes Benz Ltd.
MG Rover
Morgan Motor Co. Ltd.
Motor Industry Research Association
Motor Schools Association
Motorcycle Action Group
Motorcycle Advisory Group
Motorcycle Industry Association
National Assembly for Wales
NG Cars Ltd.
Nissan Motor GB Ltd.
Parliamentary Council for Transport Safety
Pedestrian Association
Perodua
Peugeot Motor Company Ltd.
Porsche Cars (GB) Ltd.
Professor Richard Allsop, University College London
RAC Foundation of Motoring
Reliant Motors Ltd.
Renault UK Ltd.
Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Ltd.
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
SAAB (GB) Ltd.
Scottish Executive
Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders
States of Jersey
Suzuki GB plc
Toyota GB Ltd.
Trades Union Congress
TRL Ltd.
TVR Engineering Ltd.
Ultima Sports Cars Ltd.
Vauxhall Motors Ltd.
Vehicle Certification Agency
Vehicle Inspectorate
Volkswagen Group UK Ltd,
Volvo Cars UK Ltd.
Welsh Local Government Association.

We are finalising a summary of responses received and will place it in the Libraries of the House when available.

Vehicle Safety

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the additional manufacturing costs for each vehicle if all new cars were to meet the four tests developed by the European Enhanced Safety of Vehicles Committee; and what scientific advice he has received on the proposal for a two-stage negotiated agreement on this subject. [9976]

Mr. Jamieson: Previous estimates have indicated a manufacturing cost increase of between £110 and £330 per vehicle to meet the full EEVC tests. However, we believe that this cost would reduce appreciably as manufacturers gain experience of pedestrian design, and as improved technological solutions become available.

Past research has indicated that the benefits obtained from the full EEVC proposals (as proposed for the second phase of a negotiated agreement) would be in the range of an 8 per cent. reduction in pedestrian fatalities and a 21 per cent. reduction in pedestrian serious injuries. Although the first phase of the negotiated agreement would lead to appreciable casualty reductions, the second phase offers greater protection against head injuries and reduced likelihood of leg injuries, a particular aspect being reduced knee injuries.

East-west Transport Links

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 892W, on east-west transport links, if the London to South Midlands multi-modal study is considering east-west rail links between Cambridge and Bedford, and Bedford and Milton Keynes. [10065]

Mr. Jamieson: The London to South Midlands multi-modal study will concentrate on three north to south transport corridors (M1/WCML, A1/MML/ECML, M11/WAnglia) but will also look at east-west movements in the study area. The east-west rail link will be considered in this context.

Empty Homes (East Sussex)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many empty homes there are in east Sussex broken down by sector. [10398]

Ms Keeble: The numbers of vacant local authority and Registered Social Landlords' dwellings in each local authority area in east Sussex on 1 April 2000 (the latest available data) are set out in the table alongside the local authorities' estimates of private and other public sector dwellings.

Number of vacant residential dwellings in East Sussex on 1 April 2000, by local authority and tenure

	[1]Local authority	[2]RSL	[1]Other public	[1]Private	Total
Brighton and Hove	196	81	28	2,178	2,483
Eastbourne	33	37	0	1,240	1,310
Hastings	0	102	0	3,184	3,286
Lewes	42	11	0	520	573
Rother	0	130	1	2,106	2,237
Wealden	50	25	6	937	1,018
East Sussex total	321	386	35	10,165	10,907

[1] Housing Investment Programme (HIP) 2000: Operation Information returns.
[2] Annual Regulatory and Statistical Returns (RSR 1).
Notes:
1. RSL—Registered Social Landlord.
2. Other public—includes Government Departments and public sector agencies (eg health authorities).

Rail Maintenance

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many wheeltappers were employed by the railway industry in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 2000. [10379]

Mr. Jamieson: We do not hold this information.

European Single Sky Agreement

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria were assessed when deciding to sign the European Single Sky Agreement; and if he will make a statement. [11068]

Mr. Jamieson: The European Commission presented its legislative proposals on the European Single Sky to the Transport Council on 16 October.

The Government are considering their response to these proposals, but have not signed any agreement.

Social Tenants

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in what way *(a)* new and *(b)* existing social tenants will have greater choice over their housing in the choice-based lettings pilot scheme. [10166]

Ms Keeble: The 27 local authority-led pilots were chosen to test different choice-based approaches to lettings, operating in a variety of circumstances.

Nearly all the schemes are designed to give greater choice to new and existing tenants by moving away from bureaucratic, points-based, allocation schemes to schemes where applicants select directly from available vacancies.

There is a strong emphasis on partnership working between the pilot authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) operating in their area; and in some cases the intention is to bring private landlords on board as well, to offer as wide a choice as possible to new and existing tenants. Some of the pilots involve a consortium of authorities and RSLs working together. Some include links between areas of high and low demand. These schemes offer the opportunity to test the potential for promoting mobility across local authority boundaries, increasing choice for tenants' and new applicants, and enabling better use to be made of the national housing stock.

We expect all the pilot schemes to ensure that the needs of vulnerable households are considered and addressed during the development of the pilot, to ensure that they are not disadvantaged under the new scheme. This will include the provision of information and advice to help people make appropriate and informed choices—as well as practical support to help them make the move.

Housing Construction Programmes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new housing construction programmes since 1997 have built houses on *(a)* brownfield sites and *(b)* greenfield sites. [10165]

Ms Keeble: Information on the proportion of new homes built on previously developed land in England is available from the Department's land use change statistics. Between 1997 and 2000, 57 per cent. of new dwellings were built on previously developed land (including new dwellings provided from the conversion of existing buildings, which account for three percentage points).

Key Worker Housing Grant Scheme

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1367–68W, what the successful bids from *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other bodies under the key worker housing grant scheme involving (i) NHS staff and (ii) social services staff were; and what the amounts were. [11024]

Ms Keeble: The allocation of £230 million Starter Home Initiative funding to 95 schemes was announced on 6 September. This will help around 4,000 nurses and other essential health workers, 2,800 teachers, 900 police, and 300 other key workers including social workers.

The successful bids and the total amount of funding allocated to each bid are shown in the table. The table also indicates which schemes include assistance to health staff and social services staff (see notes to the table).

Area covered by successful bid	*Successful bidders*	*Total amount of SHI funding allocated £ million*
London		
All London boroughs[1,2]	Keys to the Capital Consortium: Tower Homes, Metropolitan Home Ownership, Notting Hill Home Ownership, Boleyn and Forest Housing	95.818
All London boroughs	Keys to the Capital Consortium: Tower Homes, Metropolitan Home Ownership, Notting Hill Home Ownership (NHHO), Boleyn and Forest Housing	15.312
Camden	NHHO	0.713
Hackney[1]	Unitary Ltd.	1.033
Newham[1,2]	St. George plc (NHHO will manage the scheme)	1.400
Hammersmith and Fulham[1]	Bush Housing Association	0.983
Hammersmith and Fulham[1,2]	St. George plc (NHHO will manage the scheme)	1.050
Islington[1]	NHHO	1.760
North/West London[1]	Peabody Trust	3.106
Wandsworth	Wandsworth council (NHHO will manage the scheme)	1.380
Brent[1,2]	Northcote Housing Association	1.821
Brent[1,2]	NHHO	0.322
Brent[1]	Sutherland HA	1.139
Ealing[2]	Northcote HA	1.658

Area covered by successful bid	*Successful bidders*	*Total amount of SHI funding allocated £ million*
Harrow[1]	Northcote HA	1.631
Hillingdon	NHHO	0.168
Hillingdon[1]	Airways Housing Group	0.180
Hillingdon[1]	Northcote HA	2.348
Hounslow[1,2]	Northcote HA	1.120
Richmond-upon-Thames[1]	Bush HA	0.965
Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea[1]	London Cyrenians Housing	0.246
Ealing and Hillingdon	Taywood Homes Ltd. (scheme will be managed by Genesis Housing Group)	0.958
South London[1]	Moat HA	8.051
Sutton[1]	Tower Homes	0.345
Lambeth[1]	Tower Homes	2.520
South East		
Bracknell Forest[1,2]	NHHO	0.841
Reading[1]	Western Challenge	0.266
Reading[1,2]	Northcote HA	5.052
Slough[1,2]	Northcote HA	2.374
West Berkshire[1]	Airways Housing Group	0.563
Windsor and Maidenhead[1,2]	Maidenhead and District HA	1.054
Wokingham[1,2]	Thames Valley HA	2.288
Aylesbury Vale	NHHO	0.444
Chiltern, South Buckinghamshire, Wycombe, Aylesbury[1]	Chiltern Hundreds HA	6.988
Milton Keynes[1]	Midsummer HA	0.700
Oxford[1,2]	Pan Oxford Healthcare Partnership (Northcote HA will manage the scheme)	1.865
Oxford	Northcote HA	0.966
Oxfordshire[1,2]	Beacon HA	1.666
South Oxfordshire[1]	Soha Housing	1.499
South Oxfordshire[1]	Sovereign HA	0.545
Vale of the White Horse[1]	Sovereign HA	0.436
West Oxfordshire[1]	Sovereign HA	0.574
Basingstoke[1]	Oakfern Housing	0.693
Basingstoke[1]	Sovereign HA	0.754
East Hampshire	Hampshire Voluntary Housing Society	0.125
Eastleigh[1]	Swaythling HA	0.587
Fareham[1]	Merlion Housing Group	0.875
Hampshire	Hampshire county council (scheme will be managed by Swaythling HA)	1.103
Havant	Swaythling HA	0.381
Rushmoor, Hart[1]	Thames Valley HA	1.468
Southampton[1,2]	Southampton city council (Swaythling HA will manage the scheme)	2.060
Test Valley[1]	Swaythling HA	0.663
Winchester[1]	Hampshire Voluntary Housing Society	0.131
Winchester[1]	Swaythling HA	0.589
Ashford[1]	Moat HA	0.908
Canterbury[1]	Moat HA	0.648
Dartford[1]	Moat HA	0.562
Gravesham[1]	Moat HA	0.367
Maidstone[1]	Hyde HA	0.333
Maidstone[1]	Town and Country Housing Group	0.100
Maidstone[1]	Moat HA	0.677
Sevenoaks[1]	Moat HA	1.040
Tonbridge and Malling[1]	Moat HA	0.876
Tunbridge Wells[1]	Town and Country Housing Group	0.100
Tunbridge Wells[1]	Moat HA	0.910
Brighton and Hove[1]	Moat HA	2.124
Chichester[1,2]	Raglan HA	0.116
Crawley[1]	Moat HA	0.950
East Sussex[1,2]	East Sussex local authorities in conjunction with Moat HA (Moat HA will run the scheme)	1.664
Mid Sussex[1]	Moat HA	0.750
Horsham[1]	Moat HA	0.781
Epsom and Ewell[1]	Mount Green HA	0.142
Guildford[1,2]	Guildford borough council	0.408
Surrey[1,2]	Thames Valley HA	13.472
Mole Valley[1]	Mount Green HA	0.238
Runnymede[1]	Servite Homes	0.255
Spelthorne[1]	Airways Housing Group	0.675
East		
Bedford[1]	Bedfordshire Pilgrims HA	0.587
Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire[1,2]	Cambridgeshire Employers' Consortium in conjunction with Bedfordshire Pilgrims HA (the HA will manage the scheme)	4.826
Hertfordshire[1]	Aldwyck HA	2.531

Area covered by successful bid	*Successful bidders*	*Total amount of SHI funding allocated £ million*
Hertfordshire	Ridgehill HA	1.495
Welwyn and Hatfield, Stevenage[1]	East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust in conjunction with St. Pancras HA (the HA will manage the scheme)	1.390
Watford[1]	Beacon HA	1.479
Basildon[1]	Moat HA	0.405
Braintree[1]	Moat HA	0.427
Chelmsford[1]	Boleyn and Forest HA	0.469
Chelmsford	Taywood Homes (Taywood will work in partnership with Chelmsford borough council to manage the scheme)	0.402
Harlow[1]	Moat HA	0.752
Maldon[1]	Moat HA	0.548
South West		
Bournemouth[1]	Western Challenge HA	0.517
Bristol/South Gloucestershire[1]	Bristol city council and South Gloucestershire in conjunction with Knightstone and Sovereign HAs	1.721
Cheltenham[1]	Bromford Housing Group	0.401
Christchurch[1]	Sovereign HA	0.182
Cotswold[1]	Cotswold district council	0.506
Swindon[1]	Swindon borough council (Sarsen HA will manage the scheme)	1.150

[1] Schemes include assistance to health staff
[2] Schemes include assistance to social services staff

Isle of Wight (Trunk Road Access)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will urge the highway authorities for Portsmouth and Southampton to consult with the Isle of Wight council on highway projects on trunk road access to the Isle of Wight. [11097]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans, published in March 2000, advises all local highway authorities to have effective liaison arrangements with neighbouring authorities and to agree a common or complementary approach to cross-boundary issues. I am aware that there are regular consultation meetings on transport issues between the Isle of Wight council, Portsmouth city council, Southampton city council and Hampshire county council.

Light Rapid Transit Scheme (Fareham-Gosport-Portsmouth)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress with the Light Rapid Transit scheme for Fareham-Gosport-Portsmouth, with particular reference to *(a)* costings and *(b)* the timetable to completion. [10714]

Ms Keeble: We understand that the promoting authorities, Hampshire County Council and Portsmouth City Council, hope to commence construction in 2003 with completion in 2006–07. The scheme is estimated to cost £190 million but the precise amount will not be known until tendering process has been completed.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Al Jazeera Television Channel

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Select Committee if he will make arrangements for the al-Jazeera television channel to be available on television monitors in hon. Members' offices; and if he will make a statement. [10422]

Michael Fabricant: *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* There are at present no spare channels on the Parliamentary Video Network as the 24th channel, earmarked for the Scottish Parliament when a transmission becomes available, is being used for technical purposes. It may be helpful to add that the al-Jazeera channel is an Arabic-speaking channel with no English spoken and no English subtitles.

Family Friendly Hours

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council what proposals he has for making the dates of parliamentary Sessions more family friendly. [10484]

Mr. Robin Cook: Like Leaders of the House before me, I recognise the practical arguments for more closely aligning adjournments with school holidays. There are obvious difficulties in that half-term holidays vary accordingly to region and the Scottish school summer holidays differ markedly from those in England and Wales. However, I hope we can make progress on this issue through the Modernisation Committee.

I also hope that we will announce the dates of parliamentary recesses further in advance than has been usual in the past. The dates of the Christmas recess were announced during the first business statement in October. I hope to continue and extend this practice so as to allow MPs to plan their constituency work and family engagements more effectively.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the annual administration costs were in the last financial year of *(a)* each of the national

museums and galleries sponsored by her Department, *(b)* the Arts Council of England, *(c)* Sport England, *(d)* UK Sport, *(e)* the regional arts boards, *(f)* English Heritage, *(g)* the Heritage Lottery Fund, *(h)* the New Opportunities Fund, *(i)* the Football Foundation, *(j)* the Communities Fund, *(k)* the English Tourism Council, *(l)* the British Tourist Authority, *(m)* regional tourist boards and *(n)* the Film Council; and what proportion of employees of these organisations are (1) from ethnic minorities and (2) registered disabled. [7567]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Comprehensive figures for the last financial year are not yet available, so the figures given, taken from published accounts and the Departmental Annual Report, are for the 1999–2000 financial year. The calculation of the figures depends on how each body presents its published financial information, and therefore the figures are not directly comparable. Where possible administration costs figures are given, but in some cases (asterisked) the published information only covers total operating expenditure. As Museums and Galleries are direct service providers, the operating expenditure covers their entire income.

The Football Foundation is not sponsored by DCMS, so the Department does not hold information on its expenditure. Nor does it hold the information requested on the employees of all of the organisations listed in the question.

£ million

	Administration costs
(a) Museums and Galleries	
British Museum	*45.8
Imperial War Museum	*19.9
National Gallery	*20.1
National Maritime Museum	*13.7
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	*14.4
National Museum of Science and Industry	*30.8
National Portrait Gallery	*6.8
Natural History Museum	*34.6
Royal Armouries	*7.2
Tate Gallery	*23.1
Victoria and Albert Museum	*34.1
Wallace Collection	*3.0
(b) Arts Council of England	
(includes lottery and grant in aid functions)	30.6
(c) Sport England	
(includes lottery and grant in aid functions)	28.2
(d) UK Sport	
(includes lottery and grant in aid functions)	3.05
(e) Regional Arts Board	
Eastern	*1.6
East Midlands	*1.7
London	*2.3
Northern	*1.3
North West	*1.7
Southern	*1.4
South East	*1.5
South West	*1.8
West Midlands	*1.5
Yorkshire	*1.5
(f) English Heritage	*65.3
(g) Heritage Lottery Fund	14.2
(h) New Opportunities Fund	13.8
(j) Community Fund	27.8
(k) English Tourism Council	3.5
(l) British Tourist Authority	6.8
(m) Regional Tourist Boards	
Cumbria	*1.4
East of England	*2.0
Heart of England	*2.6
London	*5.3
Northumbria	*1.5
North West	*2.7
South East	*1.6
Southern	*4.1
South West	*2.6
Yorkshire	*4.1
(n) Film Council	*7.4

Al-Qaeda Broadcasts

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the policy relating to broadcasts in the UK of statements by al-Qaeda through the al-Jazeera network. [8275]

Tessa Jowell: Al-Jazeera is a Qatar-based broadcaster licensed by the French authorities for transmission within the European Union. I understand that it is the only TV broadcaster allowed by the Taliban to operate on a permanent basis out of Afghanistan. We have urged broadcasters to be cautious in their use of material from Afghanistan and to ensure that viewers are aware of the source of material and how reliable it might be.

Under the Television Without Frontiers Directive, 89/552/EEC, as amended by 97/36/EC,

> "Member states shall ensure that broadcasts do not contain any incitement to hatred on grounds of race, sex, religion or nationality".

It is open to the UK Government, on the advice of the ITC, to proscribe a television broadcaster which broadcasts from another member state, where the broadcasts contain material which manifestly, seriously and gravely infringes this prohibition, on at least two occasions in a twelve month period. The ITC's monitoring of al-Jazeera has not led it to conclude that proscription would be justified. UK established broadcasters must comply with obligations to maintain due impartiality and accuracy in their reporting of news and current affairs.

Broadcasters must apply their own judgment to the context of the al-Qaeda videos.

Galleries and Museums

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much new Government investment funding was given to galleries and museums in each of the last three years. [10266]

Dr. Howells: In 1998–99 the Government provided £203 million in grant-in-aid for DCMS's sponsored museums and galleries in England. In 1999–2000 we increased this to £219 million. In 2000–01 the figure rose to £229 million, and in 2001–02 the figure will rise to £246 million.

These figures do not include Resource, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, and the Designated Museums Challenge Fund awards, both of which are funded by DCMS. Figures for these are as follows.

£ million

	Resource[1]	*DMCF*
1998–99	9.8	—
1999–2000	13.0	2.5
2000–01	13.5	4.5
2001–02	12.5	8.0

[1] Also for archives and libraries.

Film Industry

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what public funds were provided for the production and distribution of the film "Enigma". [10229]

Dr. Howells: No public funds were provided for the production or distribution of the film "Enigma".

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funds she provides for the distribution of UK-produced films in the UK. [10230]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1287W.

Terrorism

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much she forecasts will be spent in the current year by her Department as a direct result of measures associated with the war on terrorism. [10619]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The Department does not expect to have any additional costs as a direct result of measures associated with the war on terrorism. However, I have been co-ordinating work to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place in the UK to support the families of victims of the events of 11 September.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Racial Hatred

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Solicitor-General how many successful prosecutions for incitement of racial hatred there have been. [9967]

The Solicitor-General: Records for prosecutions for incitement of racial hatred under part III of the Public Order Act 1986 have been kept only since 1988. Since then 42 defendants have been successfully prosecuted under the provisions of the Act. The number of applications for consent to prosecute for each year since 1988, the number of prosecutions arising and the convictions obtained are as summarised.

	Number of applications for Attorney General consent[1]	*Withdrawn*	*Not granted*	*Prosecuted*	*Convicted*[2]
1988	3	—	1	2	2
1989	1	—	—	1	1
1990	2	—	—	2	2
1991	4	—	1	3	1
1992	5	—	2	3	2
1993	2	—	—	2	2
1994	2	—	—	2	2
1995	8	1	—	7	6
1996	13	—	1	12	9
1997	12	—	2	10	9
1998	2	1	—	1	1
1999	4	—	—	4	3
2000	5	—	—	5	2
2001[4]	7	—	—	7	—[5]

[1] Per defendant
[2] Not necessarily in the same year
[3] Two results outstanding
[4] To date
[5] Results awaited

WALES

Economy

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to offset the effect in Wales of the worldwide economic slowdown. [9262]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government's economic policy of low inflation, sound public finances and steady growth means that Wales should be well placed to withstand worldwide fluctuations in economic cycles.

The block grant for Wales that I negotiated with the Treasury last year allows the National Assembly to match fund objective 1 programmes and, more recently, I have worked closely with colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry and in the National Assembly to help fund and support areas affected by steel closures.

I will continue to work closely with my colleagues in Government and in the National Assembly to ensure that Wales has the opportunity to build on the stable foundations laid by the Government's economic policy.

Secondments

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many secondments there were from his Department to a business in the private sector; how many secondments there have been from the private sector to his Department in each of the last five years; and if he will provide a list of the companies involved and the location of the companies. [8346]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since 1 July 1999, my Department's staff have been seconded from the National Assembly for Wales and have access to the full range of development opportunities offered to Assembly employees, including secondment to businesses in the private sector. Given this arrangement, it is not practicable to attribute individual outward secondments to the Wales Office. There have been no inward secondments from the private sector to the Wales Office.

Central records of secondments to and from the former Welsh Office are available only from January 1998. Between that date and 30 June 1999, there was one outward secondment to the New Millennium Company, which commenced in September 1998 and one inward secondment from King Sturge, which commenced in December 1998. Specific locations have not been recorded.

Departmental Account Payments

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the measures his Department is taking to improve its record in the prompt payment of accounts, with special reference to small contractors and suppliers. [11122]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have already taken measures which have resulted in 97 per cent. to 98 per cent. of our bills being paid on time over the last few months.

My Department's bills are paid by the National Assembly for Wales under a service level agreement; I will ensure that the present standard is maintained.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bangladesh

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is towards *(a)* the operation of non-governmental organisations in Bangladesh, *(b)* NGOs promoting western concepts of the role of women in Bangladesh and *(c)* the substitution of western for local cultural norms by NGOs in Bangladesh. [7203]

Clare Short: The UK Government do not have a general policy towards NGOs in Bangladesh. My Department works with a number of NGOs to help advance a range of our objectives, as set out in our published Country Strategy Paper for Bangladesh.

One of these objectives is improvements in the position of women in society. DFID's overall strategy is set out in a published paper on 'Poverty Elimination and the Empowerment of Women'. In accordance with that strategy we work with NGOs and the Government of Bangladesh to help implement Bangladesh's international commitments.

The UK Government do not promote any particular policy on cultural norms in Bangladesh. The majority of our funding to NGOs in Bangladesh goes to indigenous Bangladeshi organisations. Most of these have a commitment to internationally recognised human rights including women's equality.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9232]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 23 October 2001]: (a)* The news department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office issued 78 press releases during the parliamentary recess. This figures includes the daily bulletin of ministerial engagements.

(b) No consultation documents were issued during the period 20 July to 15 October.

British Council

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on changes to the budget for the British Council between 1997 and 2001. [9971]

Mr. MacShane: In 1997–98 the British Council received grant-in-aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of £96 million and £30 million from DFID. Subsequently the DFID grant-in-aid was transferred to the FCO, which provided some £127 million in 1998–99, £133 million in 1999–2000 and £137 million in 2000–01. Under the current Spending Review settlement the British Council is receiving £143 million in 2001–02, £151 million in 2002–03 and £159 million in 2003–04.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which laws prohibit the use, production, possession and transfer of nuclear, chemical, biological and radiological materials which could be used as weapons of mass destruction; and if he will make a statement. [9904]

Mr. Bradshaw: The specific legislation which applies to weapons of mass destruction, in addition to the general criminal law of the United Kingdom, is as follows:

The Chemical Weapons Act 1996 prohibits the use, development, production, possession and transfer of chemical weapons, and preparations of a military nature to use such weapons. Chemical weapons are defined as including toxic chemicals and their precursors, except where used for permitted purposes. Permitted purposes are peaceful purposes, purposes related to protection against toxic chemicals, legitimate military purposes, and purposes of enforcing the law;

The Biological Weapons Act 1974 prohibits the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition or retention of any biological agent or toxin of a type and in a quantity that has no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes. "Biological agent" means any microbial or other biological agent; and "toxin" means any toxin, whatever its origin or method of production;

The Radioactive Substances Act 1993 prohibits the possession of radioactive material (including nuclear material) less exempt quantities outside a licensed nuclear site without an authorisation;

The Nuclear Installations Act 1965 prohibits the separation of plutonium or the enrichment of uranium without a permit and certain large scale nuclear activities without a nuclear site licence;

The Nuclear Material (Offences) Act 1983 relates to certain offences involving nuclear material;

The Nuclear Explosions (Prohibitions and Inspection) Act 1998 will make it an offence knowingly to cause a nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion, except in the course of

an armed conflict. This Act is not yet in force, since it is intended to give effect to certain provisions of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty which is yet to enter into force;

The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 allows regulations to be made relating to the safety/security of radioactive material. Radioactive material other than nuclear material cannot be used to construct a weapon of mass destruction;

Other health and safety regulations are also relevant in requiring certain procedures and safeguards over the use, storage and transport of hazardous materials which will contribute to containing the risk of their misuse as weapons of mass destruction;

Export of nuclear, chemical and biological and radioactive goods is controlled by the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended, Council Regulation (EC) No. 1334/2000, as amended and the Dual-Use Items (Export Control) Regulations 2000, as amended.

Additionally, under the Terrorism Act 2000, a person commits an offence if he provides instruction or training in the making or use of firearms, explosives or chemical, biological or nuclear weapons, receives instruction or training in the making or use of the same items.

Provisions relating to these matters will be included in the Emergency Anti-Terrorism Bill.

Liberalisation of Trade in Services Committee

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Liberalisation of Trade in Services Committee in the last 12 months. [10279]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 417W.

"Everything but Arms"

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of the EU's "Everything but Arms" policy on those countries not classified as least developed. [10533]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The EC regulation which extends duty free access to products originating in the Least Developed Countries (the so-called "Everything but Arms" proposal) was adopted at the General Affairs Council in February 2001. The regulation came into force on 5 March 2001, and provides duty free access to EU markets for the world's 48 poorest countries for all goods except arms. Access for bananas, sugar and rice will be phased in, with full liberalisation for bananas from 2006, sugar from 1 July 2009 and rice from 1 September 2009.

The Government believe the regulation represents the best available deal for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and non-LDCs, given the complex balance of interests involved. The impact of the measure is difficult to assess, particularly at this early stage. Much will depend on the response of producers, both in LDC and non-LDC countries, and on wider developments in trade and agriculture policy. The Government are committed to working with multilateral and other bilateral donors to ensure that non-LDCs receive help and advice during the necessary process of adjustment. We will monitor clearly the impact of the changes, on LDC and non-LDC countries' economies.

Joint Entry Clearance Unit

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek a report from the British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia on the response of the Embassy in Riyadh to information sought by the Joint Entry Clearance Unit about the family reunion case GV 100/67853/TD raised with JECU by the hon. Member for Manchester, Central. [10427]

Mr. Bradshaw: I will raise this case with our Ambassador in Saudi Arabia and will write to my hon. Friend with my findings as soon as possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Extradition

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the pause on extradition proceedings mentioned in his statement of 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 302–04, was at the recommendation of *(a)* the Chief Constable and *(b)* General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland. [11057]

Jane Kennedy: The approach set out in the statement had been discussed with my security advisers.

Population Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those enumeration districts which are in the top 5 per cent. measured by *(a)* reduction in population in the last 10, 20 and 30 years and *(b)* change of population in the last 10, 20 and 30 years for which information is available. [11055]

Dr. John Reid: Responsibility for this subject has been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and is therefore no longer a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Prisoner Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those persons released from prison as a result of the Belfast Agreement, indicating for each (i) the date of release, (ii) the term for which sentenced, (iii) the period served as a percentage of (ii), (iv) the crime for which sentenced, (v) the paramilitary group with which they were associated and (vi) when recalled to prison. [11056]

Jane Kennedy: It is not our policy to release information in relation to individual cases. However certain statistics are held on releases under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998.

Of 444 individuals released to date under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, 230 were released in 1998, 80 were released in 1999, 123 were released in 2000 and 11 have been released so far in 2001.

In total, 153 were life sentence prisoners and 291 were determinate sentence prisoners.

Under the terms of the Act, a life sentence prisoner was liable to serve about two thirds of the period he would have been likely to spend in prison and a fixed term prisoner was liable to serve a third of his sentence.

In relation to the terms and crimes for which they were sentenced, applicants for early release have to fulfil certain criteria to qualify for consideration under the Sentences Act. They have to be serving a term of imprisonment of life or at lease five years for a scheduled offence within the meaning of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts (or a similar offence if committed outside Northern Ireland) and their offence(s) have to have been committed before 10 April 1998.

Information is held, for management purposes, in relation to the perceived paramilitary association of prisoners in Northern Ireland. The table sets out details of the perceived association of the 444 individuals released.

To date five early release licensees (two in 2000 and three in 2001) have had their licences suspended and been returned to prison.

Perceived association	*Total*
PIRA	205
INLA	24
Former INLA	7
Republican Association	3
UDA	87
UFF	14
UVF	67
RHC	3
LVF	16
Loyalist Association	6
Criminal or No Association	12
Grand total	444

Electoral Fraud

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with Sinn Fein on the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill. [11028]

Mr. Browne: My predecessor, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), met with representatives of 10 Northern Ireland political parties (including Sinn Fein) between 20 and 23 November 2000. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss the Government's proposal for a Bill to counter electoral fraud in Northern Ireland.

The White Paper, "Combating Electoral Fraud in Northern Ireland" (Cm. 5080) was published in March 2001. It set out the Government's policy on electoral fraud in Northern Ireland and the legislative changes we intended to make to combat that fraud. A copy was sent to all the Northern Ireland political parties.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the results are of his quantitative survey of the scale of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland; and if he will place his report in the Library. [8607]

Mr. Browne: A report, presenting the quantitative findings from a research project undertaken by Research and Evaluation Services for the Northern Ireland Office and the Electoral Office, was placed in the Library of the House on Tuesday 16 October.

The purpose of the research was to inform the development of electoral policy in Northern Ireland. The results of the research will contribute to a wider discussion on the issue of electoral malpractice and provide feedback on the operation of the combined poll held on 7 June 2001.

The research was comprised of surveys of the general public, presiding officers and count staff. A series of in-depth interviews and focus groups with presiding officers was also carried out. The report placed in the Library of the House on 16 October presents the quantitative survey elements of the project—these findings relate to people's general views and perceptions of the elections held on 7 June. The qualitative feedback from presiding officers will be included in a later report to be published as part of the Northern Ireland Office's Research and Statistical Series.

Bill of Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what additional resources have been allocated to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to support the consultation process they are undertaking on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland; [7102]

(2) how many bids have been received from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for resources to support the consultation process on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland; and if these have been granted; [7103]

(3) how his Department intends to support the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in providing financial resources for it to run a consultation process on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. [7104]

Mr. Browne: It was initially envisaged that the task of advising on the scope for a Bill of Rights was an integral part of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's functions, and would therefore be covered by the Commission's core budget. However, we made it clear from the outset that we would be prepared to consider bids for increased funding, provided they were accompanied by a properly costed business case.

The Commission submitted an initial request for additional funds specifically for the consultation on the scope for a Bill of Rights in December 2000. Following discussion a revised bid was submitted in June 2001. In response to this, the Commission was granted a further £357,200 to fund the consultation process to inform their draft advice to Government on the scope for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how his Department intends to respond to the consultation process on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland as it relates to proposed criminal justice and security rights. [7105]

Mr. Browne: The consultation document published by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on 4 September this year represents its draft advice to Government. The Commission expects to issue its final recommendations to the Government in early 2002, and we look forward to receiving that.

In the meantime, we will study carefully the contents of the draft as it currently stands.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Europol

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if foreign employees of Europol are immune from prosecution while on duty in the UK. [9966]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Europol employees, whether or not foreign nationals, would be immune from prosecution for acts undertaken in the exercise of their official functions. These privileges and immunities, which are comparable with those routinely afforded to the staff of international organisations, are granted only in so far as they are necessary for the proper functioning of Europol. Europol is obliged to observe national laws and to waive immunities where possible in cases where the immunity would impede the course of justice.

Visas

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visas for temporary stays in the United Kingdom *(a)* were issued and *(b)* have expired in each year since 1997; and of the latter (i) how many holders are known to have left the country and (ii) how many holders are known not to have left the country (A) because of applications for asylum, (B) for other lawful reasons and (C) for other unlawful reasons. [8465]

Angela Eagle: Information on the number of temporary visas issued is given in the table. This is the latest available published information. Data for 2000 are due to be published this year in the Command Paper "Control of Immigration Statistics United Kingdom 2000", a copy of which will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

It is not possible to determine how many persons have left the country as the United Kingdom no longer has embarkation controls.

Information on the number of visas which have expired is not currently available.

Entry clearance applications granted for temporary purposes 1997–99

Year	*Entry clearance issued*
1997	1,243,450
1998	1,256,040
1999	1,309,210

Note:
Data rounded to the nearest 10

Cannabis

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how soon he would be able to bring forward legislation to legalise cannabis following a recommendation to that effect arising from current trials; [10541]

(2) when he expects to receive the findings of phase 3 of the clinical trials of the therapeutic properties of cannabis. [10540]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Detailed evidence about clinical trials with cannabis and derivatives was presented to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Inquiry into therapeutic uses of cannabis. This information is recorded in the Committee's reports "Cannabis: The Scientific and Medical Evidence" (Ninth Report Session 1997–1998, HL Paper 151) and "Therapeutic Uses of Cannabis" (Second Report Session 2000–2001 HL Paper 50), copies of which are available in the Library. The timings relating to on-going trials are clearly a matter for the sponsors, but I understand that GW Pharmaceuticals hope to have completed phase 3 trials, which are a prelude to a licensing application, by next summer.

The Government welcome these trials and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made it clear that if a product licence is recommended by the Medicines Control Agency he would approve the necessary changes to the Misuse of Drugs legislation. These changes can be made swiftly, by way of secondary legislation subject to negative resolution, although it is not possible at this time to give precise timings.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the Metropolitan Police intend to extend its policy on not arresting cannabis users in Lambeth to other parts of London; [8650]

(2) what estimate he has made of the effect of police policy in Lambeth on cannabis possession on the Government's targets on drug reduction; [8651]

(3) what indications he has received from chief constables outside London that they plan to introduce policies on cannabis possession similar to that in force in Lambeth; [8652]

(4) what indications he has given to chief constables outside London on introducing policies on cannabis possession similar to that in force in Lambeth. [8653]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Lambeth borough is currently conducting a pilot warning scheme for simple cases of possession of cannabis for personal use, running from 2 July to 31 December 2001.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has announced his intention to reclassify cannabis, from Class B to Class C under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and has asked the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs for medical and scientific advice. He will consider this advice in conjunction with the findings of the evaluation of the Lambeth pilot. The Home Secretary intends to take a final decision in the spring of next year.

Asylum Seekers

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers whose applications were refused during *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000 have now left the country; and what proportion this represents of the total in each case. [10629]

Angela Eagle: It is not possible to say how many persons whose asylum applications were refused in 1999 and 2000 have subsequently left the country. Applicants may leave voluntarily without informing the Home Office, or may be in the process of preparing an appeal or awaiting the outcome of an appeal.

The total number of asylum seekers who were removed (excluding dependants) from the United Kingdom in 1999 and 2000 is given in the table. Some of these removals will relate to decisions to refuse asylum in earlier years.

Year	Total asylum removals[1,2]
1999	7,665
2000	[3]8,980

[1] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action was initiated against them.
[2] Persons who sought asylum at some point, excluding dependants. Includes persons leaving under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme.
[3] Provisional.
Note:
Figures rounded to the nearest five.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a system enabling the Government to monitor the whereabouts of asylum seekers who are not detained; and if he will make a statement. [9457]

Angela Eagle: There are a number of existing mechanisms by which the Government monitor the whereabouts of asylum seekers who are not detained. A number of options for improving these procedures are under consideration.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will make a statement shortly setting out our proposals.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Civil Nuclear Installations (Security Threat)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the security threat posed by civil nuclear installations and processes as objects of terrorist attacks. [8372]

Mr. Wilson: It is not our policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites. All aspects of required security arrangements for civil nuclear sites are kept under continuing review by the Director of Civil Nuclear Security, who regulates security in the civil nuclear industry.

Small Businesses (Data Protection)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to make small businesses aware of their obligation to register the use of CCTV equipment under the Data Protection Acts. [8281]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service have agreed with the Office of the Information Commissioners that they will jointly produce guidance on the Data Protection Acts, including the use of CCTV, which meets the needs of small business.

Small Business Service Awards

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is a SMART award in relation to the Small Business Service; and how the 581 companies granted the award qualified for it. [10162]

Nigel Griffiths: Small Business Service SMART awards are grants to individuals or small and medium sized businesses to help with the costs of either engaging a technology consultant or researching and developing a technologically innovative new product or process.

The successful applicants qualified for their awards by putting forward project proposals which met the selection criteria published in the Guidance Notes for Applicants. The criteria depend on the particular type of award sought and include the size of the business, the technical and commercial viability of the project proposal and the applicant, the need for the award, the level of innovation and technical risk involved in the project and the prospects for exploitation of the project outcome. Full details of SMART applications are available in the Library of the House.

Post Offices (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in Scotland in each of the last three years. [9219]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* I am informed by the Post Office Ltd. that historical data on the numbers of post office openings and closures are not maintained separately. The numbers of post offices operating in Scotland over the last three financial years were as follows:

End March 1998—2,051
End March 1999—2,026
End March 2000—1,999
End March 2001—1,936.

I am informed by the Post Office that an on-going revision of data has affected individual country totals. I also understand that, across the UK as a whole, of the closures in the year ending March 2001, the Post Office designate only four as permanent.

A £2 million fund to support relocation and refurbishment initiatives by volunteer or community groups to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where the traditional post office is closing received parliamentary approval in July.

Legal Action (Associated Newspapers)

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the cost met from public funds of the legal action taken by the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) against Associated Newspapers. [10146]

Ms Hewitt: No final bill for legal costs has yet been presented by the solicitors acting for my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers).

Public Telephones (Deaf People)

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the difficulties faced by the deaf population with regard to the use of public telephone kiosks, with special reference to the 999 emergency telephone service; and what plans she has to look at improvements which could be made. [9875]

Mr. Alexander: The regulation of telecoms operators is the responsibility of Oftel. Oftel is working with those operators that provide public call box services, such as British Telecom, and with disabled groups to ensure that more public text phones are made available to enable deaf people to have improved access to telecoms services, including 999 services. Oftel has also implemented

regulations which require other operators of public call boxes to offer a text relay service. All textphones at public call boxes provide access to the emergency services through the dialling of a dedicated access code. The text is then relayed on to the emergency services. BT has installed 1,950 public textphones at airports, railway stations and motorway service centres too. These offer BT's newly launched text relay services called 'TextDirect'. A hearing customer will now be able to directly dial a customer who is deaf by using an access code and vice versa.

Transport and Telecoms Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Transport and Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on 15 October; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including their voting record; and if she will make a statement. [9363]

Mr. Alexander: I represented the UK for the posts and telecoms aspects of the Transport and Telecoms Council in Luxembourg on 15 October.

The Council, with the support of almost all member states, reached political agreement on a common position on postal services liberalisation which would safeguard the continued provision of universal service and provide for UK licensing arrangements. The UK supported the political agreement having secured adjustments to meet these points. Under the agreement, the level of services that may be reserved will reduce to 100 grams in 2003, to 50 grams in 2006 but leave the final step in 2009 to a Council/European Parliament decision in 2006 following a Commission assessment of universal service.

The Presidency gave information on the proposed Communications Data Protection Directive. At the UK's initiative in the light of the measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 923, member states discussed the implications of the directive for the retention of data for law-enforcement purposes following the recent terrorist attacks in the United States. It was agreed that there should be further consideration to ensure that the directive will not restrict member states from taking action against terrorism.

The Presidency also gave information on the proposed Framework, Access, Authorisation and Universal Service Directives arising from the 1999 Communications Review. These proposals are now undergoing second readings in the European Parliament following the Council's adoption of common positions in September.

The Council held a debate on Network and Information Security, on which the Presidency intends to present a Resolution at the Transport and Telecoms Council in December.

The Commission also presented a Communication on website accessibility for disabled users, part of the eEurope Action Plan, and a Communication on the Interchange of Data between Administrations (IDA) programme, aimed at improving working practices within the EU.

First Class Mail

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of first class mail was delivered the next day by postcode for the most recent quarter for which figures are available. [8248]

Mr. Alexander: Operational issues are a matter for Consignia.

However, I have been advised by the company that postcode area performance for the first quarter of the current financial year 2001–02 is as follows:

Postcode area performance (April to June 2001)—first class stamped and metered

Postcode area	*All posted*
AB Aberdeen	91.3
AL St. Albans	81.1
B Birmingham	86.9
BA Bath	89.1
BB Blackburn and Burnley	83.2
BD Bradford	95.4
BH Bournemouth	88.3
BL Bolton	87.8
BN Brighton	91.8
BR Bromley	87.8
BS Bristol	86.4
BT Northern Ireland	86.9
CA Carlisle	87.9
CB Cambridge	88.7
CF Cardiff	87.6
CH Chester and Deeside	80.9
CM Chelmsford	85.3
CO Colchester	88.7
CR Croydon	89.0
CT Canterbury	90.5
CV Coventry and Warwickshire	91.7
CW Crewe	89.6
DA Dartford	88.1
DD Dundee	88.9
DE Derby	91.2
DG Dumfries	91.3
DH Durham	91.1
DL Darlington	91.2
DN Doncaster	93.1
DT Dorchester	88.7
DY Dudley	84.7
E London East	73.4
EC City of London	83.2
EH Edinburgh	88.2
EN Enfield	74.9
EX Exeter	87.9
FK Falkirk	87.2
FY Fylde	86.7
G Glasgow	85.4
GL Gloucester	86.6
GU Guildford	85.2
HA Harrow	78.5
HD Huddersfield	92.1
HG Harrogate	86.7
HP Hemel Hempstead	85.1
HR Hereford	87.0
HS Hebrides	79.6
HU Hull	89.0
HX Halifax	92.6
IG Ilford	86.1
IP Ipswich	81.2
IV Inverness	89.4
KA Kilmarnock	88.0
KT Kingston upon Thames	90.2
KW Kirkwall	84.2
KY Kirkcaldy	91.9
L Liverpool	82.4

Postcode area performance (April to June 2001)—first class stamped and metered

Postcode area	*All posted*
LA Lancaster	86.0
LD Llandrindod Wells	88.5
LE Leicester	92.2
LL North Wales	80.8
LN Lincoln	91.5
LS Leeds	89.4
LU Luton	80.8
M Manchester	82.5
ME Maidstone	88.5
MK Milton Keynes	85.1
ML Motherwell	84.2
N London north	81.3
NE Newcastle	88.5
NG Nottingham	89.3
NN Northamptonshire	86.6
NP Newport	84.7
NR Norwich	88.2
NW London north west	79.5
OL Oldham	86.1
PA Paisley	86.0
PE Peterborough	83.7
PH Perth	89.7
PL Plymouth	87.7
PO Portsmouth	89.9
PR Preston	86.5
RG Reading	85.2
RH Redhill	89.6
RM Romford	87.7
S Sheffield	93.2
SA Swansea	90.7
SE London south east	81.7
SG Stevenage	89.6
SK Stockport	86.0
SL Slough	83.2
SM Sutton	92.4
SN Swindon	83.2
SO Southampton	87.9
SP Salisbury	83.4
SR Sunderland	93.2
SS Southend-on-Sea	82.1
ST Stoke-on-Trent	86.1
SW London south west	77.4
SY Shrewsbury and mid Wales	84.7
TA Taunton	86.6
TD Borders	90.2
TF Telford	86.9
TN Tonbridge	86.0
TQ Torquay	86.5
TR Truro	90.7
TS Teeside	92.2
TW Twickenham	91.4
UB Uxbridge	80.1
W London west	79.2
WA Warrington	87.8
WC London west central	79.8
WD Watford	78.2
WF Wakefield	86.6
WN Wigan	91.3
WR Worcester	90.3
WS Walsall	88.1
WV Wolverhampton	88.1
YO York	89.6
ZE Lerwick	85.6

Icelandic Trawlermen (Compensation)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for compensation for Icelandic trawlermen have been rejected; and how many remain to be decided. [9977]

Nigel Griffiths: At mid-October, 4,199 claims had been rejected and 1,781 were either on hold pending a decision about the 1979 cut-off date or awaiting further information, mainly from claimants themselves.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total amount of compensation claims paid to Icelandic trawlermen, broken down by port. [9980]

Nigel Griffiths: The information is given in the table.

Compensation scheme for former Icelandic water trawlermen—payments as at 16 October 2001

	Number of payments	*Total amount paid (£)*
Hull	948	11,046,030
Grimsby	334	2,585,995
Fleetwood	201	2,059,144
Blackpool	30	240,361
Cleethorpes	82	668,046
Newcastle	182	2,137,199
West Yorkshire	114	1,197,687
Aberdeen	38	245,313
Others	210	1,862,056

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for Icelandic trawlermen's compensation are not yet dealt with; and what legal advice she has received on the validity of this delay. [9978]

Nigel Griffiths: All claims received have been scrutinised and entered into the special computer system established for the scheme. I am satisfied that there has been no undue delay.

Post Offices (Wales)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in Wales in each of the last three years. [8777]

Mr. Alexander: I am informed by the Post Office Ltd. that historical data on the numbers of post office openings and closures are not maintained separately. The numbers of post offices operating in Wales over the last three financial years were as follows:

	Number
End March 1998	1,513
End March 1999	1,501
End March 2000	1,470
End March 2001	1,402

I am informed by the Post Office that an on-going revision of data has affected individual country totals. I also understand that, across the UK as a whole, of the closures in the year ending March 2001, the Post Office designate only four as permanent.

A £2 million fund to support relocation and refurbishment initiatives by volunteer or community groups to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where the traditional post office is closing received parliamentary approval in July.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Wind Turbines

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to receive the findings of the study which her Department is undertaking on interference to radar and navigational aid from wind turbines. [10010]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* The consultants are expected to report towards the end of next year.

Post Office

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the number of Employment Tribunal applicants employed by Royal Mail/Consignia in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [9102]

Mr. Alexander: Operational issues of this kind are a matter for Consignia.

I am advised by the company that the number of employment tribunals for each of the last three years is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1998–99	465
1999–2000	555
2000–01	783

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many working days were lost through industrial action in the Post Office in each of the last 10 years. [9095]

Mr. Alexander: Operational issues including industrial relations are a matter for Consignia.

I am advised by the company that the number of working days lost through industrial action in each of the last 10 years is as follows:

	Number of days lost
1990–91	18,583
1991–92	771
1992–93	4,056
1993–94	17,065
1994–95	37,843
1995–96	63,555
1996–97	810,938
1997–98	44,664
1998–99	15,800
1999–2000	22,199
2000–01	62,908

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total number of employees in the Post Office was in each the last five years. [9096]

Mr. Alexander: Operational issues are a matter for Consignia.

I am advised by the company that the number of full-time equivalent employees in each of the last five years is as follows.

	Number
1997	193,633
1998	197,712
1999	197,531
2000	207,301
2001	217,964

Euro (Business Invoices)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many British businesses invoice in euros. [10131]

Nigel Griffiths: No official data are available on the number of British businesses that invoice in euros.

Postal Workers (Safety)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to protect postal workers from exposure to material contaminated with biological or chemical agents. [10299]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Practical measures to protect postal workers are a matter for the companies concerned who are strongly advised to follow the guidance issued by central Government, their agencies and the police. This advice is being kept under review.

In the case of Consignia, the company is carrying out an assessment with the Health and Safety Executive of what measures are needed to protect its employees.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

9. **Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Afghanistan. [8357]

35. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the security situation in Afghanistan. [8386]

Mr. Hoon: For three weeks, United States and British forces have been engaged in military action against Usama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda terrorist network and the Taliban regime that shelters them in Afghanistan. The aims of the military action are clear: to destroy the terrorist camps; to pressure the Taliban regime to end its support for Usama bin Laden; and to create the right conditions for future operations in Afghanistan to maintain that pressure.

We have achieved the first and third of these objectives. The terrorist camps that were known to be in use at the start of military campaign have successfully been put out of action. The coalition has achieved air superiority at medium and high level.

We are also making good progress against the second objective. We are now focusing on Taliban forces in the field, weakening their ability to retain control of key points of Afghanistan.

24. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implications of the military action in Afghanistan for future defence policy. [8375]

Mr. Hoon: The Strategic Defence Review and the experience and lessons from subsequent operations such as those in Kosovo have left us well placed to take on and defeat international terrorism. We have significantly improved important military capabilities including reconnaissance; intelligence; surveillance; target acquisition; precision strike; rapid deployment; and command and control. But the attacks on the United States have shown that we must build on this success and go further.

With operations continuing, it would be premature to draw conclusions on the implications for our future defence policy. We are, however, carrying out further work to ensure that our concepts, force structures, and capabilities are exactly those that we need in order to deal with asymmetric threats of the kind that we saw on 11 September. This work will look both at the defence of the UK and at our capability to counter and deter terrorism abroad.

The Ministry of Defence and the Services have well-practised systems for learning and implementing lessons from operations. These will be applied to Operation Veritas. This will ensure that our plans and policies evolve and that we are prepared for the challenges that we may face in the future.

Veterans

16. **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress the veterans forum has made in addressing the needs of veterans; and if he will make a statement. [8366]

23. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress the veterans forum has made in addressing the needs of veterans; and if he will make a statement. [8374]

Dr. Moonie: I have chaired two meetings of the veterans forum at which I have agreed with representatives of the veterans' organisations a vision and initial work programme for the initiative. A key objective has been that the initiative should be taken forward as a partnership between ourselves and the veterans' community. We are addressing issues of identity, communication, recognition and care and the action plan we have developed for the future will be focusing in particular on those veterans who are most vulnerable.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his strategic priorities as Minister for Veterans Affairs are. [10216]

Dr. Moonie: As Minister for Veterans Affairs my four strategic priorities are:

1. To develop a partnership between Government and the veterans' organisations.
2. To recognise the special status of veterans by strengthening the identity of veterans as a group to whom society owes a particular debt.
3. To gain better recognition of the contribution and achievements of veterans through education, and the part played by veterans in securing national and international stability.
4. To identify ways of improving the level of care provided to the ex-service community with particular emphasis on those most in need.

Royal Air Force

17. **Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total value is of *(a)* operating and *(b)* planned private finance initiative/public-private partnership contracts relating to the Royal Air Force. [8367]

Dr. Moonie: The total value of the signed PFI deals which are specific to the RAF or where the RAF is the major user is around £850 million in net present value terms. It is not possible to make a meaningful estimate of the total through-life costs of planned PFI contracts at present. A number of projects are under consideration. They include the provision of our future air-to-air refuelling capability and the UK Military Flying Training Services, where the RAF will be a major customer. Each of these projects could involve through-life costs of £10 billion or over. The RAF has also benefited from tri-Service deals such as the provision of commercial vehicles, materials handling and the Defence Fixed Telecommunications Services.

Operation Veritas

18. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Operation Veritas. [8368]

Mr. Hoon: Operation Veritas is the United Kingdom's military contribution to the global response to the terrorist atrocities in the United States on 11 September.

The aims of military action over the past three weeks are clear: to destroy the terrorist camps; to pressure the Taliban regime to end its support for Usama bin Laden; and to create the right conditions for future operations in Afghanistan to maintain that pressure.

We have already achieved the first and third of these objectives. The terrorist camps that were known to have been in use at the start of the military action campaign have successfully been put out of action. The coalition has achieved air superiority at medium and high level.

We are making good progress against the second objective. We are now focusing on Taliban forces in the field, weakening their ability to retain control of key parts of Afghanistan.

Gurkhas

19. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gurkha soldiers are serving in the British Army; and with which units. [8369]

20. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase the number of service personnel in the Gurkha regiments; and if he will make a statement. [8370]

Mr. Ingram: The total number of trained Gurkhas in the British Army as at 1 September was 3,500.

Gurkhas undertake a number of roles, the most significant being infantry but there are also Gurkha Engineers, Gurkha Logisticians and Gurkha Signal specialists. The number of units in the UK in which Gurkhas are currently serving are varied but their most significant collective numbers outside the main Gurkha units are in the Gurkha Reinforcement Companies.

Army Manpower

21. **Mr. Djanogly:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Army to reach its full manning strengths. [8371]

Mr. Ingram: The Army remains firmly committed to achieving full manning by 2005.

Ethnic Minority Recruitment

22. **Mr. Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures the armed forces are taking to improve recruitment in the armed services of people from minority ethnic communities. [8373]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces continue to make vigorous and focused efforts to recruit more of their personnel from the British ethnic minority communities. All three Services have highly active Recruiting and Diversity Action Teams, located in areas of high ethnic minority population; they are engaged in numerous initiatives aimed specifically at encouraging more people from diverse backgrounds into joining the armed forces.

Exercise Saif Sareea II

25. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops have taken part in Exercise Saif Sareea II. [8376]

Mr. Hoon: Approximately 22,500 military personnel, drawn from all three Services, have deployed to Oman to take part in Exercise Saif Sareea II.

29. **Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what programme is in place to assess the success of Exercise Saif Sareea II. [8380]

Mr. Hoon: A comprehensive process has been established to assess whether the exercise objectives have been achieved. This process covers the maritime, land, and air environments, as well as the joint task force level. We will also be working with our Omani colleagues to assess the success of the exercise from a combined perspective.

Terrorism

26. **Mr. Kevan Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his Russian counterpart on international terrorism. [8377]

Mr. Hoon: I met my Russian counterpart, Sergei Ivanov, in Moscow on 9 October. We had valuable discussions on international terrorism and a range of other issues.

Together with NATO colleagues, I also discussed terrorism with Mr. Ivanov in Brussels on 26 September.

Macedonia

27. **Albert Owen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts on operations in Macedonia. [8378]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is in regular contact with the Secretary General of NATO, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, and has discussed Macedonia with him. He has also recently attended the NATO Informal Defence Ministers meeting on 26–27 September and the EU Informal Defence Ministers meeting on 12 October where he discussed a range of matters with NATO colleagues.

A400M

28. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the A400M programme. [8379]

Dr. Moonie: Six of the eight participating nations signed the A400M MOU in June. Since then, the focus has been on progressing contract and price negotiations. We are close to concluding these negotiations and Germany and Portugal are moving towards achieving final parliamentary and ministerial approval. On 16 October, Italy announced its decision not to continue with the programme at present, but the A400M project nevertheless remains fully viable.

European Security and Defence Policy

30. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about progress in implementing the European security and defence policy. [8381]

Mr. Hoon: A Capabilities Improvement Conference in November will review progress already made towards the capability target known as the Headline Goal, as well as future plans. It will then address further actions needed. The analysis underpinning this review has been done in full co-operation with NATO. The conference will also review the additional contributions offered by the non-EU European allies and other countries who are candidates for EU accession.

The EU's political and military bodies in the field of European Security and Defence Policy have been made permanent and have been active in preparing for the implementation of arrangements on such matters as crisis management procedures, security, exercise policy and co-operation with NATO. Work will continue on these issues. The Secretary General High Representative, Javier Solana, and the NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson, have been in close consultation, and there have been a number of meetings between alliance and European Union political and military bodies.

Recruitment (Young People)

31. **Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has for promoting careers in the armed forces to young people. [8382]

Mr. Ingram: We have many initiatives aimed at promoting and encouraging young people to consider a career in the Armed Services. Each Service has school presentation teams, and about 1,000 schools are visited each year. Each Service also deploys Recruiting

Presentation Teams who, together with armed forces Careers Office staff, visit schools, careers fairs, exhibitions, youth clubs and organisations and other events. We estimate that over 10,500 visits are undertaken each year. The Services also offer direct work experience to young people through a variety of courses and visits to Service establishments and ships. We aim to offer anyone considering a service career the chance to take a closer look. Armed forces recruiting includes the use of a dedicated careers website for each of the Services. These are proving to be very successful. All these initiatives are supplemented by continued multi-media advertising campaigns.

We intend to expand this effort by increasing the number of schools presentation teams, appointing a schools adviser in the Ministry of Defence, setting up a schools page on our website and developing material for teachers and pupils. All of this will be linked in to the curricula.

International Peacekeeping

32. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future role of British forces in international peacekeeping. [8383]

Mr. Hoon: Since the Strategic Defence Review in 1998, our armed forces have been involved in both continuing and new peacekeeping operations, such as those in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, East Timor, and Cyprus. These recent experiences have shown that our armed forces are particularly effective at carrying out these difficult tasks and so acting as a force for good in the world.

We remain committed to participating, where appropriate and possible, in international peacekeeping operations.

Tactical Communications

33. **Helen Southworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in improving tactical communications for the armed forces in the last 12 months. [8384]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths).

Armed Services Manpower

36. **Mrs. Laing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the manpower strength is of each of the armed services. [8387]

Mr. Ingram: As at 1 September, the trained strength of the Naval Service was 37,780, the Army 100,304 and the RAF 49,535.

Procurement

37. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made to procurement priorities since the strategic defence review was published. [8388]

Mr. Hoon: Recent and current operations have shown that the procurement priorities set out in the strategic defence review were broadly correct. We shall be looking again to ensure we have the right capabilities to meet the additional challenges from international terrorism.

Joint Strike Fighter

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in the selection of the prime contractor for the engineering manufacturing development phase of the joint strike fighter programme. [11494]

Mr. Hoon: It was announced in Washington on Friday 26 October that Lockheed Martin has been selected for the contract award.

The UK participated fully in the selection process, and the decision is good news for our armed forces and for UK defence companies teamed with Lockheed Martin.

The aircraft, which will meet our future joint combat aircraft (FJCA) requirement, will incorporate advanced stealth technology and will be able to conduct multi-role operations from the sea and from the land. The decision represents a further important step, following the strategic defence review, to provide the UK with up-to-date flexible expeditionary air power capability.

UK industry stands to gain substantial benefits. The value of the work for UK companies over the engineering and manufacturing development (EMD) phase is of the order of £3 billion with much further work in production and support activities in years to come. Lockheed Martin assesses that up to 3,500 jobs could be sustained or created during EMD rising to 8,500 in the later phases.

Service Accommodation

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact on the recruitment and retention of service personnel of the standard of accommodation. [9797]

Dr. Moonie: We have no evidence of a link between the standard of accommodation and recruiting. However, continuous attitude surveys among Service personnel and their families do indicate that the standard of accommodation may influence personnel in making their decision to leave, although it is far from being the most significant factor.

We recognise, therefore, the importance of good quality accommodation for Service personnel and their families and we are committed to upgrading both Service Families Accommodation and Single Living Accommodation. In Great Britain the Defence Housing Executive is aiming to upgrade all of its core Service Families Accommodation to Standard 1 for condition (the highest grade) by November 2005. Furthermore, a project team was formed this year to oversee £1 billion worth of investment over the next 10 years to upgrade Single Living Accommodation. This money is in addition to the £1 billion that was already committed to the upgrade programme over the same period.

We believe that these commitments to upgrading accommodation will benefit all Service personnel and their families and thus have a positive effect on armed forces retention.

Recruitment (Commonwealth Countries)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to recruit more people from Commonwealth countries to the armed forces. [10066]

Mr. Ingram: Recruitment into the armed forces is open to British and Commonwealth citizens, and Republic of Ireland nationals. The Services do not actively promote armed forces careers in Commonwealth countries. Selection and recruitment teams visit those Commonwealth countries where the number of expected applicants justify the effort, and where an invitation to conduct visits has been received from the Government in question.

Negotiations are currently under way for the next, annual tri-Service recruiting mission to the UK Dependent Territory of St. Helena to take place in June 2002 in conjunction with the island's centenary celebrations. The Navy plans to visit St. Vincent and the Grenadines in February 2002.

The Army plans to send selection teams to St. Lucia in February and May 2002, and to St. Vincent and the Grenadines in July 2002 at the request of the respective Governments. The RAF has no current plans to recruit abroad.

Overseas Operations

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the operational name, location and strength of all operations under way by UK armed forces overseas; and if he will make a statement. [9987]

Mr. Ingram: As of 23 October 2001, the operational deployments of UK Service personnel are as shown in the table.

Countries	*Military personnel*
Northern Ireland	some 13,500
Kosovo (including supporting elements in the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Greece	some 3,200
Bosnia (including support elements in Croatia and Italy	some 1,750
Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)	4
Cyprus	some 3,600 (including some 400 supporting UN operations)
Falkland Islands	some 1,200
Gibraltar	some 400
Sierra Leone	some 400 personnel on the ground (including around 20 members of the UN operation)
Middle East countries in support of UN Security Resolutions in respect of Iraq	some 950

We provide support to the UN operations in:

Kuwait: 11

East Timor: 4

The Democratic Republic of Congo: 5

Georgia: 7.

We also maintain patrols by our ballistic nuclear deterrent submarines.

In addition, we have been providing around 4,200 personnel in support of the coalition against international terrorism, based in the theatre and in the US.

Operational codewords, when linked to their meaning, are classified, and I am withholding this information in accordance with clause 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of the expenditure by his Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation; which expenditure programmes are allocated with respect to this index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if he will make a statement. [8940]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence allocates defence expenditure in order to improve operational effectiveness and achieve value for money. Since 1999 the MOD has used the Index of Multiple Deprivation, along with other measures of social conditions, to inform decisions such as unit moves, site rationalisations and investment decisions on new facilities. The MOD does not, however, allocate expenditure with sole reference or respect to the Index of Multiple Deprivation or other measures of relative geographic deprivation.

Although the MOD does not solely allocate expenditure with respect to measures of geographic deprivation, a number of the activities we sponsor do assist areas of high deprivation. The 'Skill Force' programme, for example, is helping 47 schools in 11 areas, all of which are in areas that are among the most deprived in the UK. Skill Force is a MOD sponsored programme that uses retired military instructors to deliver a range of vocational skills training to young people.

Meat

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussion he has had with the Meat and Livestock Commission about the sourcing of meat for consumption by the armed forces from United Kingdom sources; and if he will make a statement. [10792]

Dr. Moonie: We continue to work closely with the Meat and Livestock Commission to explore ways to increase the proportion of British meat we buy competitively. This has been a successful partnership and contributed to, for example, the supply of 100 per cent. British beef to our UK-based Service personnel between autumn 1998 and summer 2000. We continually monitor, with the Meat and Livestock Commission, the list of meat products required for the armed forces, and look for products which can be supplied from wholly United Kingdom sources. As a direct result of this communication and frequent meetings between the Defence Catering Group, the Meat and Livestock Commission and '3663', our food contractor, a range of British meat products have been added to a "core" list of products available to the armed forces, including British lamb shoulder and British thick rib beef. We will continue our dialogue with the Meat and Livestock Commission in order to maximise the amount of British product that can be supplied competitively.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much *(a)* beef, *(b)* lamb and *(c)* pork was purchased since 1 January 2000 for consumption by the armed forces; how much of it was sourced from the United Kingdom; at what total costs; and what the per tonne cost from (i) United Kingdom and (ii) overseas sources has been. [10791]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1997 the task of buying food for the armed forces has been contracted to '3663' (formerly known as Booker Foodservice) and it is the Ministry of Defence's policy to require them to seek the best price in the 'open market; to do otherwise would contravene European law. Our contractor is specifically required to give full consideration to British products, which we look to them to buy wherever they are competitive.

Since January 2000, 3,983 tonnes of beef, 1,369 tonnes of lamb and 2,075 tonnes of pork have been supplied to the armed forces by '3663'. The average annual cost of beef and lamb is some £6 million and £2 million respectively. The average annual cost of all pig meat, including pork, is £2.5 million.

In the case of beef, during the year 2000, 87 per cent. of all beef supplied (1,892 tonnes) was sourced from the UK. This followed the agreement we secured from the EC to release British intervention beef at competitive prices. As was announced to the House in July 2000 and again in May 2001, these stocks ran out during the summer of 2000 and market prices dictated that a mixture of British and imported beef would be required. Consequently, this year 31 per cent. of beef (571 tonnes) has been sourced from the UK.

In the case of pork and lamb, since January 2000, 84 per cent. of all pork supplied (1,750 tonnes and 4 per cent. of all lamb supplied (17 tonnes) was sourced from the UK.

We continue to work in partnership with '3663' to explore ways to increase the proportion of British meat that is supplied to our armed forces. Both the Ministry and '3663' remain committed to buying meat from UK sources wherever they are competitive.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will instruct procurement officers responsible for the supply of meat to British service personnel stationed in the Falkland Islands to buy exclusively from the EU-approved abattoir on the islands. [10800]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a contract for food supply with '3663' formerly trading as Booker Foodservice. The contract includes responsibility for the procurement of all commodities including meat and offal. The role of the Ministry of Defence's Defence Catering Group (DCG) is to work with the contractor to ensure that meat supplied to UK armed forces is procured from reputable sources and offers best value for money. This partnering approach extends to DCG making recommendations to '3663' regarding new sources of supply and supplementing '3663's own sourcing and quality assurance activities. The DCG is monitoring the development of the fledgling meat industry in the Falkland Islands and continues to assess the volumes of production, product availability and the quality standard of meat from the limited range of products available from the abattoir recently constructed to EU standards. It is understood that, for the foreseeable future, the output of the abattoir will be limited to lamb only. Any decision to procure meat from this particular facility to feed British service personnel in the Falkland Islands will ultimately rest with '3663' who will ensure that our stringent quality requirements are met or exceeded.

Tungsten

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the military value of tungsten as an alternative to depleted uranium. [8237]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence has funded research into both the metallurgical and ballistic aspects of tungsten penetrators in tank ammunition over a period of more than 30 years. With other UK research this has produced extensive data on the performance of different tungsten materials and designs. Depleted uranium has consistently outperformed tungsten alloy equivalents as a kinetic penetrator when employed in anti-armour weapon systems; its use, therefore, offers increased operational effectiveness. In recent years, a new tungsten round has been developed for the Royal Navy's Phalanx close-in-weapons system. Anti-armour properties are not important for this weapon system; in this case, a tungsten round offers improved performance. Since 1996 all replacement ammunition for the Phalanx system has been of the tungsten variety.

Sovereign Bases

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights is applicable to servicemen serving on sovereign bases. [10503]

Mr. Ingram: While the European Convention on Human Rights does not apply within the UK sovereign base areas on Cyprus, Service personnel are able to assert their rights under Article 6 of the Convention against UK public authorities wherever they are stationed.

Biological and Chemical Threats

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of measures to detect biological and chemical threats to British forces. [8360]

Dr. Moonie: We take very seriously the need to protect UK armed forces personnel against all threats, including the potential hazards presented by chemical and biological weapons. We therefore constantly monitor the threat, and make adjustments to our response as changing circumstances warrant. Service personnel are protected by a combination of detectors, protective equipment, medical countermeasures and operational procedures, supported by a proactive research and development programme to enhance our defensive capability in this area.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use of depleted uranium has been authorised by his Department for use in the production of military equipment or materials of any kind within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [10630]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence employs depleted uranium (DU) in three principal ways. It is used in ammunition for the weapons systems for the Challenger II tank and the Royal Navy's Phalanx close in weapon system. A DU-based round was also developed for use in the Challenger 1 tank for use in the Gulf conflict. C-130J/K Hercules and Tristar aircraft and some Wessex helicopters use DU as either a counterweight or as ballast. DU is used to shield radiological sources (such as nuclear reactors) and in nuclear medicine. In addition, small amounts of DU are used for defence research purposes, and some nuclear weapons also contain uranium in this form.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what immediate changes to armed force deployment in Northern Ireland he plans; and if he will make a statement. [11016]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the House on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 302–19. While the Government have made it clear they will consider further moves on normalisation, any subsequent measures will take account of the prevailing security situation at the time.

Service Complements

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects each of the three Services to reach their full manning strengths. [8359]

Mr. Ingram: Although the Naval Service will not achieve broad manning balance by the year 2003–04, it is determined to do so before 2005 and work continues on measures to achieve this. The RAF is in broad manning balance and aims to achieve its Public Service Agreement target of full manning by March 2004. The Army remains committed to full manning by 2005.

TREASURY

Payroll Services Review

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Mr. Patrick Carter's review of payroll services will be completed. [8272]

Dawn Primarolo: Patrick Carter's review of payroll services has been completed.

Expenditure (Scotland)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1261W, how much money in real terms has been spent in Scotland on policy areas which are the responsibility of *(a)* the Scottish Executive, *(b)* the Scotland Office and *(c)* other UK Government Departments since 1 July 1999. [10125]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information on expenditure by the Scottish Executive and the Scotland Office is published in the Annual Expenditure Report of the Scottish Executive and the Scotland Office Departmental Report. The latest available breakdown of identifiable total managed expenditure by country was published in Chapter 8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses in April 2001.

NHS Funding

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research his Department is conducting into different mechanisms for funding the national health service; and if he will make a statement. [9955]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* Budget 2001 announced that Derek Wanless, former Group Chief Executive of Natwest bank, would be leading the review commissioned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to provide a long-term assessment of the technological, demographic and medical trends over the next two decades that will affect the health service.

In the light of these trends, the review will identify the key factors which will determine the financial and other resources required to ensure that the NHS can provide a publicly funded, comprehensive, high-quality service available on the basis of clinical need and not the ability to pay. The review will report to the Chancellor by April 2002.

National Changeover Plan

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost to date has been of the Government's national changeover plan. [10248]

Ruth Kelly: Details of expenditure on national changeover planning were included in the Fourth Report on Euro Preparations, published on 6 November 2000. Copies of the report are available in the Library of the House.

The Government will provide an updated breakdown of public sector spending in the next progress report, which will be published later this year.

Climate Change Levy

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenue would be forgone if full exemption from the climate change levy were applied to combined heat and power plants. [10431]

Mr. Boateng: No such estimate has been made.

Frozen Assets

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will happen to the assets that were frozen by the Government from the bank accounts under UN Resolutions 1267 (Taliban), and 1333 (Usama bin Laden). [10160]

Ruth Kelly: UN Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1333 call upon states to freeze the assets of the persons listed in the annexes to each UNSCR. The assets will remain frozen until the Security Council repeals the resolutions.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) for what reason it was decided to dispose of items of silver originally ordered for the Privy Council; and if he will make a statement; [10082]

(2) if he will withdraw from sale the Privy Council silver due to be sold at public auction on 30 October; and if he will make a statement; [10076]

(3) if he will list the *(a)* silver, *(b)* paintings, *(c)* sculptures, *(d)* books and *(e)* other works of art disposed of by his Department at auction or by private treaty in each of the last five years; [10081]

(4) of which assets held by his Department he plans to dispose; [10079]

(5) if the Privy Council silver which is up for sale was offered to public institutions before the decision to dispose of the items at public auction; [10083]

(6) if he will make it his policy to penalise Government Departments which do not dispose of assets that do not produce a return. [10077]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans his Department has to sell off *(a)* silver candlesticks, *(b)* silver candle snuffers, *(c)* silver trays, *(d)* silver meat-skewers, *(e)* paintings, *(f)* antiques, *(g)* fine wines and *(h)* furniture; if he will list such items *(i)* sold by his Department since May 1997 and (ii) planned to be sold by his Department over the next two years; if he will list the age and value of each item; and if he will make a statement. [9729]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting is encouraging a number of Departments, including HM Treasury, to reduce their asset holdings in order to focus public resources where they are most needed. That process will continue.

The Government remain of the view that HM Treasury is not the most appropriate long-term owner of the four lots of silver items made for the Privy Council and referred to in the question. However, they recognise the case which has been made for ensuring that those items are available to be seen by the UK public.

A number of possible future owners of these items have come forward. To allow discussions with those parties to proceed, the items have been withdrawn from auction. Any further proposals which may come forward will also be explored.

Health Spending

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his target of increasing health spending to the EU average includes raising non-Government health spending to average EU levels. [9925]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

We aim to increase total health expenditure in the United Kingdom up to the average of the countries of the European Union, which is around 8 per cent. of gross domestic product. By the end of the present spending review period (2003–04), we expect that total UK expenditure on health will have reached 7.7 per cent. of gross domestic product. This assumes private sector spending will remain at around 1 per cent. of GDP. Expenditure beyond this period will be decided in future spending reviews.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Policy Announcements

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes in policy relating to *(a)* issuing press notices and *(b)* making other forms of announcements he has put into effect since 11 September. [10711]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have not put into place any new arrangements for issuing press notices or making any other forms of announcements since 11 September. There has been no change in policy.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what criteria he used to determine the pathfinder areas for the introduction of the Jobcentre Plus work-focused interviewing scheme. [10803]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices were chosen to provide a mixture of rural, urban and inner city offices. Other criteria used included having the capacity for the staff processing claims to be close to the staff giving work-focused interviews; having the capacity for Jobpoints to be installed by October; being in clusters linked to a single Benefits Agency district or office within a district; having sufficient office space to cope with more customers; having a high level of performance and good working relationships with stakeholders; and having boundaries which matched local authority boundaries.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what specific measures he has proposed to allow those living in rural constituencies without a jobcentre nearby access to personal advice from his Department. [8273]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: From April next year, the Employment Service and the parts of the Benefits Agency that support people of working age will come together to form a new business, Jobcentre Plus. We are aiming to launch 15 of the 17 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder areas this month, comprising around 50 pathfinder offices. We anticipate that the remaining two pathfinder areas will be operating by the end of the year, once building work is completed. As the service rolls out, we will deliver an integrated service to employers and benefit claimants of working age nationally.

Jobcentre Plus will offer a significantly enhanced telephone service that will improve access to the service for those who do not live near a Jobcentre Plus office. Each Jobcentre Plus pathfinder office will have a dedicated telephone contact centre open from 8.30 am to 6.00 pm. Customers will be able to make their initial claim to benefit through this service and book appointments with personal advisers. Customers will also be able to access job vacancies over the telephone through Employment Service Direct.

Jobcentre Plus will also have its own internet site with information on the service and links to the Employment Service Job Bank and Worktrain sites, which offer a vast range of job and training opportunities and advice on job searching.

There are several Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices in rural locations, and the managers in those places will be further developing the service they offer to meet the needs of rural communities.

The development of services for people in rural communities is not confined to the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders, with both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service already undertaking valuable outreach work. In north Yorkshire for example, the Northallerton and Richmond Jobcentres are engaged in outreach work to some of their outlying rural areas. Vacancy lists are put on display in a large number of local post offices and Jobcentre "clinics" are held in three locations—Hawes, Leyburn and Catterick—for half a day each week.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received regarding his plans to remove protective screens for Benefits Agency staff; what risk assessment has been undertaken and by whom; what consultation he has had with the relevant trade unions; and what account he has taken of the views expressed. [10802]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus is a new service which brings together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency which deal with people of working age. Jobcentre Plus will provide a far more personalised, customer friendly and work-focused service for both employers and individuals. The first 49 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices opened on 22 October.

Central to the new service is our ability to provide face-to-face advice to members of the public. That can be done only in a predominantly unscreened environment. To that end we have invested considerable sums of money in building a far more friendly and safer environment than any we have had in the past. In particular we take the issue of the safety of both the public and our staff very seriously. We have therefore been involved in discussions with the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) about some of their members' concerns about the new working arrangements, both at national and local level.

Employment Service and Land Securities Trillium risk assessors have carried out risk assessments in each pathfinder office. Drawing on those assessments, and following consultation with local trade union health and safety representatives, we have introduced a series of extra security measures. These include: wide coverage by closed circuit television; training for staff in how to handle difficult situations; better management in each office to avoid difficult situations building up; panic alarms; and more visible and more effective security guards. Additionally, in each pathfinder area there are screened facilities to deal with individuals and parts of the business which pose a greater risk. We believe that these measures demonstrate that we are taking security even more seriously than we have done in the past.

Benefits Take-up

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what date he received the 'Take-up of Income Related Benefits: Statistics for 1999–2000' report which was published on 27 September; and what arrangements he made for the publication of the report on receiving it. [10799]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The report 'Take-up of Income Related Benefits: 1999–2000' was published in line with departmental protocol for the release of national statistics. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State received an advance copy of the report 48 hours before the publication date. The publication date was set by DWP statisticians and pre-announced in the Office for National Statistics' series "Updates" on 10 September.

Motability

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the financial accounts made to him by Motability Finance Ltd. for each of the last five years; and if he will make it his policy that in future years the financing of the Motability scheme be undertaken on a not-for-profit basis. [10804]

Maria Eagle: Copies of the financial accounts of Motability Finance Ltd. for each of the five years to 30 September 2000 have been placed in the Library. The level of the profit margin allowed to Motability Finance Ltd. is a matter for negotiation between Motability and Motability Finance Ltd. The allowed profit margin since 1 March 1999 has been 0.85 per cent. per annum.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many persons left the new deal for young people for *(a)* unsubsidised jobs and *(b)* sustained unsubsidised jobs in small and medium enterprises according to the most recent available figures; and if he

will give a breakdown of this figure as a proportion of those leaving the gateway period and each of the four options; [7983]

(2) how many of the persons on the full time education and training option under the new deal for young people *(a)* left the option for employment, *(b)* completed their course and *(c)* obtained a qualification in each year since the inception of the new deal; and if he will list the qualifications obtained. [8124]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The results of the new deal for young people are contained in the monthly Statistical First Releases which are placed in the Library.

Pension Credit

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research he has undertaken to ensure that the pension credit is sufficiently easy to understand by the target market. [9744]

Mr. McCartney: The Department has taken into consideration results from a range of research, including "Overcoming Barriers: Older People and Income Support" (DSS Research Report No 100, 1999) and "Attitudes and Aspirations of Older People: A Qualitative Study" (DSS Research Report 102, 1999), and responses to the consultation exercise, "The Pension Credit: a consultation paper" (Cm 4900, November 2000), in the design of pension credit.

Departmental Advertising

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the final cost of each of his Department's advertising campaigns was in 2000–01, broken down into *(a)* advertising media and production and *(b)* other costs. [7899]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table:

£

	Advertising and media	*Other costs*
Targeting benefit fraud	5,747,000	402,252
National Benefit Fraud Hotline advertising	425,178	—
Minimum Income Guarantee	3,365,000	[1]176,000
Inherited SERPS	340,000	345,000
Winter Fuel Payments	616,000	294,000
Pensions Education[2]	[3]5,232,000	1,297,000
Bereavement Benefits	155,000	90,000
New Deal for Young People	558,201	951,728
New Deal 50+	2,175,367	63,793
New Deal Partners	99,445	67,310
Action Teams for Jobs	58,504	440
New Deal for Disabled People	31,372	240,387

[1] This includes £30,985 customer research into a new MIG claim form which straddled two financial years.

[2] In addition to the total of £6,529,062 (which was rounded to £6,530,000) £103,370 was spent on completing our previous pensions education activity (with a Monopoly theme) that preceded the new Working Dogs campaign, as well as some developmental work that was undertaken before the new Working Dogs Campaign was launched.

[3] The overall Pensions Education marketing budget figure remains unchanged at £6,529,062 (which was rounded to £6,530,000). Within this total, the advertising media and production cost given previously has changed from £5,212,000 to £5,232,000. This takes account of some photography costs that were previously included as part of "other costs", but can be directly attributed to advertising.

Means-tested Benefits

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department has spent in respect of each means-tested benefit, on *(a)* benefit up take advertising and *(b)* anti-fraud advertising; in respect of these benefits, how many members of staff are involved in (i) benefit up-take initiatives and (ii) anti-fraud initiatives; and if he will make a statement. [6733]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: During the financial year 2000–01, £3.54 million was spent on the Minimum Income Guarantee take up advertising campaign as well as £8.12 million on other benefit awareness advertising campaigns and £4.25 million on employment programmes.

£6.15 million was spent during 2000–01 on the Targeting Fraud advertising campaign and £425,000 was spent on advertising the National Benefit Fraud Hotline, which includes the Shared Fraud Hotline pilot.

We aim to ensure that all people receive the benefits that they are entitled to and that these benefits are administered in a secure manner. This means that encouraging benefit take-up and tackling fraud in the benefit system are integral to the work of all staff within the Department.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees formerly employed by the Benefits Agency have left to join the Pensions Service since its creation. [8972]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 4 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 196W that the Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus organisations would come into existence in April 2002.

A co-ordinated approach is being taken to staffing the new organisations in order to ensure business continuity across all parts of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what date he received the BFI report on the Benefits Agency which was published on 28 September; and what arrangements he made for the publication of the report on receiving it. [10798]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We received the BFI's report on the Benefits Agency on 26 September 2001.

We published the report on 28 September 2001 by placing a copy of the report in the House of Commons Library. In addition, an electronic copy of the report was made available on the BFI website which also advised that hard copies are available from the Department's Library.

To publicise the publication, we issued a press release. As with other BFI reports, copies of this report were distributed to a number of public bodies, local authorities and interested parties who had previously requested copies of BFI reports.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of *(a)* monetary error and *(b)* fraud in (i) Income Support, (ii) Jobseeker's Allowance and (iii) Housing Benefit for each year since 1997. [7472]

Malcolm Wicks: Ongoing estimates of the monetary value of fraud and error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance are published in the series of reports "Fraud and Error in Claims for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance" which are placed in the Library.

The latest estimate for the monetary value of fraud and error in Housing Benefit was published in the report "National Housing Benefit Accuracy Review 1997/98" which is also in the Library. In April this year we set up the Housing Benefit Review which will deliver an on-going measurement of fraud and error in Housing Benefit.

PRIME MINISTER

White Papers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions in the last 12 months confidential final revise proof copies of white papers have been made available under embargo to *(a)* the Lobby and Upper Gallery and *(b)* members of other organised groups of correspondents, before publication; and if he will make a statement. [10252]

The Prime Minister: Paragraphs 94–96 of the ministerial code set out the arrangements whereby confidential final revise proof copies of White Papers can be made available under embargo to the Lobby and Upper Gallery, and with discretion to members of other organised groups of correspondents, a short time before publication. Detailed information in the form requested is not held centrally.

Muslim Community

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many times he has met representatives of the Muslim community since 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [11393]

The Prime Minister: I have met representatives of the Muslim community on several occasions since 11 September. I have been struck by the way that Muslim leaders and clerics have responded to these terrible events. The vast majority of Muslims totally condemn the acts which are wholly contrary to the Islamic faith.

India

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to make an official visit to India. [11394]

The Prime Minister: I visited India on 5–6 October as part of the efforts to deepen the international coalition against terrorism. I have no plans for a further visit at present but wish to do so as soon as I can.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Islamic Marriages

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will require Islamic marriages entered into by persons who are UK citizens to be registered in the UK. [9990]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Marriage ceremonies which take place in England and Wales should be in accordance with the Marriage Act 1949. The Act allows for civil marriages to take place in a register office or approved premises.

The trustees of a mosque can apply for the building to be registered for marriages under s.41 of the Act. Once registered, marriages can take place there without the need for a separate civil ceremony.

Registration of Islamic marriages is already required in order to meet the criteria of the Marriage Act 1949.

Judges (Transport Arrangements)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent changes he has made to judges' transport arrangements applying to those using judges lodgings to make them more effective; what the savings from the changes are; and if he will make a statement. [9970]

Mr. Wills: As my hon. Friend will be aware, judges are provided with a car and driver for all travel between lodgings and courts and for other official journeys while at the lodgings. Judges are not provided with official transport for private travel.

A pilot exercise was carried out during 2000 to assess the feasibility of using multi-purpose vehicles (MPVs) to transport judges to and from lodgings. At smaller lodgings, the use of high-quality saloon cars has also been encouraged.

The Lord Chancellor has recently approved the introduction of more cost-effective transport across the lodgings network, focusing on the use of MPVs and saloon cars in place of limousines. The changes are likely to save over £200,000 per year once implemented.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Music Standards Fund

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was paid to each local education authority in England from the Music Standards Fund in each year since 1999. [9886]

Mr. Timms: The amounts paid to each LEA from the Music Standards Fund for each year since 1999 are contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

The figures for 2001–02 represent the grant allocated from the Music Standards Fund to each LEA and not amounts actually paid as we are still in the 2000–01 financial year.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the official meetings between Ministers and officials in her Department and representatives of the Local Government Association since 7 June, indicating in each case which representatives were present. [7491]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Details of meetings between Ministers and officials of the Department for Education and Skills and representatives of the Local Government Association are set out in the table.

Minister present	*Local Government Association representatives*	*Date*
Secretary of State; Stephen Timms	Graham Lane; David Wilcox	25 June 2001
Secretary of State; Stephen Timms	Graham Lane; Ronnie Norman	2 July 2001
Baroness Ashton	Graham Lane (Way Forward Group on School Governance)	3 July 2001
Secretary of State	Sir Jeremy Beecham	18 July 2001
Secretary of State	Sir Jeremy Beecham	30 July 2001
Margaret Hodge; John Healey	Graham Lane; David Wilcox; Ian Mearns	19 September 2001
Ivan Lewis	Graham Lane; David Wilcox; Richard Marbrow; Angela Roberts; Don Rule	25 September 2001
Stephen Timms	Graham Lane; David Cornwell; David Wilcox; Ronnie Norman	26 September 2001

Tuition Fees

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate the cost of the abolition of tuition fees in the 2002–03 financial year; what plans she has to review the impact of tuition fees on entry levels into higher education from social classes D and E; and if she will make a statement. [9078]

Margaret Hodge: The estimated cost of abolishing student contributions to tuition fees in England and Wales in the financial year 2002–03 would be £270 million in cash terms. This figure represents only a proportion of the full year cost. The full year cost, for academic year 2002–03, would be £410 million in cash terms setting aside any implications for student support. We are currently reviewing the student funding arrangements. We need to ensure that we have an appropriate balance between the contribution made by students, their families and the state to support our ambitions to widen access and participation in higher education. A range of policy options is being considered. No decisions have been taken.

Anglia Polytechnic University

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applicants were accepted for a place at the Anglia Polytechnic University at the beginning of the current academic year and in each of the previous three academic years for *(a)* full-time courses and *(b)* part-time courses. [9733]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has not yet published final figures for the number of accepted applicants at Anglia Polytechnic University this year. The latest published figures show that, by the end of June, applications for 2001 entry were 10,738, an increase of 13.8 per cent. on the same time last year.

Final figures for accepted applicants to full-time undergraduate courses in previous years are given in the first table; UCAS does not cover applicants to part-time undergraduate courses.

The available data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for entrants to part-time courses are given in the second table; final figures for 2000–01 will be available in December.

Accepted applicants via UCAS to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses at Anglia Polytechnic University

Year of entry	*Number*[1]
1998	1,942
1999	2,144
2000	1,893

[1] Covers first degrees and HND courses. Each applicant can make up to six applications

Entrants[1] *to part-time undergraduate*[2] *Courses at Anglia Polytechnic University*

Academic year	*Entrants*
1998–99	3,678
1999–2000	4,665

[1] Based on a census count as at December 1

[2] Covers first degree, HND, HNC and other undergraduate courses

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency's student record

School Financing

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she plans to announce her proposals to introduce a new system of finance for schools; and if she will make a statement. [10632]

Mr. Timms: As part of the review of local government funding we have set up two working groups, with local government and schools partners, to develop proposals for a new LEA and school funding system. We will be in a position to make proposals for the new system by the summer of 2002.

University Staff

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 42–44W, on university staff, when the information was first made public; and in what format. [10219]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* This information was first made public in the answer given on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 42–44W.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of employees *(a)* there are, *(b)* were transferred from the former training and enterprise councils, *(c)* were transferred from the former Further Education Funding Council, *(d)* were recruited directly from local authorities and *(e)* were recruited directly from private sector employers in each of the local learning and skills councils. [10291]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to my hon. Friend and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Education SSA

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what factors will be included in the standard spending assessment formula for education in Worcestershire; if she will consult on the formula prior to its introduction in April 2003; and if she will make a statement. [10796]

Mr. Timms: We expect that the new education funding formula for schools will consist of an amount per pupil, with enhancements for authorities where significant deprivation adds to education costs, and a separate enhancement for areas where schools need to pay more to recruit and retain staff. The Government will consult widely on the formulae for services funded through the local government finance system, including that for education, prior to the introduction of a new system in April 2003.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what transitional arrangements she plans to make during the move to a new standard spending assessment formula for education in Worcestershire from April 2003; and if she will make a statement. [10797]

Mr. Timms: There will be no changes to the current formula for education standard spending assessments before 2003–04, when we will be introducing a new system of funding assessments for schools and local education authorities. We have no plans to pay transitional grant in 2002–03.

Pupil Performance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the relative performance of year seven and year eight pupils in secondary and middle schools in the last three years. [11029]

Mr. Timms: We do not have data on which to base a statement.

Key Stage 1

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information is *(a)* collected by her Department and *(b)* published on the performance of individual schools at key stage 1; and what plans she has to widen publication. [11034]

Mr. Timms: At key stage 1, my Department collects individual pupil level data for task and test results in English and mathematics and teacher assessment results in English, mathematics and science. These results are aggregated at national level and published, together with the key stage 2 and 3 results, in a Statistical Release and included in the autumn package of pupil performance information that is sent to schools. Results aggregated at local education authority level are also published nationally. The key stage 1 results are not published at school level and there are no plans to widen the publication of these results.

Music Lessons

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many primary pupils indicated a wish to learn a musical instrument in the last 12 months; and how many did so. [11030]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not collect this information centrally, although we are keen to encourage primary school pupils to learn a musical instrument. We have pledged that, over time, all primary school pupils who want to will be able to do so. The Department is considering a range of options to fulfil this pledge. It is an important part of our drive to ensure that all pupils, regardless of their background, have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

We are also committed to supporting LEA instrumental music tuition. The Music Standards Fund was introduced to halt the decline in LEA music services. Between 1999 and 2004 £270 million has been made available to protect and expand local music services.

Higher Education

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent research she has commissioned on the relationship between participation in higher education and economic performance. [11031]

Margaret Hodge: The Department launched the Centre for the Economics of Education (CEE) in February 2000 to undertake research into the economics of education. This centre has published several studies that have examined the economic benefits from education, including higher education. This research shows that the economic benefits from participating in higher education are substantial. The Labour Force Survey shows that graduates now earn 35 per cent. more than the average salary. This differential reflects graduates' higher productivity. Research shows that the earnings gains enjoyed by graduates have been maintained during the expansion in HE during the last 25 years. This indicates the continued strong growth in the demand for graduates.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Combined Heat and Power

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her review of the combined heat and power strategy will be published. [10423]

Mr. Meacher: We will be issuing a draft Government strategy for consultation by the end of this year.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to exempt combined heat and power from the climate change levy. [10424]

Mr. Meacher: All good quality CHP fuel use and heat supply is exempt from the climate change levy, as is power supplied on site or direct to known users. Any changes to these arrangements would be a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many individual generators there were; what was the installed capacity of combined heat and power; and how much total power was generated from combined heat and power in each month between January 2000 and October 2001. [9936]

Mr. Meacher: Comprehensive data on CHP capacity are produced in the annual Digest of UK Energy Statistics (DUKES), which is published each July. Data collated from the year 2000, show there were 1,556 CHP schemes in operation, CHP capacity totalled 4,632 MWe, with a total of 23,295 GWh total power output. No data are available for the individual months between January 2000 and October 2001.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what further measures the Government will introduce to encourage the installation of combined heat and power to ensure that its target is reached by 2010; [9933]

(2) what is the installed capacity for combined heat and power; and how much her Department estimates this installed capacity will be in *(a)* 2005 and *(b)* 2010; [9934]

(3) what proportion of combined heat and power capacity has been lost since the introduction of the New Electricity Trading Arrangements in March. [9935]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1082W.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government's combined heat and power strategy will be published. [9932]

Mr. Meacher: We will be issuing a draft Government strategy for consultation by the end of this year.

Recycling

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which councils have introduced user-friendly domestic and commercial waste recycling programmes; and what plans the Government have to encourage more councils to establish such programmes. [9072]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities operate a variety of collection schemes, through civic amenity sites, bring sites and kerbside collection.

Local authorities are required to collect commercial waste if requested to do so, but may charge. They will therefore do so only where it is convenient for the business concerned. We have no specific information on the arrangements for recycling this material.

Under best value local authorities must provide information on the percentage of the population that is currently served by kerbside collection of recyclables or is within 1 km radius of a recycling centre. The latest data are at the following website: www.local-regions.dtlr.gov.uk/bestvalue/indicators.

The latest information on kerbside schemes alone show that these are continuing to develop and now provide nearly 30 per cent. of recycled material and cover around 43 per cent. of households in England and Wales. These schemes currently produce on average 81 kg per household per annum for those households covered, however there is a wide range with some schemes achieving very low yields and a few achieving more than 200 kg. The success of schemes depend on both participation and capture rates. Rates of participation are typically in the range 30–85 per cent.

We have set challenging statutory performance standards for every local authority which overall triple household waste recycling and composting. As a minimum local authorities must deliver 10 per cent. recycling and/or composting of household waste by 2003–04 and 18 per cent. by 2005–06. It is for local authorities to decide how they should meet their performance standard.

We support the promotion of voluntary initiatives such as accredited environmental management systems EMAS and ISO 14001 and publicly committing to improvement targets (eg the re-launched "Making a Corporate Commitment" campaign) to help local authorities improve their environmental performance and waste management services.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress towards meeting the requirements of the EU directive on the recycling of household waste. [8291]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* There is no EU directive on the recycling of household waste. The EU landfill directive (99/31/EC) sets challenging targets for the reduction of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill. We consulted earlier this year on a system of tradable landfill permits for waste disposal authorities. We will announce the final form of the scheme in due course and will introduce a Bill when parliamentary time permits.

Meeting the Landfill Directive targets will require a greater percentage of household waste to be recycled, and the Government's Waste Strategy 2000 set targets to increase recycling in England and Wales. These targets are:

To recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005.

To recycle or compost at least 30 per cent. of household waste by 2010.

To recycle or compost at least 33 per cent. of household waste by 2015.

To underpin these national targets we have set statutory recycling performance standards for each local authority in England. For example, Surrey county council currently recycles or composts approximately 15 per cent. of waste collected and must increase this to 30 per cent. for 2003–04 and 36 per cent. for 2005–06. We will consider future standards in the light of technological advances, with the aim of maximising the recycling and composting of waste.

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the recycling of domestic composting is not counted when assessing local authority performance against recycling targets. [9613]

Mr. Meacher: We do measure local authority recycling and composting as a percentage of the waste stream. But there are great difficulties with accurately measuring home composting and the volume of waste that local authorities would otherwise have handled.

There are none the less clear incentives for local authorities to support home composting, including savings in the costs of waste collection and transport.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on methods used for recycling industrial waste. [9949]

Mr. Meacher: Of the 400 million tonnes or so of waste produced in England and Wales each year around 78 million tonnes is waste produced by industry and commerce. Nearly half of industrial and commercial waste is already recycled and recycling is highest for separately collected waste streams such as metals and scrap equipment and paper and card. The Government are keen to encourage still higher recycling rates and have set a target to reduce the amount of industrial and commercial waste sent to landfill to 85 per cent. of the 1998 level by 2005.

The extension of producer responsibilities will contribute to the achievement of this target—both through statutory schemes implementing EU legislation such as the Packaging Directive and forthcoming directives on end of life vehicles and waste electronic and electrical equipment and through voluntary schemes such as that with newspaper publishers and one currently being negotiated on junk mail. The Government also fund Envirowise to give advice to businesses on how to minimise their waste and has set up the Waste and Resources Action Programme to develop markets for recycled materials.

Sheep Premium

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she proposes to implement the increased sheep premium payments to the herds recommended by the European Parliament. [8295]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Opinion of the European Parliament on the European Commission's proposal for reform of the sheepmeat regime, under which sheep annual premium payments are made, has not yet been delivered. We expect that the European Parliament will vote on the Opinion later this month. We further expect that the Commission's proposals will be considered by the Council of Ministers in November. Amounts of premium to be paid will be decided by Council taking into account the Opinion of the European Parliament.

Rhizomania Epidemic

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what contingency plans she has for *(a)* a rhizomania epidemic in sugar beet crops and *(b)* potato brown rot. [8293]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Department has written contingency plans against outbreaks of a number of serious plant pests and diseases, including rhizomania of sugar beet and potato brown rot.

Statutory measures have been taken against rhizomania since the first UK finding in 1987, to slow the spread of the disease until such time as high-yielding disease tolerant varieties became available to UK farmers. Action has been taken against a further 210 outbreaks discovered during annual official surveys, including 68 so far this year. Disease tolerant varieties are now available and we will be consulting shortly on the future of the containment policy and the UK's "protected zone" status within the EC. This status imposes precautionary measures on the movement of certain commodities from other countries where rhizomania is already widely established.

Our contingency plans for outbreaks of potato brown rot reflect the measures set out in EC Directive 98/57 which are aimed at eradication and containment of that disease. Over the last three years we have co-ordinated an exercise to eradicate the bacterium which causes brown rot from a number of river systems in east Anglia and one in Kent. We are currently evaluating the results of that exercise.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis municipal incineration is classified as a renewable energy source. [8261]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* All energy from waste was classified as a renewable energy source under the original Non Fossil Fuels Order. However, the EU Directive on the promotion of electricity from renewable energy sources in the internal energy market classifies only the biodegradable element of waste as a renewable source.

The Government have recently consulted on their view that waste incineration should not be promoted through the Renewables Obligation (RO) and that such projects will not contribute to the Government's proposed target that by 2010 renewable sources eligible for the RO should comprise 10 per cent. of sales by licensed electricity suppliers.

Regional Advisory Panels

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reinstate the former MAFF regional advisory panels. [8300]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* We are currently consulting a wide range of rural interests, including farmers, on the detail of proposed new national and regional advisory structures to reflect the new Department's range of responsibilities and our fresh regional focus through the Government Office in each region. We are proceeding with plans to set up regional rural affairs forums as proposed in last year's Rural White Paper. These will involve the regional development agencies and other service providers and external stakeholders. They will also be able to refer issues to a new Rural Affairs Forum for England. Regional consultation groups which already advise on the specific provisions of the England Rural Development Programme will continue to operate as before but will also be able to raise wider issues with the new regional forums.

Biomass Energy

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many hectares of UK farmland produced biomass in the last 12 months. [8289]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* There are approximately 1,500 hectares of purpose grown energy crops in the UK. In addition, material from forests and straw from agricultural crops is used for the production of renewable energy.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tonnes of *(a)* glass, *(b)* paper, *(c)* metals and *(d)* textiles which are collected for recycling were disposed of in landfill sites in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [8288]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The Department does not record this information. However, what is known is that in 1999–2000 approximately 29 million tonnes of municipal waste was collected by local authorities. Of this approximately 81 per cent. was sent to landfill and 11 per cent. was considered to have been recycled. 395,000 tonnes of glass, 922,000 tonnes of paper and card, 277,000 tonnes of metal and white goods and 46,000 tonnes of textiles were collected for recycling by local authorities in 1999–2000. Figures for 2000–01 are not yet known.

Correspondence

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the average length of time taken for her Department to provide substantive replies to letters from hon. Members in the last year for which figures are available. [9090]

Mr. Morley: Since June 2001 the average length of time taken for the Department to provide replies to letters from hon. Members was 29 working days. Although this is longer than the departmental target of 15 working days we are working hard to ensure that this record is improved and the target met. The Department has suffered severe disruption due to allocating priority to defeating the foot and mouth epidemic. I accept this is not an excuse for not giving hon. Members good service, and now that normality is returning to the Department one of our urgent priorities is to rectify any weakness in our service delivery.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases are being investigated by her Department for *(a)* fraudulent claims and *(b)* the deliberate transmission of foot and mouth disease. [9530]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Two claims for compensation in respect of animals slaughtered due to foot and mouth disease are currently being investigated by DEFRA's legal department.

As regards possible cases of deliberate transmission of foot and mouth disease, the Department has investigated three cases and found them to be unsubstantiated. One further case is currently under investigation.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to ensure animal welfare in areas defined as high risk in relation to foot and mouth disease. [7870]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The Animal Movement Licensing System allows foot and mouth disease susceptible animals to move for commercial and welfare reasons. Limited movement in high risk counties in infected areas is also possible. The arrangements are intended to strike a balance between the commercial and welfare needs of farmers and their animals, and the need to contain and eradicate foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason further blood tests are carried out in protection zones after blood test results from the infected premises and contiguous cull farms have proved to be negative. [6665]

Mr. Morley: Many foot and mouth disease (FMD) infected premises are confirmed on clinical grounds, by the vet on the spot in liaison with vets at DEFRA HQ. Subsequent negative results from blood tests do not necessarily mean that there was no disease on the premises. Blood tests for FMD antibodies are carried out on all farms with sheep and goats within 3 km of infected premises to check for presence of the disease. Blood sampling has to take place at least 21 days after preliminary cleansing and disinfection of the infected premises and this interval should allow time for any infected animals to produce detectable antibodies. A

similar procedure was followed in France, Ireland and the Netherlands as part of the process of demonstrating freedom from FMD.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the *(a)* safety and *(b)* marketing in the UK of milk and meat from animals vaccinated against foot and mouth disease. [5251]

Mr. Morley: The Veterinary Medicines Directorate has assessed the foot and mouth disease vaccines that might be used in the UK for safety in relation to the consumer. They concluded that there are no risks to human health associated with vaccination of animals intended for the production of milk or meat for human consumption. This assessment is based on the fact that these vaccines consist of purified, inactivated viruses together with a number of other ingredients which are widely used in other vaccines for animals. The Food Standards Agency has also considered this issue and is satisfied that the use of such a vaccine would not have implications for food safety.

There has been no official assessment on marketing in the UK of milk and meat from animals vaccinated against foot and mouth disease. Information about the disease concerning vaccination against foot and mouth disease can be found on the DEFRA foot and mouth disease website www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reports she has received of bovine body parts being found in the countryside on land where animals have not previously been slaughtered because of foot and mouth disease. [5614]

Mr. Morley: A report was received by DEFRA's Newcastle office that part of a cow's tongue had been found by a gateway on a farm in Northumberland. The Veterinary Officer who inspected the tongue did not consider it to be infected. A report was also received in June by the Leeds office that a decayed tongue was lying in a road. It was collected and disposed of by a Veterinary Officer.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to promote support schemes for those affected by the foot and mouth crisis, in accordance with the twelfth recommendation of the Haskins report. [10452]

Alun Michael: We will shortly respond to both the Haskins report and the report of the Rural Task Force.

Meanwhile, the Government have been actively raising awareness among affected businesses of the financial aid available to help cope with the impact of foot and mouth disease. The Small Business Service has sent out 3.7 million copies of their leaflet "Coping with Foot and Mouth Disease—help for business" via banks, post offices, trade associations, employer organisations, etc. Business advice fact sheets have been posted on DEFRA's website, http://www.defra.gov.uk/, and we have set up help lines. The regional development agencies have also been actively promoting the Business Recovery Fund.

Preliminary results from research by Prism Consulting for the Department in September reveals that 40 per cent. of businesses had sought assistance from an outside organisation—central or local Government, or through the regional development agencies, Business Links etc.—which is an improvement on earlier results. We continue to look at the most effective means to engage the rural business community in order to make sure that assistance gets to those businesses with the most pressing need.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when farmers can continue with normal farming practice after their land has been used for the incineration of livestock as part of the eradication of foot and mouth. [8090]

Mr. Morley: Monitoring carried out by the Environment Agency for the Department of Health has confirmed that there is very little risk to human health following the removal of ash from the incineration of carcases. The Food Standards Agency considers that the available results indicate that there is no additional risk to health through the food supply. Farmers may therefore resume farming once the removal of ash has been completed.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of pollution of land where incineration of livestock took place as part of the eradication of the foot and mouth epidemic; and if she will make a statement. [8091]

Mr. Morley: Where possible the Government have arranged for ash from the incineration process to be buried on site. This has only occurred following Environment Agency permission in accordance with the Groundwater Regulations. The Government are currently consulting with the Environment Agency on a programme of on-going monitoring of ash burial sites.

In circumstances where the Environment Agency has assessed that ash cannot be buried on site then it has been disposed of at a licensed landfill site.

Monitoring carried out by the Environment Agency for the Department of Health has confirmed that there is very little risk to human health following the removal of ash from the surface of the land.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* holdings and *(b)* other premises in Cumbria (i) refused to give up sheep for the 3 km cull and (ii) still have sheep on their premises. [5256]

Mr. Morley: In total, 375 holdings in Cumbria did not participate in the 3 km cull which ended on 24 May. All premises involved had or were allocated a holding number so no "other premises" were involved. Approximately 242 of these holdings still have sheep on the premises.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will set out the number of payments to farmers following foot and mouth disease of *(a)* less than £100,000, *(b)* between £100,000 and £200,000, *(c)* between £200,000 and £300,000. *(d)* between £300,000 and £400,000, *(e)* between £400,000 and £500,000, *(f)* between £500,000 and £600,000, *(g)* between £600,000 and £700,000, *(h)* between £700,000 and £800,000, *(i)* between £800,000 and £900,000, *(j)* between £900,000 and £1 million, and *(k)* in excess of £1 million; [7654]

(2) how many individual payments have been made to farmers as a consequence of foot and mouth disease. [7668]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The numbers of individual payments made to farmers since the beginning of the foot and mouth disease outbreak are as follows:

Amount	*Number of payments*
£0 to £99,999	10,180
£100,000 to £199,999	1,257
£200,000 to £299,999	603
£300,000 to £399,999	364
£400,000 to £499,999	223
£500,000 to £599,999	141
£600,000 to £699,999	92
£700,000 to £799,999	58
£800,000 to £899,999	43
£900,000 to £999,999	29
£1,000,000 and over	68
Total	13,058

The number of payments does not equate to the number of infected premises since the Department has, in some cases, made separate payments for animals slaughtered, and for seized or destroyed items.

Kyoto Protocol

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress towards ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. [7882]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The UK is committed to the EU's target of ratification and entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol by 2002. The European Commission is expected to publish shortly its proposal for formalising the emission reductions to be delivered by the EU under the Protocol.

Quota Hopping

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent action she has taken to prevent quota hopping. [7867]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* From 1 January 1999 all British registered fishing vessels over 10m catching more than 2 tonnes of quota stocks have had to demonstrate an economic link with coastal communities in the UK. A full report on the first year of operation was published in November 2000 and placed in the Library of the House. There was almost total compliance; foreign-owned UK vessels increased their landings and expenditure in the UK, and additional quota was made available to inshore fishermen in the under 10m fleet and the non-sector. A report on compliance in 2000 will be published later this year.

Flood Defences

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to improve flood defences. [7887]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The Government have sought to reduce the risk of flooding by investing in effective flood warning arrangements and flood defences in the highest risk areas. Funding for the Department's programme is increasing from £66 million in 2000–01 to £114 million in 2003–04.

This Department provides funding to the Environment Agency, local authorities and internal drainage boards for capital flood and coastal defence works that meet certain criteria. Responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with the operating authorities.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has held with the Environment Agency regarding measures to stop flooding of the *(a)* Ouse, *(b)* Uck and *(c)* Cuckmere; and if he will make a statement. [8675]

Mr. Morley: I have attended meetings with concerned residents, such as those from Lewes, at which the Environment Agency has been represented. However responsibility for operational flood management rests with the agency and I have not discussed specifically with them their plans for the Ouse, Uck and Cuckmere. DEFRA's regional flood defence engineer will be involved in discussions on the technical aspects of any plans. I am always interested in the progress of flood defence schemes and hold regular meetings with the agency.

Organic Farming

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the proportion of UK agricultural land under organic production is; and what the proportion is in *(a)* the EU member states and *(b)* the USA. [7876]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* As at the end of June 2001 around 3.4 per cent. of UK agricultural land was under organic management.

Figures for end 2000 produced by Organic Europe www.organic-europe.net indicate that the proportion of total agricultural land under organic management in other EU member states is as follows:

Member state	*Organic area as a percentage of total agricultural area*
Austria	8.0
Belgium	1.5
Denmark	6.2
Finland	6.8
France	1.3
Germany	3.2
Greece	0.7
Ireland	0.8
Italy	7.0
Luxembourg	0.8
Netherlands	1.4
Portugal	1.3
Spain	1.5
Sweden	6.3

Information published by the USDA www.ers.usda.gov from the 1997 Census of Agriculture shows land under organic management to be around 0.15 per cent. of total agricultural land in the USA.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's responsibilities in relation to food hygiene. [7881]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Food hygiene policy is the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for the implementation of the enforcement aspects of Community and UK legislation concerning the hygiene of food imported from third countries.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's responsibilities are in relation to the environment of inner city areas. [7880]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* My Department's responsibilities for protecting and improving the environment and conserving and enhancing biodiversity cover all areas, including inner cities.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy towards nuclear power and the disposal of nuclear waste. [7863]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 25W. This describes our consultation paper "Managing radioactive waste safely". The Government policy on nuclear power is described on page 18 of the consultation paper.

Departmental Properties

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the number, value and location of properties newly leased in each of the last five years by her Department, broken down by leases by the Department itself, its next step agencies and its non-departmental public bodies, differentiating between purchases made as a result of the creation of new bodies and those purchases made by established bodies. [7813]

Mr. Morley: The information requested in respect of the Department and its next step agencies is available in the Libraries of the House. The Department does not hold centrally information about the properties occupied by non-departmental public bodies.

Food (Pesticide Residues)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of *(a)* vegetables, *(b)* fruit, *(c)* cereal products and *(d)* meat products available for consumption in the UK has been sampled for pesticide residues in the past 12 months. [7884]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* In the calendar year 2000, 2,304 food samples were analysed for a wide range of pesticide residues under the Governments annual pesticide residues surveillance programme. The programme generated results for about 90,000 pesticide/commodity food combinations. Specifically, 395 samples of fruit, 643 samples of vegetables, 71 samples of cereal/cereal products and 350 samples of animal products including meat were tested during 2000.

The majority of samples are collected at retail level and information is not available on the size of the consignment from which samples are collected. It is not therefore possible to calculate the proportion of total supplies sampled. As a result of the provision of additional funding by the Government and value for money improvements in the programme we are boosting the total number of samples collected for analysis to 4,000 during 2001.

Livestock Movements Licences

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff in Worcestershire Trading Standards Department are working with her Department on issuing autumn livestock movements licences; what other responsibilities these individuals have; and if she will make a statement. [8991]

Mr. Morley: I understand from Worcestershire county council that three staff are employed on autumn movement work on Tuesday, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays with an additional person working on Mondays and Fridays more staff would be deployed if the workload should arise.

Nuclear Power Generation

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the environmental impact of nuclear power generation. [9942]

Mr. Meacher: Work is under way within the EU to establish a framework for the assessment of the environmental impact of ionising radiation. The project is due to finish in October 2003. A recent study on behalf of the Environment Agency and English Nature "Impact Assessment of Ionising Radiation in Wildlife", published in July this year, concluded that wildlife is not significantly impacted by exposure to ionising radiation from authorised discharges. The study, however, recommended some specific areas that needed to be investigated further.

Proposals for liquid or aerial discharges of radioactive waste, or the disposal of solid low-level radioactive waste, are subject to authorisation by the appropriate regulator. In examining such proposals the regulators satisfy themselves, among other things, that alternatives, where they exist, are properly evaluated and that the resulting authorisation will result in a low environmental impact and that it is based on the best practicable environmental option.

Last year the Government published for consultation a draft "UK Strategy for Radioactive Discharges 2001–02", and draft "Statutory Guidance on the Regulation of Radioactive Discharges into the Environment from Nuclear Licensed Sites". Final versions of both documents will be published shortly. The former is the Government's strategy for complying with the commitments it and other members of OSPAR entered into in 1998 for reducing radioactive discharges into the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic in the period up to 2020. The second is guidance

to the Environment Agency about the setting of radioactive discharge limits which will help to ensure compliance with the objectives of the strategy.

The Government published in September this year a consultation paper "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely". The purpose of the consultation is to set in train a process for deciding how radioactive waste can best be managed. Nuclear power generation contributes 23 per cent. of the total volume of radioactive waste. Nuclear power contributes about 26 per cent. of the UK's electricity supply and plays an important role in helping the UK to meet its climate change target. In 1998 nuclear power generation was estimated to have reduced UK carbon emissions by between 12 and 24 million tonnes. At present, high and intermediate-level waste from nuclear power generation is safely stored at nuclear licensed sites. Low-level waste is mostly disposed of at BNFL's facility at Drigg in Cumbria.

CAP Dairy Regime

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her priorities are for the next reform of the Common Agricultural Policy dairy regime. [9803]

Mr. Morley: Our priority remains to seek an orderly end to the bureaucratic and restrictive system of milk quotas.

Farm Veterinary Care

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the ability of farmers to afford adequate veterinary care for their animals. [9801]

Mr. Morley: Farmers have a duty to maintain the welfare of animals for which they are responsible, including the provision of veterinary care. This is a normal business expense of livestock farmers and as such, estimates of total income from farming are net of this expenditure.

Sheep

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she is considering in relation to the traceability of sheep; and if she will make a statement. [10295]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Traceability of sheep in England and Wales is at present secured by tagging them with the number of the holding from which they made their first post-foot and mouth disease move, combined with very strict movement controls. We are currently considering how continued traceability could be secured when freer movements are permitted. We have already held some discussions with industry organisations on this subject and plan to hold others shortly.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultation she has had with the livestock auction industry in relation to the traceability of sheep; and if she will make a statement. [10296]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Representatives of the livestock auction industry have been present at recent meetings to discuss traceability of sheep in England and Wales in the context of autumn and spring movements. We recognise the interests of the livestock auction industry in this subject; they will be invited to participate in further discussions on traceability.

Voluntary Sector

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to improve support for the voluntary sector in rural areas. [R] [10713]

Alun Michael: Last year's Rural White Paper (Cm 4909), section 12.5, sets out work which is now in hand to strengthen the voluntary and community sector in rural areas. The impact of foot and mouth disease has revealed the pressing need to sustain the health of rural voluntary and community activity, and the creation of the new Department, with for the first time an explicit focus on rural affairs, has enabled us to enhance our capacity to work with the sector. I am holding a series of meetings with representatives of rural voluntary and community bodies and will consider what further measures may be needed.

GM Crops

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what post-trial procedures are in place to *(a)* ensure destruction of the root system, *(b)* ensure the soil is free from GMOs, and *(c)* monitor levels of GMOs in other crops in relation to land used in farm scale evaluations of GM crops. [5550]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* The post-trial procedures for each of the three types of crops grown as part of the farm scale evaluations are set out as follows. In addition the crops are grown in accordance with the industry body, SCIMAC, code of practice and guidelines on the growing of GM herbicide tolerant crops. These specify the agronomic practices to be followed and require monitoring and removal of volunteers in subsequent years.

For oil seed rape, the conditions of the research (Part B) consent require that the seeds produced by the plants are harvested and removed from the site. The field is then ploughed destroying the remaining plant material including the roots. Fallen seeds will remain in the soil. The consent holder is required to monitor the site in the subsequent two years, destroy any oil seed rape volunteers which germinate and submit a monitoring report to the Department.

For beet, the conditions of the consent require that at harvest the beet are lifted and removed from the site. The field is then ploughed destroying the remaining plant material including the roots. The GM plants are not permitted to flower so no seeds will be produced. The consent holder is required to monitor the site in the subsequent year, destroy any beet volunteers which arise and submit a monitoring report to the Department.

The GM maize in the evaluations has a Europe-wide approval for cultivation under Directive 90/220, which does not impose any conditions on growing. However, under the terms of the agreement with SCIMAC setting

up the farm-scale evaluations the plants will be harvested and removed from the site which will then be ploughed destroying any remaining roots. Maize does not give rise to volunteers in subsequent seasons.

Summer Recess

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by her Department during the summer recess. [9233]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 October 2001]*: *(a)* The DEFRA press office issued 155 news releases from 20 July to 15 October 2001.

(b) A central register to log consultation documents which have been issued does not currently exist within DEFRA. From 20 July to 15 October 2001, 24 consultations were posted on the DEFRA website.

The texts of these press releases and consultation exercises can be found at the website www.defra.gov.uk.

BSE

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the announcement of the results of her Department's tests into evidence for BSE in sheep has been postponed. [9854]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 19–22.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the reasons for testers confusing sheep and bovine brains. [9865]

Mr. Morley: An independent risk assessment company has been asked to perform a detailed audit of the Institute for Animal Health experiment, including how the relevant samples were stored and handled. We have also asked the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS) to undertake to a longer time scale a rigorous assessment of the chain of custody arrangements for the IAH project. We will not know the full facts until the results are reported.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to commission further research into sheep brains and BSE. [9867]

Mr. Morley: We will carry out a thorough review of the full range of scientific studies presently being undertaken in this area. In doing so we will take account of the research being undertaken elsewhere in Europe and the views of the Food and Standards Agency and the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. Findings will be made available to the House.

Contagious Disease (Animals)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what importance she attaches to traceability with regard to prevention of outbreaks of contagious disease in animals; and if she will make a statement. [10297]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 October 2001]*: Traceability does not in itself give protection against outbreaks of disease, but it does enable possible contacts to be identified fully and more rapidly. Individual tracing of cattle is already possible and licensing of movement improves traceability for pigs, sheep and goats as well as cattle.

EU Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Scottish arable farmers have been compensated from European agrimonetary compensation. [9843]

Mr. Morley: This is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Hill and Dairy Farming

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to reinstate the task forces on hill and dairy farming and the supply chain; and when she expects them to publish their evidence. [9799]

Mr. Morley: After an enforced break due to the demands of the foot and mouth disease, the milk task force resumed its work and on 12 October 2001 it held its first meeting since its activities were suspended in April. The milk task force hopes that it will be able to report quickly and to feed its findings into the Policy Commission on Food and Farming. No specific deadline has been set for it to complete its work. On completion, the milk task force's report will be placed in the Libraries of the House and will be publicly accessible on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/ and in the library of the Department at 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR.

The inputs task force has completed its work. Its report was published on 9 May and is available in the Libraries of the House and on the DEFRA website.

The hills task force was set up on 23 November 2000 to do a specific job and report quickly. Its report was received in March and is available in the library of the Department at 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR.

Farm Worker Incomes

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the effect of the crisis in agriculture on farm workers' annual incomes. [9802]

Mr. Morley: The Government do not monitor the annual incomes of farm workers directly. However, the earnings and hours worked by farm workers in England and Wales are measured by a statistical survey each September. The latest results, for September 2000, were published in January 2001. A copy of the results has been placed in the Library. Results for September 2001 will be published in January 2002.

In England and Wales minimum agricultural wage rates and conditions of employment are set by the Agricultural Wages Board (an independent body). A new agricultural

wages order implementing this year's wage negotiations came into force on 1 October 2001. Some workers will be paid more than the minimum wage rates.

Nicarbazin and Dimetridazole

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's policy in relation to the proposals from the European Commission to remove the authorisation for the anti-coccidial drugs Nicarbazin and Dimetridazole. [10206]

Mr. Morley: The UK made representations to the Council of Ministers on 23 October opposing the Commission proposal to withdraw the authorisation of nicarbazin.

The proposal to withdraw nicarbazin was due solely to the company responsible for the product not having supplied a complete data dossier for re-evaluation by the agreed deadline.

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Food Standards Agency are not aware of any evidence that nicarbazin is mutagenic. At the March 2001 Standing Committee for Animal Nutrition, the Commission agreed to postpone any decision on the future authorisation of nicarbazin and to allow the company time to submit additional information. The company commissioned the tests required to generate the missing data, and all reports are expected to be submitted by February 2002. Despite this, the Commission included nicarbazin in the proposal.

In view of this and potential serious bird health and welfare problems, the UK believed that the authorisation for nicarbazin should not have been withdrawn simply to meet an arbitrary Commission deadline.

Regarding dimetridazole, the UK did not oppose its inclusion in the proposal to withdraw authorisation.

The dossier submitted by the company responsible for the product was inadequate, consisting only of an index and no data. The company did not indicate a firm commitment at an early stage to submit the missing data. The Commission did not offer the company time to submit the data and unlike nicarbazin there has been evidence of safety concerns. The rapporteur for the product, France, indicated at a Standing Committee meeting that it would not support a proposal for the authorisation of DMZ to continue. Under those circumstances the UK felt it was impossible to argue for the continued authorisation of dimetridazole.

It should be noted that despite the UK's representations to the Council of Ministers, we failed to get the Commission to reconsider the proposal to withdraw nicarbazin, and along with dimetridazole the authorisations will be withdrawn. This will result in the products being removed from the market six months after the commission regulation is published.

Agricultural Workers

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people were employed in the agricultural industry in a *(a)* paid and *(b)* unpaid capacity, and (i) full-time and (ii) part-time (A) at the latest date for which figures are available and (B) in each of the last five years. [10451]

Mr. Morley: The latest information available for England is from the June 2000 Agricultural Census. Results for 2001 will be available later this year. The labour questions were changed in 1998 to allow more detailed information on full/part time and paid/unpaid labour to be collected. The available information is shown in the table.

Thousand head

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Total workers (England)	195.8	191.9	189.5	189.1	176.1	153.5
Salaried Managers[1]	6.7	6.9	6.9	10.9	12.1	9.9
Full-time	n/a	n/a	n/a	8.7	9.4	8.1
Part-time	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.2	2.7	1.8
Regular workers	126.0	124.2	122.5	120.2	110.8	96.9
Full-time	83.4	81.6	81.6	79.2	73.6	64.2
Paid	n/a	n/a	n/a	76.6	72.1	62.9
Unpaid	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.7	1.5	1.2
Part-time	42.5	42.6	41.9	41.0	37.2	32.7
Paid	n/a	n/a	n/a	30.5	28.8	25.2
Unpaid	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.5	8.4	7.5
Casual/gang	63.2	60.9	60.1	58.1	53.2	46.8
Full-time	n/a	n/a	n/a	15.7	16.1	14.6
Part-time	n/a	n/a	n/a	42.4	36.6	32.1

[1] From 1998 all farmers managing holdings for limited companies were asked to classify themselves as salaried managers.

Notes:

1. In 1998 fundamental changes were introduced to the labour questions. It appears that this change may have led to the recording of additional labour not previously included in the census returns. The change in questions has also led to a redistribution of labour between the various categories, most notably for salaried managers. Caution is therefore advised when comparing the 1997 and 1998 results.
2. Part-time is defined as 39 hours or less.
3. Figures exclude school children but include trainees employed under an official youth training scheme and paid at Agricultural Wages Board rates or above.
4. Includes minor holdings.

Milk Consumption

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average daily consumption of milk was in the UK in July. [10269]

Mr. Morley: On average in July 2001 the estimated total consumption of liquid milk in the UK was 18 million litres per day.

Food Safety

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she proposes to ensure that scientists involved in public research into food safety are adequately qualified. [9920]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

All research projects for the Food Standards Agency are subjected to expert appraisal before being commissioned to ensure that their scientific quality and the competence of the proposer are acceptable.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will made a statement on the safety of British lamb. [9915]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that its advice continues to be that, while consumers should be aware of the theoretical risk of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in sheep, it does not advise them to avoid consumption of lamb.

Beef Imports

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance the Government issues to consumers wishing to avoid imported beef when it is included in products that do not make the country of origin clear. [9800]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Standards Agency, with the support of the Consumers Association, has published a leaflet for consumers on bovine spongiform encephalopathy and beef. The leaflet advises that, for processed food, if the country of origin is shown on the label, it usually refers to the country where the product was processed, and not necessarily where the beef or other ingredients came from. This is one of the reasons why the FSA is pressing for improved European Union rules on country of origin labelling.

HEALTH

Overseas NHS Operations

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of his Department's budget for the current financial year has been earmarked for NHS operations to be carried out overseas. [8519]

Mr. Milburn: None; we are devolving control over resources to local health services. In the light of rulings of the European Court of Justice in July this year, I have made it clear to health authorities and primary care trusts that they are now able to commission services from other European countries as part of their wider efforts to reduce waiting times for national health service treatment. However, NHS bodies will need to apply the same criteria to purchasing treatment abroad as they do to purchasing treatment in the NHS or United Kingdom-based independent sector, including value for money.

Hospital Doctors

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital doctors left the NHS in each of the last four years on grounds of *(a)* retirement, *(b)* early retirement, *(c)* ill health and *(d)* taking up an alternative post. [7595]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Data in the form requested are not available. The number of hospital and community doctors in England and Wales who retired from the national health service in the financial years 1998 to 2001 is in the table. The "Others" category is indeterminate retirements not available from the computer records.

	All retirements	*Early retirements*	*Ill health retirements*	*Others*
1998	803	175	127	148
1999	698	136	101	112
2000	625	119	98	96
2001	786	140	116	130
Total	2912	570	442	486

Notes:
1. Early retirements includes retirements on the grounds of ill health, premature retirements following redundancy or in the interests of the efficiency of the service and voluntary early retirements before the scheme's normal retirement age of 60.
2. Ill-health retirements include retirements before and after the scheme's normal retirement age of 60.
3. "Others" relate to retirements where the reason for retirement is not yet established.
4. Hospital doctors include:
Hospital and community doctors
Associate Specialist
Clinical Assistant
Consultant
House Officer
Medical Assistant
Senior House Officer
Medical Officer—all grades
Registrar
Senior Registrar
Medical Specialist
5. The NHS Pensions Agency does not hold data on hospital doctors taking up alternative posts.
Source:
NHS Pensions Agency

Aventis T25 Maize

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will hold an open public investigation into the health implications of the currently approved trials of Aventis T25 maize. [5652]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

I am confident that the current approved trials of Aventis T25 maize do not pose a risk to health and in any case none of the GM crop in the trials will enter the food or feed chain.

The implications of health of Aventis genetically modified maize known as T25 were assessed during the passage of the marketing dossier through the European GMO regulatory regime. T25 maize was granted regulatory approval under Directive 90/220 for unrestricted cultivation throughout the European Union in 1998 through the French authorities. The dossier, including the assessment of risks to health, is on the public register held by my Department and is available for scrutiny.

However concerns about the safety of T25 maize for animal feed have been raised and need to be addressed. These concerns have been presented in public as part of the DEFRA public hearing into the seed listing of the variety of T25 known as ChardonLL. This hearing is currently suspended pending further information from the European Commission and the French competent authorities. However, the Government have referred all the written evidence presented to the hearing relating to the safety of T25 to the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment for advice. ACRE has sought further advice on the animal feed issues from the Advisory Committee on Animal Feed. ACRE expects to finalise its advice to Government before the end of the year.

As part of this re-evaluation we intend to hold an additional open debate involving both Aventis and its critics, where ACRE can question the strength of the scientific evidence from both sides.

The safety of T25 maize for use in food is regulated by the European novel food regulations and is a matter for the Food Standards Agency.

Heart Surgery

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients waiting for NHS heart surgery in the west Midlands he estimates have *(a)* had their operations performed privately or *(b)* died while waiting for that surgery in the last 12 months. [8984]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect data about the number of operations performed in the private sector.

Waiting list mortality data are not collected, nor are data collected on other possible reasons why a patient may be removed from the waiting list prior to treatment, including a change in the patient's place of residence or a move to the private sector.

We are committed to improving waiting times for cardiac surgery, and in the west midlands initiatives include a new £13 million purpose built cardiac surgery critical care unit which recently opened at the University Hospitals Birmingham national health service trust.

We are also developing a new purpose built cardiac surgery centre at the Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS trust which is due to open in 2003, and is the first new specialist cardiac centre to be built in the west Midlands for 30 years.

Fines

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons and at whose request his Department increased the level of fine upon conviction of a person other than a registered midwife or registered medical practitioner attending a woman in childbirth to £5,000; and if he will make a statement. [8869]

Mr. Hutton: The independent review of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1997 carried out by JM Consulting in 1998 noted that the level of fine for misuse of title was not as high as in other regulatory bodies and recommended that penalties should be raised. We accepted this recommendation, and this is reflected in draft legislation to establish a new Nursing and Midwifery Council. It will be for the court to decide what penalty to impose in any individual case taking into account all of the relevant circumstances.

Breastfeeding

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure the promotion of breastfeeding in health regions; and when he will publish the results of the study his Department is conducting into barriers to breastfeeding in low income groups. [9425]

Jacqui Smith: The infant feeding initiative was launched in May 1999 with an aim to increase the incidence and duration of breastfeeding among those groups of the population where breastfeeding rates are lowest. Two infant feeding advisers were appointed part-time, one a health visitor and one a midwife to act as a focus for developing and implementing strategies for promoting breastfeeding these lower socio-economic groups, and to support the national network of breastfeeding co-ordinators at a regional level.

A total budget of nearly £3 million over three years from the Public Health Development Fund has been allocated for this initiative. This is more money than had previously been spent on breastfeeding promotion and reflects our commitment to health inequalities that was highlighted by the Acheson Report and has since been reconfirmed with the NHS Plan commitment for increased support for breastfeeding.

A total of 79 best breastfeeding practice projects have been funded across all regions. The aim is to increase the rates of breastfeeding, both initiation and duration. A summary of the first wave of 31 of these projects is being printed and will be available shortly. Copies of the summary report will be distributed to all health regions and organisations involved in the best breastfeeding practice projects. Increasing the incidence and duration of breastfeeding is a goal shared by all Sure Start initiatives and several health action zone programmes. Many of the best breastfeeding practice projects have now obtained mainstream funding from Sure Start initiatives.

Mental Illness (Employment)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of those with a diagnosis of severe mental illness were in employment in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* on the latest date available. [9518]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally. However, the psychiatric morbidity survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics and published in 1995 provided some information on the prevalence of psychiatric disorder by employment status. A copy of this report has been placed in the Library. A repeat psychiatric morbidity survey took place in 2000. The results of this survey are not yet available.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the ethnic minority monitoring exercise in respect of mental health services announced on 24 October 2000. [9517]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has asked the mental health task force to prepare a strategy to address the issues surrounding black and minority ethnic mental health issues. A task force member, Professor Sashidharan, is taking forward the development of a draft strategy under the guidance of the ethnicity and mental health reference group. We expect consultation papers on the draft strategy to be issued in spring 2002.

While the reference group has yet to finalise the content outline, a survey to find out about the experiences of black and minority ethnic people who use mental health services is being considered as part of the strategy.

The strategy is aiming to ensure that a range of issues across the mental health national service framework and NHS Plan are addressed.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on talking treatments for those with a diagnosis of severe mental illness; and if he will make a statement. [10495]

Jacqui Smith: The mental health national service framework sets out specific targets, service models, performance indicators and milestones for the provision of the most effective services, including "talking treatments" for people with severe mental illness. In support of this, the Department has commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to develop a guideline on the management of schizophrenia to cover the full range of effective treatments, including talking therapies.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* available beds and *(b)* staffed residential places for mentally ill people there were in each of the years since and including 1995–96, indicating the number of staffed residential places in (i) local authority, (ii) the voluntary sector and (iii) the private sector and the available beds in (A) private hospitals, (B) nursing homes, (C) clinics and (D) the NHS, excluding day care. [10519]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is given in the tables.

Table 1: Number of available beds for adults with mental illness, in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics and national health service facilities in England, 1996 to 2000

Rounded numbers

Year	Total number of available beds	Registered nursing beds in private hospitals and Clinics[1,2] (A,C)	Registered nursing beds in nursing homes[2,3] (B)	NHS facilities—average daily number of available beds[4] (D)
1996	66,900	1,000	26,400	39,500
1997	67,300	800	27,700	38,800
1998	64,700	1,300	25,500	37,900
1999	66,000	1,500	27,500	37,100
2000	64,200	800	27,900	35,500

[1] Registered beds in private hospitals and clinics are not available separately.
[2] For 1995–96 and 1996–97, refers to date during the period 1 October to 31 March. The basis of data collection changed in 1998 and from 1998 onwards figures are as at 31 March.
[3] Registered nursing beds in general nursing homes and mental nursing homes (including registered nursing beds in dual registered homes).
[4] The average daily number of beds during the year ending 31 March.
Note:
Figures may not add to totals because of rounding
Source:
Department of Health annual returns

Table 2: Number of residential places for adults with mental illness[1] in staffed residential care homes, by type of home, England, 1996 to 2000

Rounded numbers

As at 31 March	All residential places	Residential places in local authority staffed homes (i)	Residential places in voluntary homes (ii)	Residential places in private homes[2] (iii)	Residential places in dual registered homes
1996	25,900	4,700	5,500	15,000	700
1997	36,900	4,900	7,100	22,800	2,100
1998	38,700	4,500	6,900	24,200	3,000
1999	38,200	3,500	6,100	25,900	2,800
2000	40,000	4,100	6,600	25,900	3,400

[1] Residential places for people with mental illness including older people who are mentally infirm.
[2] Includes places in small homes (less than four places)
Note:
Figures may not add to totals because of rounding
Source:
Department of Health annual returns

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of calls to NHS Direct are associated with mental illness. [10530]

Jacqui Smith: NHS Direct received 3.5 million calls during 2000–01, of which between 6 and 8 per cent. were logged as mental health-related. However, there is evidence from an independent study commissioned by the Department to suggest that a higher number of mental health calls were actually received and handled. A copy of the report of the evaluation (March 2001) has been published by King's College London Institute of Psychiatry. Methods for recording calls are being reviewed to align them closely with the clinical assessment system.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a statutory right to advocacy for users of mental health services. [10017]

Jacqui Smith: In the White Paper, "Reforming the Mental Health Act", which was published in December 2000, we set out our proposal to introduce in a new mental health act an independent specialist advocacy service for patients subject to powers under a new act. The Department has commissioned work on how best this might be achieved.

There are no plans to introduce a statutory right to advocacy for users of mental health services not subject to compulsory powers. However the mental health national service framework makes it clear that mental health service providers should ensure that specific arrangements are made for the provision of advocacy services.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the money to improve wards and conditions for psychiatric patients announced on 6 April has been spent; and where and when. [9512]

Jacqui Smith: £5 million was allocated for 2001–02 as follows:

	£
Portsmouth Healthcare National Health Service Trust (St. James Hospital)	500,000
Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust (Fairmile Hospital)	250,000
Avon and Wiltshire Partnership Mental Health Trust—(Barrow Hospital)	500,000
East London and City Mental Health Trust (St. Clements)	380,000
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust (St. Anne's)	265,000
County Durham and Darlington Priority Services NHS Trust (the Gables and County Hospital, the Pierremont Unit)	270,000
Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust (St. Lukes, Middlesbrough)	535,000
Worcester Community and MH NHS Trust (Redditch, Worcester, Bromsgrove, Kidderminster)	150,000
Coventry Healthcare Trust (Caludon Centre)	150,000
Shropshire Community NHS Trust (Telford and Wrekin, Shrewsbury)	100,000
North Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust (Small Heath)	100,000
South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust (Queen Elizabeth Hospital)	100,000
Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Trust (Lister and QE2 Hospitals)	700,000
Rotherham Priority Health Services NHS Trust (Rotherham)	300,000
Doncaster and South Humber Healthcare Trust (Scunthorpe and Goole)	200,000
North Sefton and West Lancashire Community NHS Trust (Scarisbrick unit, the Hesketh Centre)	210,000
Tameside and Glossop Community and Priority Services NHS Trust (Wards 35/36)	110,000
St. Helen's and Knowsley Hospital NHS Trust (Whiston Hospital)	180,000
Total	5,000,000

Information on actual spend to date is not held centrally.

Pharmacies and Dispensing Practices

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to support pharmacies and dispensing practices in rural areas. [9061]

Ms Blears: We have agreed, in principle, to implement certain changes proposed jointly by the general practitioners committee of the British Medical Association and the pharmaceutical services negotiating committee to the regulations governing the award of national health service dispensing rights in rural areas. The changes are intended to increase stability for rural pharmacies and dispensing practices.

GPs (Retirement)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average age at retirement of GP principals was in each year since 1974. [9058]

Mr. Hutton: Information in the form requested is not available. The indicative average retirement age, based on past experience, of principal and assistant medical practitioners, in normal health, at each quinquennial valuation of the National Health Service Pension Scheme for England and Wales is set out in the table.

Valuation Period	*Average Age Men*	*Average Age Women*
1969–1974	63.5	62.5
1974–1979	62.0	61.0
1979–1984	62.0	61.0
1984–1989	62.0	61.0
1989–1994	62.5	62.5
1994–1999	62.5	62.5

Private Finance Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 434W, on the private finance initiative, if he will state the average savings as a percentage of the public sector comparator for the 23 hospitals cited in his answer; and if he will make a statement. [9441]

Mr. Hutton: The savings of the private finance initiative option as a percentage of the public sector comparators for the 23 hospitals range from less than 1 per cent. to 7.14 per cent., with the average being 1.75 per cent.

The comparison figures of the PFI and public service comparator options at the time each scheme reached financial close have been reported to the Health Select Committee.

Social Services Departments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the source is of the moneys to be allocated to social services departments through the community care services specific grant. [8918]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 22 October 2001]*: The £300 million allocated to councils over this year and next is additional funding for social care. The increase in the

personal social services settlement for 2001–02 over 2000–01 is now 4.7 per cent. in real terms compared with 3.7 per cent. before this grant was announced. Similarly, the increase is now 3.7 per cent. in 2002–03 compared with 2.9 per cent. before this grant was announced.

Recognising the key role that local government has to play in delivering community services, £80 million of this funding has been provided by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and a further £20 million from Her Majesty's Treasury. The remaining £200 million will come from resources the Department has identified which previously were not earmarked for social services.

Coventry and Warwickshire University Hospital Trust

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure improvements take place in the running of Coventry and Warwickshire University Hospital Trust following the publication of the recent report by the Commission for Health Improvement. [9743]

Mr. Hutton: The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) report highlighted several issues at the Coventry and Warwickshire University Hospitals national health service trust that need to be improved. The trust was given three months to produce an agreed action plan for improvement, and is also expected to show signs of improved performance during this time.

Officials from the West Midlands Regional Office (WMRO) met the executive directors of the trust to give feedback and guidance on the formulation of their action plan. This is an evolving strategy requiring further work to demonstrate how the change will be delivered. The performance of the trust will be monitored monthly by officials from the WMRO during the initial three month period.

Clinical safety is paramount in the provision of health care and CHI plays a central role in our plans to drive up the quality of care in the NHS, as outlined in the NHS Plan.

Digital Hearing Aids

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many digital hearing aids have been fitted under the NHS's pilot project on hearing services to date; [9691]

(2) what change there has been to the estimated number of people in England to benefit from the pilot project in digital hearing aids since 18 January 2000. [9692]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* By the end of September 2001, 11,080 digital hearing aids had been provided for adults and children as part of the "modernising national health service hearing aid services" project. 10,552 hearing aids were for adults and 528 hearing aids were for children.

Last year, the Department estimated that between 20,000 and 30,000 people would benefit from being involved in the project. We now expect more than 20,000 digital hearing aids to have been prescribed, and 18,000 adults to have digital hearing aids, as part of the modernisation project, by March 2002.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent estimate his Department has made of the cost of making digital hearing aids universally available among the hard of hearing; [10189]

(2) what recent representations he has received on levels of NHS audiology provision and the availability of digital hearing aids. [10188]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has received recent correspondence from the Royal National Institute for Deaf People about the modernisation of hearing aid services and the availability of digital hearing aids.

The Institute of Hearing Research is evaluating the "modernising national health service hearing aid services" project, which includes collecting information on the cost of providing hearing aids. The evaluation report will help planning of the further modernisation of hearing aid services.

Subject to favourable evaluation, we have earmarked funding to support modernisation of hearing aid services and expect to invest up to an extra £25 million by 2003–04. The cost of providing digital hearing aids will be determined by the speed and scale of modernisation.

Tourette's Syndrome

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people under the age of 18 are diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome in the UK. [10271]

Jacqui Smith: We do not collect figures of the number of young people under the age of 18 who are diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome. The prevalence is estimated to be in the region of three to six per thousand children in the general population.

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what basic level of support is offered to the parents of young people with Tourette's Syndrome. [10272]

Jacqui Smith: Parents of young people with Tourette's Syndrome should expect to receive support to help understand their child's difficulty and to assist in their child's care from services that are treating the child. Parents can seek additional information and advice from the Tourette Syndrome (United Kingdom) Association.

Free Personal Care

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Care, with specific reference to the provision of free personal care; and if he will make a statement. [10535]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* We announced our response to the Royal Commission on Long Term Care in the annexe to the NHS Plan which we published in July 2000, copies of which are available in the Library.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to speed up the processing of the registration of overseas nurses at Yeovil District Hospital

by the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting; and if he will make a statement. [10543]

Mr. Hutton: Registration is a matter for the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC). However, the UKCC advises that a number of these applications for registration have now been processed. The UKCC is awaiting further information in order to complete the work on the remaining applications.

Health Spending

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date he expects to meet his target of raising the share of national income spent on health in England to the average level of the other countries in the European Union; what his estimate is of the current gap between these two figures; and if he will make a statement. [10628]

Mr. Hutton: We aim to increase total health expenditure in the United Kingdom up to the average of the countries of the European Union, which is around eight per cent. of gross domestic product. By the end of the present spending review period (2003–04), we expect that total UK expenditure on health will have reached 7.7 per cent. of gross domestic product. Spending beyond this period will be decided in future spending reviews.

The figures are provided for the UK rather than England, because this is the level at which there are the most reliable figures for gross domestic product and figures for private health expenditure.

Waiting Times

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards meeting his targets of reducing waiting times to *(a)* a maximum of six months by the end of 2005 for in-patients and *(b)* a maximum of three months by 2005 for out-patients. [10545]

Mr. Hutton: In order to achieve maximum waiting times of six months for in-patients and three months for out-patients by 2005, shorter maximum waiting times are being phased. This year the national health service is working towards reducing the maximum in-patient waiting time of 18 months now to 15 months and the waiting time standard for a first out-patient appointment of over six months now to a maximum of six months by the end of March 2002. In-patient waiting times will continue to fall on a staged basis each year from 18 months through to 15, 12, nine down to six months. Waiting times for a first out-patient appointment will also fall from six months, to five, four, then eventually three months by 2005.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 30 October 2001

DEFENCE

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of the retrospective recognition of pre-1975 military service for pension purposes. [10433]

Mr. Ingram: Before 1975, and currently, pensions were awarded to Service personnel who completed at least 22 years' reckonable service (or 16 years' reckonable service in the case of officers). Gratuities were awarded to those who did not qualify for a pension but had completed 12 years' reckonable service (or nine years in the case of officers).

It has been the long-standing policy of successive Governments that changes to improve benefits from public service pension schemes should normally be implemented from a current date for future service only.

In the case of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme, in order to calculate the precise cost of awarding pension rights retrospectively, my Department would have to identify and assess the potential entitlements of all service men who left service before April 1975 without completing enough service to qualify for a pension. There are probably several hundred thousand if not more than a million former service men in this category. An accurate estimate could, therefore, be provided only at disproportionate cost.

None the less, we can be clear that the cost of awarding pensions retrospectively would be considerable. In addition, such a retrospection could not be applied solely to former service men, and would require a change for all public service pension schemes.

Service Accommodation

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the overall standard of Single Living Accommodation. [9796]

Dr. Moonie: The condition of Single Living Accommodation has been examined in detail to underpin decisions on the major investment programme announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 14 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 600W, in particular the Single Living Accommodation Modernisation prime contract which we plan to award by the end of 2002. Recent surveys indicate that roughly half of the Single Living Accommodation is sub-standard. The Ministry of Defence's objective is to improve all Single Living Accommodation to single bedrooms with en suite shower, wash hand basin and toilet facilities. To this end, an additional £1 billion worth of investment is planned over the next 10 years.

Veterans

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made in publicising and demonstrating assistance offered to veterans of the armed services by central and local government. [10215]

Dr. Moonie: Since my appointment as Minister for Veterans' Affairs on 14 March significant progress has been made in publicising and demonstrating the aims of the Veterans' Initiative. The Ministry of Defence has established a Veterans' Affairs Secretariat and I have chaired two meetings of the Veterans' Forum comprising the Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations (COBSEO) executive committee members, and officials from Government Departments with an interest in veterans' affairs. I also chaired the first meeting of the Forum in Plenary session on 16 October, which was attended by 158 delegates from veterans' organisations, welfare providers and pressure groups. The Plenary programme included a presentation from the DTLR's National Housing Federation which gave veterans advice on how to get the most out of the "Supporting People" initiative currently being taken forward by local government. The Veterans' Forum has fully endorsed the Strategic Action Plan to take forward the Veterans' Initiative and I will now present the plan to my ministerial colleagues at the Veterans' Task Force on 6 November.

A short press release was issued after each forum meeting and minutes of forum and task force meetings, including a copy of the Strategic Action Plan, have been widely circulated among the veterans' community and are available on the MOD website: http://www.mod.uk/vau

Chinook Helicopters

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* by date and *(b)* by aircraft serial number, all incidents of uncommanded flight control movements in Chinook helicopters since 1 January 1999; and what their cause was. [10638]

Mr. Ingram: Uncommanded movements are defined as an unusual movement of flying controls or rotors that are not caused by pilot inputs.

The table lists the incidents of uncommanded flying control movements in Chinook helicopters since 1 January 1999 and their determined causes.

Uncommanded flying control movements in Chinook aircraft since 1999

Date	*Tail number*	*Cause*
1999		
12 March	ZA712	Faulty AFCS
17 March	ZA718	Faulty DASH actuator and directional gyro
20 April	ZD983	Directional gyro out of tolerance
29 April	ZH775	Faulty AFCS and directional gyro
14 June	ZA718	Faulty directional gyro
29 July	ZA718	Faulty AFCS and directional gyro
29 October	ZA711	Faulty directional gyro
18 November	ZA711	Faulty directional gyro
2000		
6 January	ZA714	Faulty AFCS
6 January	ZA718	Faulty AFCS
11 February	ZA682	Faulty vertical gyro
4 April	ZA682	Faulty DASH actuator gear assembly
5 April	ZA679	Faulty DASH actuator
5 April	ZA684	Faulty directional gyro connector

Uncommanded flying control movements in Chinook aircraft since 1999

Date	Tail number	Cause
30 May	ZA710	Faulty AFCS
24 July	ZA679	Faulty AFCS and DASH actuator
5 August	ZA674	Faulty cables to AFCS
9 November	ZA671	Faulty vertical gyro
12 November	ZA671	Faulty AFCS
2001		
17 January	ZH777	Units replaced following pitch oscillations
1 March	ZA709	Faulty directional gyro
1 May	ZA674	Faulty directional gyro
24 May	ZA680	Faulty lower control actuators
5 July	ZD981	Faulty attitude indicator

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each occasion on which pilots have temporarily lost control of RAF Chinook helicopters during an uncommanded flying control movement. [10637]

Mr. Ingram: No such instances have occurred. Aircrew have retained full control of the aircraft whenever an uncommanded flying control movement has taken place by successfully mitigating the effects of the control movement.

Defence Spending

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is (1) of the level of UK defence spending as a share of UK gross domestic product for each year from 1973–74 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement; [10493]

(2) UK defence spending as a share of gross domestic product for each of the last 25 years; and if he will make a statement. [10631]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Following the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting (RAB) in the Ministry of Defence on 1 April 2001, future financial planning, management and reporting is conducted on the new resource basis.

UK defence spending as a share of the UK GDP from 1973–74 to 2000–01

Financial year	Percentage GDP
1973–74	4.7
1974–75	4.7
1975–76	4.8
1976–77	4.7
1977–78	4.5
1978–79	4.4
1979–80	4.5
1980–81	4.8
1981–82	4.9
1982–83	5.2
1983–84	5.1
1984–85	5.3
1985–86	5.0
1986–87	4.7
1987–88	4.4
1988–89	4.0
1989–90	4.0
1990–91	3.9
1991–92	4.1
1992–93	3.7
1993–94	3.5
1994–95	3.3
1995–96	3.0

UK defence spending as a share of the UK GDP from 1973–74 to 2000–01

Financial year	Percentage GDP
1996–97	2.9
1997–98	2.6
1998–99	2.6
1999–2000	2.5
2000–01	2.5

Using defence based figures announced in the 2000 spending review, defence budget expenditure is expected to represent the following share of GDP for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Financial year	Percentage GDP
2001–02	2.4
2002–03	2.3

Sovereign Bases

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the status of Sovereign Bases under UK law. [10502]

Mr. Ingram: The legal status of the UK Sovereign Base Areas on Cyprus is as set out in the Cyprus Act 1960 and the 1960 Treaty of Establishment. Under the Act, the Sovereign Base Areas were retained as UK sovereign territory when the Republic of Cyprus achieved independence.

Frigates and Destroyers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the predicted total number of frigates and destroyers will be in the Royal Navy after the final type 45 destroyer comes into service. [10116]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans and based on the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review, the number of frigates and destroyers in service after the final type 45 destroyer comes into service will be 32.

NATO

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by his Department in implementing each of the decisions of the NATO Defence Capabilities Initiative. [11454]

Mr. Hoon: I am pleased by the progress achieved by NATO in improving military capabilities in line with the 59 Decisions of the Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI), although I acknowledge that much still remains to be done.

A number of DCI Decisions propose action for the Alliance as a whole, rather than for individual nations. Often these address standards and procedures rather than specific capabilities. The UK is working with Allies and the NATO International Staffs to achieve success in these areas.

The UK's own DCI performance has been relatively strong. It compares well with the Alliance average and reflects capability enhancements such as the introduction

of the C17 strategic transport aircraft, the acquisition of a greater sealift capability and development and procurement of new precision guided munitions.

Helicopter Accident (Sierra Leone)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the recent fatal helicopter accident in Kenema, Sierra Leone. [11451]

Mr. Ingram: At approximately 7.15 am local time on Friday 19 October, a HIND helicopter belonging to the Sierra Leone armed forces crashed about fives miles south west of Kenema, Sierra Leone. Regrettably, a British Army Officer, Major Vanessa Lang, sustained head injuries in the crash, and subsequently died of her injuries in hospital in Kenema. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I extend our deep condolences to Major Lang's family.

Major Lang was working from the British Military Headquarters in Freetown as a media adviser to the Sierra Leone armed forces. She was travelling in the helicopter to provide advice to the Sierra Leone Army on their information strategy in relation to a planned border security operation. The other five occupants of the helicopter included a British Non-Commissioned Officer and an Australian Major: none received serious injuries in the accident. British accident investigators are assisting the Government of Sierra Leone in the investigation into the precise cause of the accident.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Human Rights Commission

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many additional appointments are to be made to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; and on what date these appointments will be made. [10560]

Mr. Browne: I intend to announce the outcome of the recent competition for appointment to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in the near future.

Semi-automatic Weapons

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the criteria are for the granting of a licence for a semi-automatic weapon in Northern Ireland. [7836]

Jane Kennedy: Firearms licensing in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Chief Constable under the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and is generally more restrictive than in Great Britain. For example, all firearms, including shotguns and air guns, require a firearm certificate. The Chief Constable shall not permit a person to hold a firearm certificate unless he is satisfied of certain statutory criteria—that a person is not prohibited by law from possessing a firearm and that the requirements in respect of fitness, good reason and public safety have been met.

The Chief Constable has advised us that the term "semi-automatic weapon" is not specifically defined in the legislation and can therefore be open to wide interpretation, eg shotguns (including pump action), .22 rifles and handguns (not revolvers), target weapons and prohibited weapons. To provide an answer to this question would require an in-depth search of police records and incur disproportionate cost.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many applications have been registered for semi-automatic weapons in the last 12 months in Northern Ireland; [7834]

(2) how many licences for semi-automatic weapons were granted in the last 12 months in Northern Ireland. [7835]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised us that the term "semi-automatic weapon" is not specifically defined in the legislation and can therefore be open to wide interpretation, eg shotguns (including pump action), .22 rifles and handguns (not revolvers), target weapons and prohibited weapons. To provide an answer to this question would require an in-depth search of police records and incur disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railway Network

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money has been invested in the railway network in each of the last 10 years. [8877]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is contained in the latest (September 2001) edition of the Strategic Rail Authority bulletin "National Rail Trends".

Thameslink

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the timetable of the Thameslink investment programme will be affected by Railtrack going into administration. [9378]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 222W.

Ministerial Visit (Brazil)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was *(a)* the itinerary for and *(b)* the cost of the Minister for Housing's visit to Brazil of 4 to 8 November 2000. [9891]

Mr. Raynsford: I led a successful trade mission to Brazil and Chile from 5–10 November. We visited Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Santiago. Accompanying me were around a dozen representatives from the British construction industry. The purpose of the mission was to promote British construction exports.

In Rio de Janeiro we met with the Municipal Secretary for Housing, representatives of Town Hall's Favela Bairro Programme, representatives of the UK and Brazilian Oil and Gas companies, the President of SINICON (Association for Heavy Construction), the British Chamber of Commerce, the State Secretary for Sanitation and Water Resource, representatives from CEDAE (local

water company), and ABES (sanitary engineers), a group of top architects from Rio, and local British and Brazilian businessmen. I also visited the Copa D'Or Hospital where I met with the President of D'Or Group.

In São Paulo we met with SABESP (Water Company) the Brazilian Trade Association for the Construction Industry, PINI Publishers, the Brazilian British Centre, ABRAS (retail association), the State Secretary for Transport and the President of Cia do Metropolitano de São Paulo Metro. We also made a site visit to a major road construction scheme with Rodanel and contributed to a PFI Seminar for representatives of the construction and finance sector in Brazil.

The total cost to the public funds of the mission to Brazil was approximately £9,800. This covered the cost of my travel and accommodation, local transportation, incidental expenses, interpreters' fees and that of my Private Secretary who accompanied me.

Railtrack

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has conducted into the impact a not-for-profit Railtrack will have on rail safety, reliability, ability to raise funds for investment purposes, and its own public acceptability. [9892]

Mr. Jamieson: Our proposed company limited by guarantee (CLG) would be able to make an operating surplus, which would be re-invested in establishing reserves and in developing the network. Our proposals are now being developed and we will work to ensure that the CLG would be able to raise funds for investment and have a positive impact on rail safety and reliability.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he made of the financial position of Railtrack before deciding to apply for an administration order. [9833]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), *Official Report*, column 572W, and to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 195W.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings he held with officials from the IPPR to discuss their model for a not-for-profit trust prior to his decision to take Railtrack into administration. [9835]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1319W.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Safety and Standards Directorate of Railtrack will be transferred to the new railway industry safety body. [9824]

Mr. Spellar: On 1 January this year the industry-wide functions of Railtrack's Safety and Standards Directorate were incorporated into a separate, non-profit making company, within the Railtrack Group—Railway Safety. Lord Cullen has recommended that most of the functions carried out by Railway Safety should be undertaken by the new Rail Industry Safety Body.

We shall publish in this parliamentary Session our plans to take forward Lord Cullen's recommendation to establish a fully independent industry safety body.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has received confirmation from the European Commission that his plans for Railtrack are compatible with European law. [9829]

Mr. Spellar: The Secretary of State will ensure that any proposals for restructuring the railway industry are compatible with European law.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if Railtrack's administrators will be permitted to dispose of non-operational assets and return the proceeds of any such disposals to Railtrack's shareholders. [9828]

Mr. Spellar: The administrator is required to manage the transfer, as a going concern, of as much of Railtrack plc's undertaking as it is necessary to transfer in order to ensure that the relevant activities may be properly carried on. The administrator's proposed transfer scheme must then be passed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for consideration and approval. It is then for the administrator to determine whether any residual value can be distributed, and on what basis.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information was given by his officials to Railtrack executives in their meeting on 3 October about his intentions to take Railtrack into administration. [9840]

Mr. Spellar: None. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took the decision to refuse Railtrack's proposal for additional funding on 5 October.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library *(a)* a copy of written statements from Railtrack substantiating its requests for extra subsidy and *(b)* an analysis of the decisions of the Regulator on such funds. [9837]

Mr. Spellar: Documents provided to my Department by Railtrack relating to the company's requests for extra funding remain commercially confidential. These documents have not been analysed by the Rail Regulator.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when and how he informed the Strategic Rail Authority of his decision *(a)* to put Railtrack into railway administration and *(b)* to replace it with a Government-owned non profit-making company. [9830]

Mr. Spellar: My officials informed the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) on 6 October.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from City firms about future private investment in the national railway network since 11 September. [9858]

Mr. Spellar: My officials and my Department's advisers have had a number of contacts with financial institutions since Railtrack plc was placed into administration.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, if he will provide Railtrack plc with sufficient funds to complete the modernisation of train protection systems. [9827]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the Deputy Prime Minister's statements to the House on 20 July 2000, *Official Report,* column 549, and 24 October 2000, *Official Report,* column 136.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much private money was invested in equity share issues by Railtrack; what is the cumulative value of dividends paid out on that equity; and if he will estimate the cumulative interest payable on the same amount of gilt edged stock. [10147]

Mr. Spellar: The flotation of Railtrack Group Plc on 20 May 1996 raised gross proceeds of £1.93 billion from equity investors.

Since 20 May 1996, Railtrack Group Plc have paid out £709 million in cash, or equivalent, dividends.

The amount of interest payable on gilt edged stock is dependent on the coupon and maturity of the stock that is bought.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent meetings he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss recent developments affecting Railtrack. [10173]

Mr. Jamieson: My officials are in regular contact with the Strategic Rail Authority.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under the new arrangements proposed for Railtrack and the railway sector, to what extent *(a)* train operating companies and *(b)* Railtrack would have responsibility for safety. [10174]

Mr. Jamieson: The successor company to Railtrack plc would need to meet the same safety requirements as its predecessor. Train operating companies' safety responsibility would not be affected.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the implications for the planned improvements to the east coast main line of the decision to put Railtrack into administration. [10172]

Mr. Jamieson: The decision to put Railtrack into administration will have no immediate implications for the planned improvements to the east coast main line (ECML). The development studies for the ECML upgrade are being jointly carried out and funded by the Strategic Rail Authority and Railtrack. This will continue unchanged until the end of this financial year. The review of the upgrade objectives is a continuous process as part of the project's development. Decisions on planned improvements will be subject to the outcome of these reviews regardless of whether or not Railtrack is in administration.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to compensate Railtrack employees holding shares in Railtrack plc. [9906]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Government will do their utmost to ensure shareholders get fair value for money but they will not use additional taxpayers' money to create value.

As my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement on 15 October, no further taxpayers' money will be put into Railtrack to compensate shareholders.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the calculation supporting the statement he made on 15 October that Railtrack would be in deficit by £700 million by 8 December this year and £1.7 billion by the end of March next year. [10195]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* The figures are those stated in the report at Exhibit "DR3" in the bundle of High Court papers, copies of which have already been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the cash needs of Railtrack plc *(a)* between now and its next year-end and *(b)* for the following year; and how much of this will be supplied by the Treasury. [9780]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The Government have committed to provide the Railway Administrators with the financial support necessary to ensure that the rail network can remain fully operational throughout the administration of Railtrack Plc. The Administrators, who are currently undertaking a thorough review of Railtrack's business and cost base, will determine the overall case needs of Railtrack Plc during this period.

In respect of the funding arrangements, I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) on 17 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 1230W.

Services for Deaf People

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if local authorities are obliged to adhere to a minimum standard of service provision with regard to providing interpretation services for deaf residents. [9878]

Dr. Whitehead: Part three of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 applies to services to the public provided by local authorities. Where access to a service is impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person, a local authority will be under a duty to make a reasonable adjustment to the way the service is provided. This might involve providing British Sign Language interpretation for a deaf person.

We would expect local authorities to consult deaf people as necessary over the provision of all services as part of best value reviews. Statutory guidance emphasises the need to consult all groups: these will include those who are deaf and their representative bodies.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to implement a London-wide translation service for deaf residents. [9877]

Dr. Whitehead: There are no current plans to implement a London-wide translation service for deaf residents. The provision of services is a matter for the London boroughs in the light of local needs. We are actively encouraging authorities jointly to review services under best value, and there is nothing to prevent a review being carried out London-wide, perhaps co-ordinated through the GLA or the LGA. However, this is ultimately a matter for the boroughs.

Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding is necessary to provide the signalling and safety equipment suggested by the Cullen Inquiry into the Ladbroke Grove accident; and over what period he expects this funding to be delivered. [9839]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the Deputy Prime Minister's statements to the House on 20 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 549 and 24 October 2000, *Official Report*, column 136.

Rail Investment

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much investment has been made in the *(a)* east coast main line and *(b)* west coast main line in each of the last 15 years. [10128]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures for infrastructure expenditure on the east coast main line and west coast main line are only readily available since 1998, when Railtrack first published its Network Management Statement (NMS).

1998–99

East coast main line—£75 million

West coast main line—£250 million

1999–2000

East coast main line—£95 million

West coast main line—£461 million

2000–01

East coast main line—£181 million

West coast main line—£823 million.

Until publication of the NMS, Railtrack, and previously British Rail, recorded expenditure by zone, or sector, not line of route.

Mandatory Services

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce greater freedom for local councils to charge for mandatory services. [10071]

Dr. Whitehead: In the Green Paper "Modernising Local Government Finance" (September 2000) we said that in addition to extending local authorities' power to charge for services they provide at their discretion, we would, in the longer term, review the policy on charges for mandatory services.

Housing Stock (Borrowing)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to allow local authorities to borrow against the value of their housing stock; and if he will make a statement. [10127]

Dr. Whitehead: We announced on 21 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 250W, our intention to abolish the present system of local authority capital controls. This will be replaced by a system under which local authorities would be free to borrow without obtaining Government approval; the new arrangements will apply to borrowing for housing expenditure. Legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The amount of borrowing that an authority can undertake will depend on the resources available to service debt and be subject to a Prudential Code which is currently being developed. The impact of the new freedom will, therefore, depend on what revenue resources an authority can make available for this purpose while meeting other liabilities.

There is no proposal to remove the present prohibition on the mortgaging of local authority capital assets. Loans by authorities are secured on all the revenues of the authority and that will remain the position.

Public Interest Trusts

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings were held by officials of his Department to discuss *(a)* Project Ariel and *(b)* not-for-profit public interest trusts; and when these were held. [10192]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* Under paragraph 2 of Part 11 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the practice to disclose details of internal communications.

Vehicles (Pedestrian Protection Standards)

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish a chronology of *(a)* research undertaken by and *(b)* proposals for pedestrian protection standards for cars for the Transport Research Laboratory. [11137]

Mr. Jamieson: A major programme of research into pedestrian protection was carried out by TRL between 1992 and 1999 under project S220C/VF. This project covered TRL's input into the work of EEVC Committees WG10 and WG17 including the development of test tools, an early cost-benefit analysis, and some work on the additional problems caused by pull bars. The completion of this work coincided with the presentation of the final report of WG17 to the European Commission, covering recommendations for test tools and procedures for assessing the pedestrian protection offered by cars.

A copy of the final report of this work, "Pedestrian protection test procedures and design: Final report (April 1992 to March 1999)—TRL report 480", which gives full chronological details is being placed in the Library.

Since 1999 further work by TRL in the area of pedestrian protection has concentrated on further refinement of the test tools, some analysis of the Honda

Civic and a preliminary comparative benefit analysis of phase 1 of the ACEA proposals. This work will be incorporated in the final project report in late 2002. The following interim reports are being placed in the Library:

"Assessment of the damped, production version of the TRL pedestrian legform impactor (unpublished project report PR/SE/030/00)"

"Assessment of TNO's new child and adult headform impactors for EEVC (WG17) (unpublished project report PR/SE/097/00)"

"Summary of progress towards pedestrian protection test procedures—April 1999 to March 2001 (unpublished project report PR/SE/143/00)"

"Development of a biofidelic pedestrian and vehicle model for reviewing the EECV upper legform test energies (unpublished project report PR/SE/309/01)".

TRL have not made any proposals for pedestrian protection standards for cars.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what parliamentary procedure he will adopt for *(a)* the proposed mandatory test standards for vehicles protection for pedestrians and *(b)* the voluntary proposals; and what procedure will be adopted by the European Parliament. [11133]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no formal proposal from the European Commission for the introduction of mandatory pedestrian protection test standards for vehicles. The proposal for a negotiated agreement with manufacturers is subject to full parliamentary scrutiny, and an Explanatory Memorandum was submitted on 10 October. The proposal is also currently being considered by the European Parliament.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when COREPER will discuss pedestrian protection standards for vehicles; what the UK objectives are at COREPER on this issue; when Ministers will next meet in the European Council to discuss it; and if he will make a statement. [11132]

Mr. Jamieson: COREPER plan to discuss pedestrian protection on either 7 or 9 November. Our objective at COREPER is to bring about improvements in pedestrian protection in Europe. The issue will next be discussed by Ministers at the Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council on 26 November.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to adopt the highest proposed standard for pedestrian protection standards for vehicles. [11136]

Mr. Jamieson: Our policy is to bring about the introduction of effective European measures to make car fronts safer for the benefit of pedestrians. In practical terms this means finding a reasonable balance between the technical standards proposed in the initial stages and ensuring early implementation.

Road Schemes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which major road schemes each highway authority has included in its full local transport plan and first annual progress report where funding is not being sought in the Local Transport Settlement 2001. [10487]

Mr. Jamieson: Not all local authorities have included in their full local transport plans or first annual progress reports information on those road schemes for which they are considering making a bid for LTP funding in future years. In many cases they have yet to make decisions on whether to make such a bid. We know of a number of schemes where the authority has forewarned us that they may be making a bid and in some cases has provided us with some information. These include:

A171 Burniston/Cloughton Bypass

A19 Shipton/Beningbrough Bypass

A24 Ashington to Southwater Route Safety Strategy

A228 Leybourne and West Malling Bypass

A228 Ropers Lane (Phase 2)

A260 Hawkinge Bypass

A38/A390 Link Dobwalls

A391 Corridor

A418 improvements including a Rowsham Bypass

A418 Wing Bypass

A605 Stanground Bypass

A684 Leeming/Aiskew/Bedale Bypass

Botley Bypass

Chickenhall Lane Link Road

East Kent Access (Phases 2 and 3)

Newhaven Port Access Road

North-West Relief Road, Shrewsbury

Tunstall Northern Bypass.

There are other schemes which have been bid for in the past but which were not accepted for funding. Where such schemes were not rejected outright authorities are free to bid for these schemes again. These include:

A57 Cadishead Way

Heysham—M6 Link Road

Wylye Valley Relief Road.

In other cases, authorities are seeking decisions in December 2001, although the planned spend profile of the schemes concerned means that no funding is sought for the 2002–03 financial year.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when *(a)* English Nature, *(b)* the Countryside Agency and *(c)* English Heritage (i) were and (ii) will be consulted on local road schemes being considered for funding in the Local Transport Settlement 2001. [10485]

Mr. Jamieson: Local authorities bidding for road schemes under the Local Transport Plan system are required to consult the four statutory bodies—English Nature, English Heritage, the Countryside Agency and the Environment Agency—before submitting their bids. In addition, once the bid documents were received by my Department in August the Appraisal Summary Tables for all road schemes were sent to the four bodies to seek their further views on the schemes. The bodies have been kept informed of alterations to the tables.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he is presented with appraisal summary tables for each of the options before deciding whether to approve a major road scheme; [10633]

(2) if his Department requires appraisal summary tables to be submitted for more than one option when a local authority seeks funding for a major road scheme. [10634]

Mr. Jamieson: Before major local road schemes can be accepted for funding, local authorities need to demonstrate that they have considered alternative approaches. Submission of appraisal summary tables for each alternative is not required but decisions will only be taken once we are satisfied that these have been subject to proper consideration. Decisions are based on all of the evidence available to the Department.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the major new road schemes submitted by local authorities for funding *(a)* by 31 July and *(b)* after 31 July. [10488]

Mr. Jamieson: The following major new road schemes were submitted for funding by *(a)* 31 July:

A1 South East Northumberland Link Road
A1198 Papworth Everard Bypass
A182 East Durham Link Road
A228 Main Road to Ropers Lane (Phase 1)
A24 Horsham-Capel Improvement
A34 Alderley Edge Bypass
A350 Westbury Bypass Town Centre Scheme
A36 Codford-Heytesbury Improvement
A52 Grantham East-West Bypass
A57(T) M1 Junction 31-Todwick Crossroads
A6096 Ilkeston Awsworth Link
A612 Gedling ITP Scheme
A628 Cudworth and West Green Bypass
Aston Northern Bypass (Phase 2)
Bletchley Link
Central Route, Sunderland
Central Somerset Access Package
East Middlesbrough Corridor
Junction 11 M4 Improvement Proposals
Kiln Lane Link, Surrey
Markham Employment Growth Zone
Northern Gateway Stage 2, Newcastle
Oakham Bypass
Poole Bridge Regeneration Initiative
Roscommon Way Extension, Essex
Selly Oak Relief Road

and *(b)* after 31 July

Luton East Corridor.

Information on the scheme listed in *(b)* was submitted after 31 July with the full agreement of the Department.

In some cases revised information on the schemes listed in *(a)* was sought from authorities after 31 July.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the New Approach to Appraisal applies to *(a)* national and *(b)* local major road schemes which are financed by private capital. [10486]

Mr. Jamieson: The New Approach to Appraisal (NATA) applies to all trunk and local major road schemes that have some element of public funding. For developer-funded trunk road highway works, the principles of NATA apply, though the form of application may vary. For developer-funded local road schemes, local highway authorities have scope to decide on the appropriate approach and may apply NATA.

Chiltern Line Franchise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to reach a final decision on the renewal of the Chiltern line franchise; and if he will make a statement. [11449]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is, I understand, close to concluding negotiations and will then seek the Secretary of State's consent to their entering into a new agreement.

Travel Concessions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will include travel concessions on Isle of Wight ferries in forthcoming legislation; [11463]

(2) what further provision he proposes to make for travel concessions for elderly people in forthcoming legislation. [11462]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 10 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 339W.

Pensioner Journeys

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the annual number of pensioner journeys *(a)* by train, *(b)* by coach, *(c)* by underground, *(d)* bus and *(e)* as foot passengers on ferries. [11464]

Ms Keeble: It is estimated that there were 10.5 million people of pension age (65 and over for men and 60 and over for women) in 2000.

The number of annual journeys made by pensioners, averaged over the years 1998 to 2000, were (a) 46 million by train, (b) 790 million by bus, (c) 26 million by coach, and (d) 30 million by London Underground. No data are available on journeys by ferry.

10-Year Plan for Transport

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what provision has been made for local road maintenance in the 10-Year Plan for Transport. [11643]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are providing £30 billion for local road maintenance over the next 10 years, not £10 billion as I stated in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) on 23 October 2001 *Official Report,* column 136.

Housebuilding (Hertfordshire)

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from councillors concerning housebuilding targets for Hertfordshire. [5570]

Ms Keeble *[pursuant to the reply, 23 October 2001, c. 132]:* My right hon. Friend has received no representations from individual councillors since comments were invited in December 2000 (and not November 2000 as originally stated) on the proposed changes to housing distribution, although local authorities made representations.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the target, in tonnes, of the delivery of food to Afghanistan; by what means the food is being delivered; and what obstacles have to be overcome to increase the supply of food to Afghanistan. [10795]

Hilary Benn: The World Food Programme's monthly target for food delivery into Afghanistan is 52,000 metric tonnes. WFP is trucking food to Afghanistan by land routes from neighbouring countries. It continues to make progress on increasing the supply of food to Afghanistan, but obstacles do remain.

In addition to the physical challenges of distributing food to distant villages on poor roads, obstacles include: a lack of hauliers willing to undertake the work; local NGO staff unable to show up for work to oversee secondary distribution; limited communication with local staff; and the fact that case load lists are becoming outdated due to further population displacement. The fear of harassment and looting of supplies by some elements of the Taliban is further compounding an already difficult situation.

We are doing all we can to support WFP in overcoming these obstacles, so that food delivery can continue to increase now and over the winter. WFP is looking into all options for delivering food, including opening up new land routes from the north, as well as air operations, to support the people of Afghanistan in the coming weeks and months. We have already allocated £3 million to WFP for its response to the Afghan crisis.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the dietary content is of the foodstuff being delivered to Afghanistan; and who assesses it. [10793]

Hilary Benn: The food being dispatched to Afghanistan by the World Food Programme (WFP) to feed vulnerable people is primarily made up of wheat and wheat flour. This is being supplemented in some areas by other foodstuffs provided by local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as pulses, oils, and fresh foods where available. Individual agencies are responsible for assessing the dietary content of the food that they dispatch. Availability of food stocks and logistical constraints play a large part in determining what they are able to deliver.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [8821]

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on humanitarian relief to Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the surrounding regions. [9981]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Members to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development to the House on 24 October 2001, *Official Report* column 283.

North Korea

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contribution her Department made to the World Food Programme and other agencies for famine relief and food distribution in North Korea in the last financial year. [9816]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development did not make any contribution to the World Food Programme (WFP) for North Korea in the last financial year. However we did provide a total of £500,000 towards famine relief and related activities in North Korea. This included £200,000 through World Vision for restoring the food production capacity of six co-operative farms under the United Nations Development Programme's Agricultural Recovery and Environmental Protection Programme. We also allocated £300,000 directly to UNDP in support of two parts of AREP.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures are taken by the World Food Programme and other multilateral agencies that distribute famine relief in North Korea to ensure that the food is consumed by those for whom it is intended. [9817]

Hilary Benn: The World Food Programme (WFP) is the only multilateral agency involved in the distribution of food aid in North Korea, apart from a small input through UNICEF. WFP's food aid programme is targeted at vulnerable groups including children under five, primary and secondary school children, orphans and children in other health institutions, pregnant women and the elderly. WFP work only in provinces to which they have access (currently 167 out of a total of 211). This is essential for carrying out assessments of need, and to undertake monitoring. WFP run an intensive programme of monitoring visits to beneficiaries.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are taken to monitor the distribution of food for famine relief by the agencies responsible in North Korea. [9819]

Hilary Benn: The World Food Programme (WFP) is the lead UN Agency for food relief distribution within North Korea. WFP works with the Food Aid Liaison Unit within the Government's Public Distribution System which co-ordinates the work of non-governmental organisations involved in the sector. This includes the monitoring of food aid through these agencies. WFP monitors food both on its arrival in North Korea and at distribution points. The programme averages 300 monitoring visits per month.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Terrorist Attacks

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the economic impact on *(a)* the UK aerospace industry and *(b)* UK airlines of the events of 11 September. [9389]

Mr. Wilson: Officials in the Department of Trade and Industry are in close contact with the UK industry and are continuing to evaluate and monitor developments in the aviation industry in co-operation with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. When the economic impacts have been fully assessed, we will be in a position to consider the most appropriate response.

Aerospace Industry

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment the Government have made of the impact of the events of 11 September on the aerospace industry; [11181]

(2) what action the Government are taking to protect jobs in the aerospace industry. [11180]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle, (Mr. Prentice), question number 9389.

Fireworks

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from *(a)* the firework industry and *(b)* local authorities regarding fireworks being stored in unlicensed premises and sold illegally door to door. [9791]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Department has received representations from the British Pyrotechnists Association regarding fireworks being stored in unlicensed premises, but no representations from local authorities. No representations have been received regarding door to door sales.

Regulations (Consultations)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which regulations issued by her Department since 27 November 2000 have been subject to a consultation period of less than 12 weeks. [8775]

Ms Hewitt: The Code of Practice on Consultations announced by the Prime Minister on 27 November 2000 applies to all consultations launched after 1 January 2001.

Two regulations introduced since 27 November 2000 were subject to a consultation period of less than 12 weeks launched since 1 January 2001.

In the case of 'The Working Time (Amendment) Regulations 2001' there was a short one-month consultation, running from 28 June to 27 July 2001. The 12-week period was reduced on the grounds of the urgent need to amend a UK law, following a judgment by the European Court of Justice that the annual leave qualifying period contained within the original regulations was contrary to the Working Time Directive.

In the case of 'The Electricity (Class Exemptions from the Requirement for a Licence) Order 2001', there was a one-month consultation period, which reflected the original intention of having the order in force by June 2001. Three previous consultations on the individual elements of this measure (dealing with electricity generation, distribution and supply) had taken place in November 1999, March 2000 and July 2000.

Consultation lasting fewer than 12 weeks was undertaken prior to the introduction of the Consultation Code in respect of the following regulations, which were then introduced after 27 November 2000:

The Unsolicited Goods and Services Act 1971 (Electronic Communications) Order 2001;

The Offshore Combustion Installations (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Regulations 2001;

The Patents (Amendment) Rules 2001: Implementation of Articles 13 and 14 of Directive 98/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions;

The Sex Discrimination (Indirect Discrimination and Burden of Proof) Regulations 2001;

The Batteries and Accumulators (Containing Dangerous Substances) (Amendment) Regulations 2000;

The Competition Act 1998 (Public Transport Ticketing Schemes Block Exemption) Order 2001.

A number of orders introduced since 27 November 2000 have licensed companies to provide public telecommunications services. In these cases a statutory consultation period of not less than 28 days was carried out in line with the requirements of the Telecommunications Act 1984 and the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1998.

Enterprise Insight Campaign

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will outline the steps the Enterprise Insight Campaign will take to promote enterprise. [10163]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The Government strongly support Enterprise Insight, a 10-year private sector-led national campaign for enterprise. The campaign is led jointly by the British Chambers of Commerce, Confederation of British Industry and Institute of Directors in partnership with enterprise programme providers including Young Enterprise, Shell LiveWIRE and the Prince's Trust. Its aim is to promote enterprise by fostering an entrepreneurial spirit across the UK through four key initiatives: Enterprising Education, Enterprising Communities, Enterprising Media and Enterprising Business.

The first step started with the launch of the Enterprising Education campaign in July 2001. Since its launch, 246 businesses have registered their interest in promoting enterprise within schools. A further 750 are expected to

do so by 2002. The aim over the next two years is to get 40,000 more young people engaged in enterprise learning in schools and 5,000 new business people to support its delivery. This will be achieved through a number of activities including roadshows and the development of a website enabling businesses to register their interest online. In addition, the Entrepreneurs in Residence scheme, which matches businesses to local enterprise projects, is under way and the first five matches have already been made.

Enterprise Insight also aims to promote enterprise positively across society and, in particular, plans to work with the media, using case studies and role models, to help spread knowledge about entrepreneurship and business.

Small Business Service

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the priorities are for the Small Business Service in the coming year. [10161]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The Small Business Service's strategic objectives for 2001–04 are set out in its strategy for 2001–04. They are to:

Be a strong voice for small business at the heart of government, ensuring that government is aware of the needs of Business;

Strive for a regulatory framework which minimises the burdens of business;

Develop and maintain a world class business support service to enhance competitiveness and profitability of small businesses;

Champion entrepreneurship across society particularly in under-represented and disadvantaged groups.

Priorities for 2002–03 are currently being developed and will be published in the SBS Business Plan next year. SBS's operational targets for 2002–03 will be announced in the House.

The SBS Strategy and the SBS Business Plan for 2001–02 are available on *www.sbs.gov.uk.*

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much funding has been made available to companies by the Small Business Service. [10091]

Nigel Griffiths: From April 2000, when it was set up, until September this year the Small Business Service programme expenditure amounted to £365 million. Of this, expenditure under the Phoenix Fund, the Enterprise Fund and the Smart scheme, whereby grants may be made directly to small businesses, amounted to £96 million.

Business Support

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the *(a)* high technology venture capital fund and *(b)* incubator workspace loan fund will assist business. [10164]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The information is as follows:

(a) The £126 million UK High Technology Fund, managed by Westport Private Equity, has been established to increase the amount of finance available for investment in technology based businesses. The fund was established on a 'Fund of Funds' basis, and invests in those venture capital funds that are specialist in investing in early-stage, technology-focused companies. Investments in sectors and businesses being supported by the fund include software, pharmaceuticals, communications, internet technologies and biosciences.

(b) Loans from the SBS Business Incubation Fund are available to meet shortfalls in finance for incubation projects. Increasing the availability of incubation and its supportive nurturing environment will help improve the chances of survival and growth of business start-ups and early stage SMEs.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce legislation to combat age discrimination; if she will outlaw mandatory retirement ages; and what powers the authorities will be granted to enforce such legislation. [10112]

Alan Johnson: We shall introduce legislation to combat age discrimination in employment and training by the 2006 deadline set out in the EC's Employment Directive. That will give us the necessary time to resolve the complexities surrounding this issue, and to decide the right approach to retirement ages in the light of extensive consultation with employers, individuals, and expert groups on age good practice. We shall be issuing proposals for a first round of public consultation within the next three months. This will cover issues which are common to discrimination on grounds of age, sexual orientation, religion, disability and race, including enforcement.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact of the climate change levy on British industry. [10990]

Mr. Wilson: The climate change levy only became operational in April this year and the first payments are still being received by Customs and Excise. It is too early to assess its impact, but the levy is operating in the planned revenue neutral manner.

The impact on any specific sector will depend on a number of factors including;

The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.

Employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded reduction of national insurance contributions.

The number of energy intensive firms in that sector that are eligible to receive a discount on the main rates of the levy by signing up to an energy efficiency agreement.

What use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt 'new' renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from industry about the effects of the climate change levy. [10639]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has received many representations from businesses about the climate change levy, raising concerns about its impact on businesses' costs and competitiveness and arguing for amendments to its design. The levy has been introduced in line with the Government's Statement of Intent on environmental

taxation to contribute towards the UK's commitments to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, while protecting business competitiveness. HM Treasury has made it clear that the levy will be kept under review, as with any other new tax measure. The Government are keeping in touch with business on the levy to monitor initial experience with its operation.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received about the climate change levy from the engineering sector. [10641]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has received representations from the Engineering Employers Federation and others in the sector about the climate change levy, raising concerns about its impact on businesses' costs and competitiveness and arguing for amendments to its design. The levy has been introduced in line with the Government's Statement of Intent on environmental taxation to contribute towards the UK's commitments to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, while protecting business competitiveness. HM Treasury has made it clear that the levy will be kept under review, as with any other new tax measure. The Government are keeping in touch with business on the levy to monitor initial experience with its operation.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations she has received from the Association of Electricity Producers concerning energy from waste in the renewables obligation; [10661]

(2) what representations she has received from the Renewable Power Association on waste in the renewables obligation. [10695]

Mr. Wilson: We published our Statutory Consultation on the renewables obligation in August this year. The consultation period has just ended and we are now analysing the responses received. Over 150 responses were received, including one from each of the Association of Electricity Producers and the Renewable Power Association.

Both responses can be viewed on our website at www.dti.gov.uk/renewable/consultationresponses.htm (see responses 150 and 57 respectively).

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects gasification and pyrolysis plants to be ready to operate commercially using mixed waste as a fuel. [10660]

Mr. Wilson: There are a number of pilot plants using pyrolysis and gasification which may advance to commercial scale operations in due course. There are also commercial operators in other countries who are interested in developing pyrolysis and gasification projects in this country. This was one of the subjects discussed on my recent visit with relevant officials to Japan.

We propose to include pyrolysis and gasification in the Renewables Obligation to provide an incentive for the development of these technologies to help us meet our target for 2010.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects gasification and pyrolysis plants, as specified in the draft Renewables Obligation Order, to be ready to operate commercially using mixed waste as fuel. [10900]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* There are a number of pilot plants using pyrolysis and gasification which may advance to commercial scale operations in due course. There are also commercial operators in other countries who are interested in developing pyrolysis and gasification projects in this country. This was one of the subjects discussed on my recent visit with relevant officials to Japan.

We propose to include pyrolysis and gasification in the Renewables Obligation to provide an incentive for the development of these technologies to help us meet our target for 2010.

Gas Imports

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what date she expects Norway will be unable to meet further UK demand for gas; and if she will make a statement. [9052]

Mr. Wilson: Demand for gas is dependent on a number of factors, including energy prices, GDP growth and the impact of other measures such as the Climate Change Programme. Future demand levels are therefore uncertain and, consequently, the extent to which the UK will need to import gas from Norway or elsewhere cannot be accurately predicted. Against that background, current best estimates are that the UK is likely to become a net importer from around 2005–06 with the possibility of 90 per cent. of the UK's gas being imported by 2020.

Figures from the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate show that Norway has about 2,100bcm of remaining discovered gas resources in the North Sea and expects to be able to produce at least 90bcm of gas a year until 2050. The extent to which those resources might be available to meet further UK demand will depend on a number of variable factors, including movements in gas and oil prices, which may affect the anticipated level of production; any growth in Norway's domestic demand for gas; competition for Norway's gas from other purchasers in Europe and elsewhere; and the availability of capacity in infrastructure linking Norwegian supplies to the UK. Although there will be a point at which Norwegian gas will be unable to meet further UK demand, it is difficult to give a meaningful estimate of when that might be.

I am, however, fully aware of the need to secure longer term security of supply from a range of sources and this is one of the issues under consideration as part of the Performance and Innovation Unit's current review of energy policy.

Utilities Working Group

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the members of the joint working group of her Department and Ofgem to monitor security of supply; and what its terms of reference are. [10236]

Ms Hewitt: The Working Group comprises officials from my Department, Ofgem and the Performance and Innovation Unit. It is chaired jointly by the Deputy Director General of Energy in my Department and the Technical Director of Ofgem. Representatives of Transco and the National Grid Company will be invited to attend meetings when appropriate. The remit of the Working Group is:

To assess the available data relevant to security of supply, to identify the gaps in that data and develop appropriate indicators;

To monitor at a strategic level, over a timescale of at least seven years ahead,

(a) the availability of supplies of gas;

(b) the availability of supplies of electricity and fuels used for electricity generation;

(c) the adequacy of generating capacity; and

(d) the adequacy of the UK's gas and electricity infrastructure;

To assess whether appropriate market-based mechanisms are bringing forward timely investment to address any weaknesses in the supply chain that are anticipated;

To identify relevant policy issues and consider implications.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about the effects of the aggregates tax upon the construction industry. [10643]

Mr. Wilson: A number of construction products companies and associated trade associations have made their concerns regarding the potential impact of the aggregates levy on their overall competitiveness and future level of performance known to me. My officials have drawn these representations to the attention of relevant Government Departments to ensure they are taken into account in the course of discussions between HM Customs and Excise and the industry over the form, implementation and mechanism of the levy.

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list which countries in the EU have decided on the start date for the implementation of the End of Life Vehicles Directive; and if she will make a statement. [9690]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* All EU member states are required to transpose the End of Life Vehicles Directive by 21 April 2002—18 months after it came into force. The directive mandates various dates when individual requirements (e.g. the new recycling standards) must come into force, and in some cases there are options (e.g. when producers must take responsibility for meeting the cost of take back of ELVs). Decisions on these optional dates have in most cases not yet been made.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he plans to start implementing the end of vehicles life directive. [9597]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are working to transpose the End of Life Vehicles Directive by 21 April 2002—the date by which all EU member states are required to do so—and to implement its various provisions in accordance with the dates and options specified in the text.

Depleted Uranium Imports

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what approval her Department has given for the import of *(a)* depleted uranium and *(b)* products containing depleted uranium, over the last 10 years; what regulations apply to the import of depleted uranium into the UK; and if she will make a statement. [10544]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Imports of depleted uranium into the United Kingdom do not require the specific approval of my Department. All imports of armour piercing ammunition, whether or not containing depleted uranium, require an individual import licence granted by my Department under the Import of Goods (Control) Order 1954. No other product containing depleted uranium requires such an individual import licence.

Information on imports of armour piercing ammunition containing depleted uranium over the last 10 years is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Colliery Canteen Workers (Bassetlaw)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress his Department has made in the investigation of equal pay claims made by colliery canteen workers in Bassetlaw. [9880]

Mr. Wilson: Of the 1,300 valid equal value claims made by former canteen ladies and workers, 115 are from the Nottinghamshire area, including those living in my hon. Friend's constituency of Bassetlaw. Of those, 99 have already received payment, and efforts are being made to locate the remaining 16.

We also have details of some 175 women who do not have valid claims as they were not lodged with an Employment Tribunal in accordance with the terms of the Equal Pay Act 1970.

Oil Shortages

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contingency plans she has to deal with an oil shortage. [9943]

Mr. Wilson: Under EU Directive 93/1998 each European Union member state has an obligation to keep stocks of oil that can be made available in the event of any disruption to international oil supplies. As part of this, the UK has an obligation to hold stocks of oil products (including motor spirit) or crude oil equivalent equal to or above 67.5 days' worth of consumption at any one time. In addition, the UK is a member of the International Energy Agency. The 26 IEA member countries, which include the USA and Japan and all other EU member states, all hold emergency stocks of oil and have committed themselves to take effective measures in accordance with IEA plans to meet any international oil

supply emergency. The IEA regularly holds exercises to ensure that procedures within the IEA and its member countries are kept up-to-date.

Late Payment

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for each year from 1990 to 2001, what proportion of commercial payments have been late. [10133]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department does not hold this information.

The Credit Management Research Centre (CMRC) has produced a quarterly report on credit management practices in the UK since 1998.

The CMRC reports show that there has been a fall of almost 7.5 per cent. in the percentage of payments that are reported as being late by the businesses that they survey. This fall relates to the period between their first survey and their most recent published survey, ie the quarter ending June 1998 and the quarter ending June 2001. During the same period their reports show that the number of debtor days for small businesses has fallen by almost 24 per cent. and that the mean number of debtor days for all businesses has fallen by almost 20 per cent.

Finally, the "European Business Survey" for 2001, produced by the accountants Grant Thornton, shows the UK as having a payment period almost a week (five days) shorter than the EU average (52 days).

Universal Bank

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the latest estimates of the cost of the Universal Bank for *(a)* the predicted 2 million and *(b)* the 6 million prospective customers. [10130]

Mr. Alexander: Universal banking services consist of two elements, namely access to the financial institutions' basic bank accounts at post offices and a Post Office Card Account (POCA) for the encashment of benefit and tax credits for those unable or unwilling to use even a basic bank account. The banking industry will meet the costs of providing post office access to their own accounts. The cost of the POCA, which will be met by Government, together with a fixed contribution from the financial institutions, is subject to commercial negotiations between Consignia and the Paying Departments and between Consignia and the potential supplier of the banking engine for POCA. The estimate of costs are confidential under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, because they are subject to commercial negotiations.

Mr. Beard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in establishing the Universal Bank; and which commercial banks are collaborating with the scheme and in what way. [10756]

Mr. Alexander: Barclays, Lloyds TSB, RBS/NatWest, HSBC, Abbey National, the Halifax, Alliance and Leicester, the BOS, NAG, the Co-operative Bank, and the Nationwide Building Society have signed a Memorandum of Understanding agreeing that they will make their PAT 14 basic bank accounts accessible through post offices, commit to simple and straightforward opening of those bank accounts at a post office and contribute £180 million to the costs of the Post Office Card Account (POCA).

Implementation of universal banking services is making good progress as detailed commercial negotiations continue between the banks, the Paying Departments and Consignia.

Export Licence Application (P.W. Allen)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will make a decision on granting export licence application 27282, submitted on 10 September, by P.W. Allen and Company, Tewkesbury. [10593]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* A decision on the export licence application in question has been taken. The company was informed of this decision on 25 October 2001.

Employment Profile (Lancashire)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the population in Lancashire were employed in the *(a)* manufacturing sector and *(b)* service sector for each of the last five years. [10087]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, dated 30 October 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the proportion of the population in Lancashire employed in the *(a)* manufacturing sector and *(b)* service sector for each of the last five years (10087). I am replying in his absence.

The table below shows the number of employee jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors for each year 1995 to 1999, the latest available.

Lancashire—employee jobs by industry

	Manufacturing Section D of SIC (92)		*Services Section G-Q of SIC (92)*		*Other industries*[1]	
	Number (000)	*Percentage of all employees*	*Number (000)*	*Percentage of all employees*	*Number (000)*	*Percentage of all employees*
1995[2]	129	24.1	378	70.4	30	5.5
1996[2]	130	23.8	384	70.6	31	5.6
1997[2]	131	24.1	384	70.9	27	5.0
1998[3]	139	23.8	411	70.8	31	5.4
1999[3]	130	23.7	384	70.2	33	6.1

[1] 'Other industries' include agriculture, fishing, mining and quarrying, utilities and and construction (sections A, B, C, E and F of SIC(92)).
[2] As at September (1995–97).
[3] As at December (1998–99).

These estimates are based on the results of the Annual Employment Survey (1995–1997) and its successor, Part 1 of the Annual Business Inquiry (1998 and 1999). An individual with two jobs would count twice in these figures. The figures cover jobs based in Lancashire rather than individuals who live in Lancashire.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Fly Tipping

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what change there has been in the incidence of fly tipping following the increase in the level of the landfill tax since April; and if she will make a statement. [7726]

Mr. Meacher: The Department does not collate statistics on fly tipping. The Government's review of the tax in March 1998, led by HM Customs and Excise, showed that out of 530 local authorities, only 78 felt that there had been an increase in fly tipping since the introduction of the tax.

In addition, a Tidy Britain group report, "Effects of the Landfill Tax on Flytipping" (published in 1998), did not establish a clear link between the tax and increased fly tipping. The report showed for 1997–98 that domestic waste was, overall, the type of fly-tipped waste most frequently collected by local authorities. The landfill tax would not make a difference to such waste as householders do not directly meet increases in the cost of the tax.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the regulations arising from the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 will be introduced which enable an authority to make a special extinguishment order and special diversion order. [9079]

Alun Michael: The regulations will be introduced as soon as possible once the necessary preparatory work has been completed. New sections 118B (special extinguishment order) and 119B (special diversion order) of the Highways Act 1980, to be inserted by schedule 6 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, require an order to be made by the Secretary of State prior to commencement. The order must designate the areas where the power to make special extinguishment and special diversion orders, for the purposes of crime prevention, will be available to local highway authorities. The exercise of the power in relation to school security will apply throughout England.

Officials from my Department and the Home Office are working jointly to establish the most appropriate means of identifying areas to be included in the designation order. I am seeking to implement new sections 118B and 119B in advance of the rest of schedule 6, to ensure these provisions are available at the earliest possible date.

BSE in Sheep (Research)

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the latest position on *(a)* the research programme and *(b)* current monitoring of sheep brains for evidence of BSE infection. [9605]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA is funding a great deal of work in relation to BSE in sheep. This includes experiments to assess susceptibility, infectivity and possible transmission in sheep, particularly in relation to different genotypes and breeds. This work will underpin the national scrapie plan.

At their meeting in September 2001, the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee reviewed the latest data from the current programme of strain typing work to assess whether BSE is present in the current sheep flock. To date, about 180 individual scrapie brains have been inoculated into mice. Results for 163 brains have reached a point where the mice might have been expected to display signs characteristic of BSE, if the disease was present. This has not happened. However, it is too soon to draw firm conclusions from these on-going experiments. Work is also in hand to develop molecular methods of differentiating BSE from scrapie to enable many more brains to be screened rapidly.

During the development of a molecular method at Veterinary Laboratory Agency (VLA), 460 sheep brains have been screened. None has indicated the presence of BSE, but the test is not yet fully validated and it is therefore too early to draw firm conclusions.

Organic Farming

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to ensure that the planned increase in funding for organic conversion will keep up with the projected increase in demand for organic produce. [9804]

Mr. Morley: The England rural development programme already allocates funding for conversion to organic farming, which would triple the organic area by 2006. We intend to produce a strategy for the future direction of organic farming when we have the report of the Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, taking account of any recommendations it makes for this sector. The strategy will assess potential growth both for UK production and for the organic market, and will need to take account of the large variation between different products. It is likely, for example, that UK production of organic fruit and vegetables can take a significantly higher share of the market for these products, while the scope for increasing organic milk production will be much more limited given the relatively slow growth of this market.

Countryside (Access)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to increase accessibility to the countryside for those living in inner cities. [10001]

Alun Michael: The new statutory right of access to open countryside will open up new areas of land close to where people live. We expect local authorities to give priority to links between town and country in their rights of way improvement plans and local transport plans, and to consider town to country journeys for leisure purposes, as well as those from the country to the town for work, shopping and education. We are also encouraging local authorities to develop and promote public transport links for people wishing to go to the countryside.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action her Department took in recognition of energy efficiency week. [11520]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have provided funding to the Energy Saving Trust since 1996–97 to run a wide-ranging programme of work to promote energy efficiency. The Department is providing over £22 million in support of the trust's programme this year. Energy efficiency week is an important part of that programme. I warmly welcome this initiative, and spoke at a parliamentary reception to mark the launch of energy efficiency week on 22 October.

Edmonton Incinerator

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action has been taken in respect of allegations made by the "Newsnight" programme on 3 July concerning the dioxin content of ash used for construction from the Edmonton incinerator; and if she will make a statement. [11812]

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful for this opportunity to clarify the answers I gave on 11 July 2000, *Official Report*, columns 496–97W, and on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 565W. Until August 2000, the Edmonton incinerator mixed bottom ash and precipitator ash. From August 1998 to May 1999, this mixed ash was reprocessed and used in the production of concrete building blocks. This ash has also been used as an aggregate.

As the reply to the first of these two questions said, neither the Department nor the Environment Agency routinely held information on the dioxin content of ash from incinerators. However, in July 1998 the Environment Agency was given an estimate of the dioxin content of the mixed ash, based on a 1997 analysis of the fly ash. I was not advised about this when I replied to the second of these questions and regret any consequent inaccuracy in my answer. I have written to both Members and have placed a copy of the letter and the analysis in the fax in the Library of the House.

The Environment Agency is currently carrying out a full and thorough investigation into the destination of ash from incinerators, the environmental implications of its use and what steps may be needed in the light of these findings. This thorough investigation will establish the true picture for all municipal waste incinerators. Its results will be made public and any necessary action will be taken.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the total cost of nuclear production. [9941]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

There is a range of estimates for the cost of producing nuclear power. The performance and innovation unit at the Cabinet Office is currently producing a report on the UK's energy policy and is looking at the cost of potential future energy options, including new nuclear build.

Its estimates of the cost of producing nuclear-generated electricity can be found at: http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2001/energy/2050.pdf.

Nuclear generators have also produced their own estimates of the cost of producing electricity from new nuclear power stations. Both British Energy and BNFL have made submissions to the PIU and these are on the PIU website.

The PIU is continuing to discuss cost estimates with the generators.

Food Safety

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the safety of United Kingdom produced lamb products in baby foods. [9913]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that it does not advise against the consumption of lamb, and this applies equally to all sections of the population including babies.

Pure Agriculture Students

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many students enrolled this year as *(a)* undergraduates and *(b)* postgraduates on a pure agriculture course as in each of the last five years. [9600]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The total number of entrants to courses in agriculture for the five years since 1996–97 are given in the table; comparable figures for 2001–02 will not be available until April 2002. The latest available data for 2001 entry published by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) show that the number of applicants accepted for entry to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses in agriculture was 2,707, an increase of 1.7 per cent. compared to the same point last year. The overall increase in accepted applicants in 2001 is 5.6 per cent. UCAS does not cover applicants to part-time or postgraduate courses.

Entrants to courses in agriculture[1]*—UK HE Institutions*

	Postgraduate	*Undergraduate*	*Total*
1996–97	544	2,841	3,385
1997–98	507	3,529	4,036
1998–99	504	3,303	3,807
1999–2000	518	3,039	3,557
2000–01	655	3,252	3,907

[1] Full-time and part-time, home and overseas students

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Expenditure

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental

publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by her Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if she will make a statement. [6886]

Tessa Jowell: The table shows the available information on expenditure by my Department. No expenditure has been incurred on polling or focus groups. The expenditure on advertising relates to the cost of newspaper advertising for the many public appointments for which I am responsible. Design consultants have only been employed during 1997–98 to design the Department's new identity.

As expenditure on caterers is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, I have provided overall hospitality expenditure which contains expenditure on caterers. Expenditure data for the production of Department publications and photographs and photographers for 1995–96 and 1995–96 and 1996–97 respectively were not recorded separately and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Year	*Cash (£000)*	*Annual percentage change*	*Spending as percentage of running costs*	*Real terms 2000–01 prices (£000)*	*Annual percentage change*	*Spending as percentage of running costs*
Advertising						
1998–99	243	—	1.1	253	—	1.2
1999–2000	140	–42	0.5	143	–44	0.6
2000–01	104	–26	0.4	104	–27	0.4
Design consultants						
1997–98	26	—	0.1	28	—	0.1
Hospitality						
1995–96	26	—	0.1	30	—	0.2
1996–97	41	58	0.2	45	53	0.2
1997–98	17	–59	0.1	18	–60	0.1
1998–99	29	71	0.1	30	66	0.1
1999–2000	33	14	0.1	34	11	0.1
2000–01	51	55	0.2	51	52	0.2
Production of departmental publications						
1996–97	501	—	2.6	554	—	2.8
1997–98	339	–32	1.7	363	–34	1.8
1998–99	288	–15	1.3	300	–17	1.4
1999–2000	448	56	1.7	456	52	1.8
2000–01	486	8	1.9	486	7	1.9
Photographs and photographers						
1997–98	2	—	0.0	2	—	0.0
1998–99	1	–50	0.0	1	–51	0.0
1999–2000	6	500	0.0	6	486	0.0
2000–01	3	–50	0.0	3	–51	0.0

Tourism

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the economic state of the tourism sectors in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* England; and what measures she is proposing to assist the tourism industry. [9848]

Dr. Howells: According to the most recent estimates, total tourism expenditure in the UK is worth some £75 billion and the value added by tourism in the UK is now estimated to be 5 per cent. of GDP.

For the English tourism industry, our best estimate to date is that the loss of revenue in 2001–02 is likely to be about £3.3 billion in 'value added' terms over the eight month period consideration (March to October) of the foot and mouth disease outbreak. Further losses are expected as a result of the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September. Individual tourism assessments for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Administrations.

Government and the industry recognise that the challenges facing tourism both for the short and long term must be tackled. Ministers have worked hard with the industry in particular to lessen the impact of foot and mouth disease and the terrorist attacks on the United States, and to attract visitors to Britain. The Government have provided additional funding to help the recovery of domestic tourism and to promote Britain overseas. The industry is taking the lead in improving the quality of product and service.

Tate Modern

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what Government funding has been given to the Tate Modern Gallery. [10268]

Dr. Howells: In 2000–01 the Government provided £24.9 million in grant-in-aid for the Tate Gallery of which £5 million was to cover the first 10 months of free admission at Tate Modern. In 2001–02 we increased this to £26.9 million of which £6 million is to enable free admission to continue at Tate Modern.

Galleries and Museums (Concessionary Admissions)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to encourage concessionary admission for pensioners to galleries and museums in the UK. [10267]

Dr. Howells: Our policy is to encourage all museums and galleries to offer the widest possible access to their collections but it is for their governing bodies to offer concessionary admission for pensioners.

In the case of the national museums and galleries funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that currently charge, funds have been made available to permit free access for people over 60 since April 2000. However, decisions on admission charges rest with the Trustees. Attendances by people over 60 have risen by 40 per cent. in the first year since free admission was introduced.

TV Licences

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many reminders are sent by the TV Licensing Authority to households that are not recorded as holding licences and at what cost in the latest year for which figures are available. [10665]

Dr. Howells: For the financial year 2000–01, the Television Licensing Authority sent 16,602,766 mail items to households that were not recorded as holding television licences. This does not include reminder letters which were sent to households where the licence was about to expire or had just expired.

The cost of this type of mailing is not readily available. The Corporation finds direct mailing the most cost-effective way of contacting television licence fee payers and seeks to maximise, wherever possible, bulk discounts with Royal Mail.

Lottery Bids (Stoke)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many bids to the National Heritage Lottery Fund have been received from the Stoke-on-Trent unitary authority since 1997. [10288]

Dr. Howells: Since 1 January 1997 the Heritage Lottery Fund has received 28 funding applications relating to projects within the Stoke-on-Trent unitary authority area. 15 of these were made by the authority itself, of which 14 were approved and one withdrawn. Funding awarded to the authority over this period totals £5,626,367.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many buildings were *(a)* listed and *(b)* delisted in each year since 1990; and how many had their listing changed (i) from Grade 1 to Grade 2 and (ii) from Grade 2 to Grade 1. [10557]

Dr. Howells: The information is as follows:

Year	*Added*	*Removed*
1990	3,633	131
1991	2,144	94
1992	1,984	64
1993	3,227	89
1994	3,909	95
1995	2,070	84
1996	1,843	89
1997	1,349	141
1998	1,945	74
1999	2,299	124
2000	1,300	67

Data relating to changes from one category to another are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Millennium Commission Grants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which projects that have been awarded a grant from the Millennium Commission specifically relate to the ethnic minority communities; and what the amount received by each project was. [11401]

Dr. Howells: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Illegal Drugs

13. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with coalition partners relating to the international traffic in illegal drugs. [8797]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our coalition partners are aware that Afghanistan has for many years been the source of nearly all the heroin reaching the streets in Britain and Europe.

On 11 October representatives of the main donor countries to the United Nations International Drugs Control Programme and of countries close to Afghanistan met in Vienna to discuss Afghan drugs issues.

International Terrorism

15. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with foreign Governments on international terrorism since 11 September. [8799]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been involved in daily contact with our international partners in the coalition against terrorism.

The media have reported on my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's many overseas visits to forge the political coalition against terrorism. He will continue to engage partners in this dialogue and process.

22. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current condition of the alliance of nations engaged in the fight against terrorism. [8806]

Mr. Bradshaw: The international consensus is strong and deep. The United Nations, OIC, the G8, NATO and the European Union have all condemned the terrorist attacks. We have encountered an unprecedented level of solidarity and commitment to work together against terrorism.

This is not simply a military campaign. The adoption of UN Security Council Regulation 1373 demonstrates the commitment of nations from all corners of the world to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism and to deny terrorists a safe haven from which to operate.

25. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Secretary-General of the United Nations to discuss the war against international terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [8809]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are in close touch with the UN Secretary-General about the international campaign against terrorism and have spoken to him on several occasions since 11 September.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary expects to discuss the issue with him in person when he visits New York for the UN General Assembly next month.

26. **Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures to combat terrorism he has discussed with the other member states of the European Union since 11 September. [8810]

Mr. Bradshaw: Since 11 September the EU has agreed to pursue many new measures to fight terrorism. These include a European arrest warrant, cutting the funding of terrorists, increased co-operation between member states' intelligence services and a strengthening of Europol to include a special anti-terrorist unit. Further measures were taken to improve air security and strengthen the EU's ability to fight terrorism globally.

31. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Belgium regarding the international coalition against terrorism. [8815]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and other Government Ministers are in regular contact on a range of issues with their colleagues in the Belgian Government.

Zimbabwe

16. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with Commonwealth colleagues on the situation in Zimbabwe. [8800]

Mr. Bradshaw: Both my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my noble Friend Baroness Amos have held intensive discussions with Commonwealth Partners following the Abuja agreement in early September. Baroness Amos accompanied Commonwealth Partners to Zimbabwe last weekend to assess implementation of the agreement and at yesterday's General Affairs Council in Luxembourg, EU Foreign Ministers voted unanimously to invoke Article 96 of the Cotonou agreement which gives Zimbabwe 60 days to fulfil its obligations or face the consequences.

Africa

17. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on measures being taken by his Department to ensure greater peace and security in Africa. [8801]

20. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is carrying out to ensure greater peace and security in Africa. [8804]

Mr. Bradshaw: Violent conflict is one of the main obstacles to social, economic and political development in Africa today. It is also a potential threat to global security.

The FCO, in partnership with the MOD and DFID, has been at the forefront of the UK's successful efforts, with the United Nations, to bring peace and security to Sierra Leone. We are also working hard to ensure the success of current international and African efforts to bring an end to the conflicts in the Great Lakes region.

The UK's approach to conflict prevention in Africa is now co-ordinated in the interdepartmental Africa conflict prevention pool. The aim of this joint pool is to ensure a coherent and effective use of resources to bring greater peace and security to Africa.

Middle East

18. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest developments in the middle east peace process. [8802]

27. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next proposes to meet the Israeli Government to discuss the middle east peace process. [8811]

29. **Mr. Laxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest developments in the middle east peace process. [8813]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friends and the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave earlier in the House today to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), *Official Report*, column 742.

Afghanistan

19. **Mr. Beard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on policy towards establishing a stable Government in Afghanistan. [8803]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has set out four principles:

The future should be placed in the hands of the people of Afghanistan themselves;

We need a global coalition to help rebuild Afghanistan;

The UN should take the lead in the political process;

We have to devote the resources and political will needed to finish the job.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent discussions with Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan. [11303]

Mr. Bradshaw: Mr. Brahimi visited London on 9 October and met my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the International Development Secretary. We have maintained regular contact. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to Lakhdar Brahimi by telephone on 22 October. Brahimi agreed with the Foreign Secretary's four principles on the future of Afghanistan, namely:

The Afghan people must determine their own destiny;

The international community should form a coalition to help;

The UN should play a leading role in any transition;

Resources should be devoted to complete the task.

The Foreign Secretary informed Brahimi of Paul Bergne's appointment as the Prime Minister's Personal Representative for Afghan Affairs. The Foreign Secretary and Brahimi agreed to stay in close touch.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts were maintained by his Department with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan prior to 11 September. [11442]

Mr. Bradshaw: HMG's policy is to recognise states, not governments. We have maintained contacts with all factions in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, but do not and did not prior to 11 September have normal government to government dealings with any of them.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with representatives of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan; what assessment he has made of their political aims; and if he will make a statement. [11437]

Mr. Bradshaw: British officials maintain regular contact with the Northern Alliance through the Chargé d'Affaires at the Afghan Embassy in London and officials have had a range of contacts with other members of the Northern Alliance including in Afghanistan and during visits by them to Europe. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has recently appointed Paul Bergne as his Personal Representative for Afghan Affairs who will be travelling in the region and meeting with representatives of the Northern Alliance to discuss the immediate political situation in Afghanistan and their aims.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that representatives of Afghan women's organisations are involved in the discussions about the composition of a post-Taliban Government. [11302]

Mr. Bradshaw: Any future Afghan government must be broad-based and representative of the great diversity of the country's ethnic groupings. The form of that government and the process leading to its establishment must be up to the Afghan people themselves. However, the international community has to engage with the widest possible range of community leaders within Afghanistan, which would include women's organisations. We would expect any future government to respect the internationally agreed norms of behaviour towards its own citizens.

National Missile Defence

21. **Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on national missile defence. [8805]

Mr. Bradshaw: The position is unchanged. We believe that it is important to tackle the potential threat from weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles as their means of delivery with a comprehensive strategy that includes arms control and counter-proliferation, diplomacy, deterrence and defensive measures. We will continue to work closely with the United States in all these areas. We understand the role that missile defence can play as one element of that comprehensive strategy, but as yet we have had no specific proposal from the United States.

Barcelona Process

23. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take to promote the Barcelona process following the events of 11 September. [8807]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK has always been a strong supporter of the Barcelona process. We welcome the EU's commitment at the General Affairs Council on 8 October

"to continue its close contacts with its partners in the Barcelona Process, notably at the Ministerial meeting on 6 November"

and the Ghent European Council conclusion that it is

"essential to encourage a dialogue of equals between our civilisations, particularly in the framework of the Barcelona Process".

World Cup 2002

24. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what help his Department will give the England football team in Korea and Japan for the World cup 2002. [8808]

Mr. MacShane: Our Ambassadors in Korea and Japan as well as my officials in London are in regular contact with the Football Association, the Korean and Japanese organising committees and their respective football associations and police. I discussed this with the Korean Government in Seoul last month. We stand ready to provide whatever support may be necessary for the England team arising from these discussions.

Pakistan (Visas)

28. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provision he has made for visa applications to be submitted in Pakistan and neighbouring countries affected by the military action in Afghanistan. [8812]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our visa sections in Pakistan remain open. However, due to security considerations we have had to change the way we deliver our service. Posts continue to accept applications through a "drop box" system, which is operated flexibly. Islamabad and Karachi continue to accept settlement applications. Posts in neighbouring countries remain open.

International Criminal Court

30. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in ratifying the statutes establishing the International Criminal Court. [8814]

Peter Hain: The United Kingdom ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in New York, on 4 October 2001. As the 42nd state to ratify the Statute, the United Kingdom secured a place among the 60 founding members of the Court. The Court will be established immediately following the 60th ratification. A 43rd state, Switzerland, ratified on 12 October.

Sudan

32. **Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken following the recent bombings in Bahrel Ghazal in Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [8816]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are deeply concerned at these further reports of civilian casualties. This underlines the urgent need for progress in the Sudan peace process. Meanwhile we regularly urge both sides to respect internationally agreed norms in their conduct of the war.

Albania

34. **Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Albania. [8818]

Mr. MacShane: We welcome the continuing progress in Albania. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Ilir Meta, Albania has achieved a great deal over the past two years in stabilising the country and extending co-operation with neighbours and the international community. The Albanian Government have continued to take a strong line against extremism in Macedonia and have made some effort to interdict arms supplies to Albanian extremists. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote to Prime Minister Meta on 17 October, and I have held discussions with Foreign Minister Arta Dade to encourage further Albanian support to help resolve the situation in Macedonia.

Angola

35. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current situation in Angola. [8819]

Mr. Bradshaw: We remain concerned at the human consequences of the civil war, which include widespread suffering, violation of human rights and the exclusion of civil society from the political process. We continue to urge dialogue, involving all parties to the conflict, as an essential first step towards addressing these problems.

Pakistan

36. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many discussions he has had with representatives of the Government of Pakistan since June. [8820]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met his Pakistani counterpart, Abdul Sattar, for talks in London on 12 June, one of his first engagements following his appointment. I met the Pakistani Foreign Secretary (PUS equivalent), Inam ul Haq, on 23 August for bilateral talks, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited Pakistan on 5 October.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Pakistan on restoring elected democratic government. [11441]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly raise the need to restore democratic government with the Government of Pakistan. Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) Ministers (including the UK) also called for further progress towards democracy in September. We welcome President Musharraf's commitment to implement his "road map" to democracy proposals, offering the prospect of multi-party elections to the provincial and national assemblies and senate by 12 October 2002.

Nice Treaty

37. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made by member states of the European Union in ratifying the Nice treaty. [8823]

Peter Hain: The following member states have ratified the Nice treaty:

Denmark

France

Luxembourg.

The other member states are at various stages of their respective constitutional processes of ratification.

European Foreign and Security Policy

38. **Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had on national Parliament scrutiny of European common foreign and security policy. [8824]

Peter Hain: The current position on national parliamentary scrutiny of the European Union's foreign and security policy is set out in the Government's White Paper of November 1998 on the Scrutiny of European Union Business. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has proposed that representatives of national Parliaments be more involved in European matters through a second chamber of the European Parliament. The role of national Parliaments in the European architecture is one of the agenda items for the next Inter-Governmental Conference in 2004. Ministers and officials have regular discussions with a wide range of contacts on this as well as on other Inter-Governmental Conference issues.

Kosovo

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the number of *(a)* Serbs and *(b)* Kosovo Albanians killed in Kosovo since 1 January. [10400]

Mr. MacShane: According to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), 41 Kosovo Albanians and 17 Kosovo Serbs were killed in Kosovo during the period 1 January to 31 July 2001.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when exhumation will begin at the Suva Reka mass grave site; and what indication he has as to the ethnic identity of the bodies contained there. [10449]

Mr. MacShane: The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) completed their exhumations in Suva Reka in October 2000. The 73 bodies identified so far have been Kosovo Albanians. There are still a number of, as yet, unexamined gravesites and an UNMIK cemetery at Suva Reka where 300 unidentified bodies, exhumed by ICTY from graves across Kosovo, were re-interred. UNMIK plans to launch a comprehensive programme of exhumations and identifications in Kosovo, including at Suva Reka, in spring 2002.

Entry Clearance (Bombay)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the case of Jayeshkumar Jethalal Javia, Bombay case ref: R/01/7052. [10587]

Mr. Bradshaw: Jayeshkumar Jethalal Javia was refused entry clearance at the Deputy High Commission in Bombay on 25 September 2001. I will write to my hon. Friend and provide a full explanation of the reasons for this decision as soon as possible.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the case of Sajanji Jivaji Odedra, Bombay ref: R/99/224–5-6; and when the visa is likely to be issued. [10586]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Deputy High Commission in Bombay referred the case of Sajanji Jivaji Odedra to the Home Office for consideration outside of the Immigration Rules in November 2000. Their response is awaited. I have asked officials to investigate the reasons for delay and I will write to my hon. Friend with my findings as soon as possible.

Colombia

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what activities Her Majesty's Government have been involved with in Colombia in the last six months; and if he will make a statement. [9245]

Mr. MacShane: HMG continue to be at the forefront of international efforts to support the peace process in Colombia. This Government also support the Colombian Government's efforts to tackle the production and trafficking of illegal drugs. We also support practical measures to address the inter-connected problems of human rights and internal conflict. Earlier this month, I visited Colombia to discuss these and other issues with Colombian Government representatives, the Human Rights Ombudsman, members of non-governmental organisations, trade unions, peace activists, and representatives of the media and UK business community. In addition, I believe that more concerted international action needs to be taken to tackle the problems of illegal small arms, precursor chemicals and money laundering by the Colombian illegal armed groups. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will host a series of meetings in London later this year and early next year on these themes in order to look at ways we can further assist the peace process, and reduce the ability of extremist groups to use violence for political ends.

Australia

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* representations he has received and *(b)* discussions he has held with the Government of Australia concerning their approach to asylum applications from Afghanistan nationals. [11445]

Mr. MacShane: Immigration into Australia is a matter for the Australian Government to determine.

On 3 September Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer used the opportunity of a series of regular meetings in London with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and me to explain Australia's position on the MV Tampa refugees.

Commonwealth Countries

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what ministerial contacts there have been since 1997 with Commonwealth countries suspended from membership. [11440]

Mr. Bradshaw: The only country suspended from Commonwealth membership in this period was Nigeria, whose suspension began in 1995 and ended in June 1999 when democratic government was restored. EU and other sanctions prevented Ministerial contact between the UK and the Abacha regime between 1995 and June 1998. Ministerial contacts resumed after the death of Abacha. Currently, Pakistan and Fiji are suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth: Pakistan since October 1999 and Fiji since June 2000.

Diego Garcia

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements the US has made with the UK Government over their use of Diego Garcia; what British forces are stationed on the island; what plans the Government have to increase the UK's facilities there; and if he will make a statement. [10113]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are a series of bilateral agreements between the UK and US concerning the availability and use of Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory, for defence purposes. The Territory remains available to meet the defence needs of both Governments, while remaining under UK sovereignty.

There are currently approximately 40 Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel based on Diego Garcia. There are no plans to increase the UK's facilities there.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Racial Hatred

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Solicitor-General how many people have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted for incitement to racial hatred in each year for which figures are available. [10284]

The Solicitor-General: Records for prosecutions for incitement of racial hatred under part III of the Public Order Act 1986 have been kept since 1988. The records relate to the year that the application for consent to prosecute was dealt with and so it is not possible to state with any certainty how many prosecutions resulted in convictions in any given year. The number of applications for consent to prosecute for each year since 1988, the number of prosecutions arising and the convictions obtained are summarised in the table.

Also, figures published in the Crown Prosecution Service Racist Incident Monitoring Annual Report 1999–2000 show that the number of racist incidents sent for prosecution rose from 1,603 in 1998–99 to 2,417 in 1999–2000. Prosecutions were brought against 1,832 defendants (76 per cent.) on 2,651 charges. Guilty pleas were tendered on 66 per cent. of the charges and there were convictions after trial on another 12 per cent. of the charges. In total 2,078 (79 per cent.) of the 2,651 charges prosecuted resulted in convictions.

Almost half the prosecutions prosecuted were new offences of racially aggravated crime brought under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which came into force in September 1999. A high proportion of the remaining offences contained admissible evidence of racial aggravation and were prosecuted under other legislation.

Consent applications and prosecutions since 1988 under Part III of the Public Order Act 1986

Year	*Number of Attorney-General consent applications (per defendant)*	*Withdrawn*	*Not granted*	*Prosecuted*	*[1]Convicted*
1988	3	—	1	2	2
1989	1	—	—	1	1
1990	2	—	—	2	2
1991	4	—	1	3	1
1992	5	—	2	3	2
1993	2	—	—	2	2
1994	2	—	—	2	2
1995	8	1	—	7	6
1996	13	1	—	12	9
1997	12	—	2	10	9
1998	2	1	—	1	1
1999	4	—	—	4	3
2000	5	—	—	5	[2]2
2001 to date	7	—	—	7	[3]—

[1] Not necessarily in the same year
[2] Two results outstanding
[3] Results awaited

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister's Powers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister further to his reply of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 818–19W, on the Prime Minister's powers, if he will list the 50 specific references in statute to Prime Ministerial powers. [10546]

The Prime Minister: I have placed in the Library of the House a list of the statutory references to the title 'Prime Minister'.

Afghanistan

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with President Bush on the use of cluster bombs by coalition forces in Afghanistan; and what restrictions were agreed on their use. [11443]

The Prime Minister: I am in close contact with the US on all aspects of the response to the 11 September attacks, including at the military planning level.

The cluster bombs used in Afghanistan do not contain anti-personnel landmines and are therefore legitimate weapons which have not been prohibited by any treaty or convention. They are used with discretion and proportionality as international law requires, and against legitimate and appropriate terrorist and military targets that are selected with great care.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will consult President Bush on initiating talks with the Government of Iraq concerning the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. [9873]

The Prime Minister: I am in regular contact with President Bush on a wide range of issues including those relating to the current situation in Afghanistan. There are no plans at present to discuss initiating talks with the Government of Iraq.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what, for each month of *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001 to date, was the total number of Afghanistan nationals who have (i) applied for asylum, (ii) been granted refugee status, (iii) been refused asylum, (iv) been granted asylum on appeal and (v) been deported. [11444]

Angela Eagle: The available data on applications and initial decisions are included in the table.

The Immigration Appellate Authority allowed five appeals (to nearest five) from Afghan nationals in 1998. Data on appeal outcomes by nationality are not available for 1999, 2000, or 2001. Mechanisms are now in place to enable the production of such statistics for 2001, but their publication is pending data quality checks to guarantee their reliability.

Monthly data on the removal of Afghan asylum applicants are unavailable. In 1998, 15 Afghan applicants (to nearest five) were removed or departed voluntarily following the initiation of enforcement action against them. Information on the number of Afghan applicants removed from the United Kingdom between 1999 and 2001 is unavailable.

Applications received for asylum in the UK, excluding dependants, and initial decisions, for nationals of Afghanistan, 1998–2001[1]

			Cases considered under normal procedures[4]			*Backlog clearance exercise*[5]	
Month	*Applications*[2]	*Total decisions*[3]	*Grants of asylum*	*Grants of ELR*	*Total refusals*	*Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria*[6]	*Refused under backlog criteria*[7]
1998							
January	110	55	*	25	25	—	—
February	90	150	—	140	5	—	—
March	150	130	5	120	5	—	—
April	115	140	*	140	5	—	—
May	140	80	*	80	—	—	—
June	175	135	*	130	*	—	—
July	180	165	*	160	5	—	—
August	275	230	5	225	*	—	—
September	255	240	5	235	*	—	—
October	260	140	5	130	5	—	—
November	310	90	5	80	5	—	—
December	325	45	5	35	5	—	—
Total	2,395	1,600	35	1,500	65	—	—
1999[8]							
January	275	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—			
February	255	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—			
March	285	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
April	295	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
May	295	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
June	370	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
July	330	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
August	415	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
September	355	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
October	355	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
November	375	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
December	380	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—	[9]—
Total	3,975	1,295	15	1,180	90	10	—
2000							
January	315	40	*	15	20	5	—
February	460	100	5	30	65	—	—
March	365	130	10	35	85	—	—
April	510	135	15	50	70	—	—
May	430	120	10	45	65	*	—
June	395	120	5	25	85	*	—
July	405	125	15	30	80	—	—
August	495	180	15	40	120	*	—
September	535	175	10	30	135	—	—
October	560	410	45	30	340	—	—
November	550	515	115	110	285	—	—
December	535	545	130	255	160	—	—
Total	5,555	2,590	375	695	1,515	10	—
2001[10]							
January	510	1,020	175	555	290	—	—
February	615	1,320	225	785	310	—	—
March	680	2,045	375	1,215	450	—	—
April	700	930	195	550	185	—	—
May	900	1,025	220	615	190	—	—
June	910	985	220	600	165	—	—
July	810	875	220	485	165	—	—
Total	5,120	8,195	1,635	4,800	1,760	—	—

[1] Figures rounded to nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2
[2] May exclude some cases lodged at local enforcement offices between January 1999 and March 2000
[3] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions
[4] Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under backlog criteria
[5] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre 1996 asylum application backlog
[6] Includes cases where asylum or ELR has been granted under the backlog criteria
[7] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds
[8] 1999 data on decisions are not available by month due to problems with data quality
[9] Not available
[10] Provisional data

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers in Spelthorne borough are funded by the Government. [11192]

Angela Eagle: Figures are not available by borough for those asylum seekers receiving support under the national asylum support scheme, nor is information available centrally on the number of asylum seekers supported under the interim support scheme in the Spelthorne borough.

Statistics from the national asylum support service (NASS) for the end of July 2001 show that 13,160[1,2] asylum seekers (including dependants) were receiving voucher-only support from NASS and were staying in the London region, which includes Spelthorne. A further 680[1,2] asylum seekers (including dependants) were being supported in NASS accommodation in the London region[3].

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Cases which have had their support ceased are excluded from these figures.

[3] It is NASS policy to allocate accommodation in London only in exceptional circumstances such as medical reasons.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional provision is being made available for asylum-seeker women who are HIV positive, who are not able to breastfeed their children, and who are not entitled to milk tokens or section 17 payments. [10283]

Angela Eagle: Asylum-seeking mothers who are supported by the national asylum support service (NASS) may claim additional support on the birth of their baby, amounting to £30.95 per week. They may also be eligible for a maternity payment of £300. Asylum-seeking women who are HIV positive, and who are not able to breastfeed their babies, are not eligible for any other additional support under the NASS scheme.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people he estimates are resident in this country on the basis of *(a)* indefinite leave to remain, *(b)* exceptional leave to remain first granted before 31 March 1996 and *(c)* full refugee status. [10175]

Angela Eagle: The table provides data on those persons granted settlement in the United Kingdom, ie granted the right to stay indefinitely, in each year from 1990 to 2000.

However, it is not possible to determine how many people are resident in the United Kingdom at any one time on the basis of their immigration status. Information on those granted indefinite leave to remain who die or subsequently leave the United Kingdom is not recorded.

Acceptances for settlement 1990 to 2000

Number of persons

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
All acceptances[1]	53,200	53,900	52,570	55,640	55,010	55,480	61,730	58,720	69,790	97,120	125,090
Refugees and persons given exceptional leave to remain[2,3]	1,130	990	1,780	3,990	3,290	1,600	4,200	4,830	6,680	22,500	24,840
Of which:											
Recognised refugees[2,3,4]	930	750	1,280	2,850	2,260	680	1,120	2,400	4,270	} 22,500	} 24,840
Persons given exceptional leave to remain[3,3]	200	240	500	1,140	1,030	920	3,080	2,430	2,410		
All other acceptances[1]	52,070	52,910	50,790	51,650	51,720	53,880	57,530	53,890	63,110	74,620	100,250

[1] Includes spouses and dependants (including spouses and dependants of refugees and persons granted exceptional leave to remain)

[2] Accepted in own right (excludes spouses and dependants)

[3] The information in the table relates to the total number of persons granted settlement (indefinite leave to remain) in any one year and does not necessarily relate to the year that refugee or exceptional leave status was granted

[4] Includes refugees from South East Asia and their dependants and persons granted settlement under measures aimed at reducing the pre-July 1993 backlog as announced in the White Paper in July 1998

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recent representations the national asylum support service has received in relation to management and support services at Landmark and the Inn on the Park in Everton, Liverpool; and what the nature of those representations was. [10207]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1394W. No further representations have been received since that date.

Criminal Injuries (Compensation)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were awaiting an award decision at the end of each quarter; what was the average time it took to process an award; how many people were awaiting an appeal decision on their award at the end of each quarter; and what was the average time it took to process an appeal for an award from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority for each quarter from the start of 1998–99 to quarter 2 of 2001–02, broken down by those *(a)* over and *(b)* under 60. [10997]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Data are available only in respect of cases lodged under the tariff scheme, which was introduced with effect from 1 April 1996. Information about residual cases lodged under the common law damages scheme in force before that date is not collated centrally.

The data in the tables have been provided by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA). The following additional information may be helpful in interpreting that data.

Claimants dissatisfied with the first decision of CICA (claims assessment) can formally seek a review of that decision by a more senior member of the authority (review). Claimants dissatisfied with the reviewed decision can make a formal appeal to the independent appellate body, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel (appeal).

The data in table 1 show the number of claimants awaiting a decision at each of the three stages. Table 2 shows the average time taken from receipt of the application to claims assessment. Table 3 shows the time taken to process an application for review, and table 4 the time taken to process an appeal application.

Table 1: Cases awaiting an award decision

	Claims assessment	*Review*	*Appeal*	*Total*
1998–99				
Quarter 1	53,473	11,758	2,739	67,970
Quarter 2	53,482	12,047	3,418	68,947
Quarter 3	52,232	10,976	4,153	67,361
Quarter 4	53,011	10,888	5,438	69,337
1999–2000				
Quarter 1	51,059	11,201	5,535	67,795
Quarter 2	54,566	11,421	6,701	72,688
Quarter 3	53,093	10,945	6,983	71,021
Quarter 4	55,574	11,018	7,497	74,089
2000–01				
Quarter 1	56,766	11,120	7,801	75,687
Quarter 2	58,386	12,272	7,814	78,472
Quarter 3	58,352	13,211	7,074	78,637
Quarter 4	60,104	13,011	6,518	79,633
2001–02				
Quarter 1	61,224	13,790	6,061	81,075
Quarter 2	61,825	13,949	5,194	80,968

Table 2: Average time elapsed between application and decision—claims assessment stage

Decision issued	*Total number of decisions*	*Average time (days)*	*Number of decisions for applicants 60 years and older*	*Average time (days)*
1998–99				
April-June	19,400	233	797	196
July-September	17,451	238	813	204
October-December	18,973	234	811	206
January-March	22,044	239	1,050	214
1999–2000				
April-June	17,644	233	842	194
July-September	17,644	216	890	184
October-December	18,910	200	959	173
January-March	18,576	218	986	190
2000–01				
April-June	16,698	234	899	195
July-September	16,487	240	896	208
October-December	18,068	239	883	222
January-March	17,557	265	887	233
2001–02				
April-June	17,239	263	892	226
July-September	18,188	270	904	230

Table 3: Time taken to process a review application

	Total number of decisions	*Average time taken (days)*	*Number of decisions for applicants 60 years and older*	*Average time taken (days)*
1998–99				
April-June	3,914	180	157	148
July-September	4,536	184	170	155
October-December	5,482	195	237	165
January-March	5,787	192	216	158
1999–2000				
April-June	4,648	193	192	162
July-September	4,622	189	188	147
October-December	5,388	186	280	145
January-March	5,359	180	247	130
2000–01				
April-June	4,259	214	170	155
July-September	3,187	228	163	186
October-December	3,426	256	186	185
January-March	4,644	249	177	181
2001–02				
April-June	3,528	262	159	209
July-September	3,751	254	177	206

Table 4: Time taken to process appeals

	Total number of cases resolved	*Average time taken (days)*	*Number of decisions for applicants 60 years and older*	*Average time taken (days)*
1998–99				
April-June	423	188	19	190
July-September	569	215	24	204
October-December	608	241	20	256
January-March	673	274	42	265
1999–2000				
April-June	914	276	50	280
July-September	1,002	303	40	294
October-December	1,065	325	46	328
January-March	1,099	351	42	342
2000–01				
April-June	863	390	30	388
July-September	1,080	416	58	399
October-December	1,369	387	74	364
January-March	1,517	421	79	386
2001–02				
April-June	1,323	418	66	391
July-September	1,438	392	82	391

Yarls Wood Immigration Detention Centre

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people are employed at Yarls Wood immigration detention centre, broken down by *(a)* contractors employed by outside firms, *(b)* his Department's officials and *(c)* those in other categories; [10184]

(2) what is the expected date for the opening of the Yarls Wood immigration detention centre; [10183]

(3) what is the cost of the construction of Yarls Wood immigration detention centre. [10182]

Angela Eagle: The new immigration detention centre at Yarls Wood is expected to open by 19 November 2001.

At this moment in time the following numbers are employed within the centre:

(a) Contractor's Personnel (including sub-contractors): 730

(b) Home Office Personnel: 23

(c) Other Categories: 14.

The cost of the construction of the detention centre cannot be disclosed on the ground of commercial confidentiality.

Immigration Snatch Squads

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department has received about the proposed operation of immigration snatch squads; what assessment he has made of the consequences for public order; and if he will make a statement. [10150]

Angela Eagle: We do not have any plans to introduce snatch squads.

The immigration service has run a highly successful pilot scheme to conduct visits and arrests without the assistance of the police. In the pilot year, 413 visits were conducted and no complaints were received. Three arrest teams have been established in the metropolitan area. By the end of March 2002, each immigration service region should have an arrest team. A full risk assessment is conducted in conjunction with the police before any visit takes place.

Islamic Fundamentalists

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from France concerning the activities of Islamic fundamentalist extremists in the United Kingdom with particular reference to individuals and groups with Algerian connections; and if he will make a reference. [10085]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has received representations from France in relation to two Algerian individuals suspected of involvement with the GIA (Armed Islamic Group) organisation. The French Government are seeking the extradition of both men. Solicitors for one of the suspects have given notice of their intention to apply for judicial review. A committal hearing is pending for the second suspect.

As the Home Secretary said in his statement on 15 October, a review of extradition procedure has already been undertaken and we intend to bring forward measures to modernise and place our extradition laws within the context of the new international situation, streamlining while retaining rights of appeal.

Mr. Aril Tuysug

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the administrative handling of the case of Mr. Aril Tuysug of north-east Bedfordshire, with particular reference to the loss of his papers by his Department; and when he will reply to the letter dated 12 September from the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire. [11299]

Angela Eagle: Mr. Tuysug's outstanding application was not considered, as unfortunately his Home Office file could not be located despite an exhaustive search. In this regard, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate wrote to Mrs. Tuysug on 12 September asking her husband to make a fresh application that would be considered as a matter of priority.

I wrote to the hon. Member on 24 October advising him accordingly.

Language Analysis Pilot

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make an authorisation under section 19D of the Race Relations Act 1976 on a language analysis pilot. [11722]

Angela Eagle: In the light of evidence that some asylum applicants are falsely posing as nationals from countries with high grants rates of asylum or exceptional leave, we have decided to undertake a language analysis pilot at the start of November 2001.

The purpose of language analysis is to provide expert evidence which helps to identify the place of origin of asylum seekers. Language analysis is used in a number of European countries and the results are generally successful. We will be piloting the scheme to see how well language analysis works in the United Kingdom, and for the purposes of the pilot we will be covering asylum seekers of three nationalities where we believe the problem of false nationality claims to be most pronounced. Those nationalities are Afghanistan, Somalia and Sri Lanka.

The authorisation made by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Rooker will enable staff in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, where there are objective reasons for doubting the nationality of a person claiming to be from one of these three countries, to request them to undertake a further interview which will be taped and sent to a language expert for analysis. Individuals may refuse to consent to this further interview, but this refusal can be taken into account when determining whether the applicant has established the facts of their case. This may lead to their claim being refused.

We will review the need for this authorisation once the pilot has been completed. In addition, the race monitor to be appointed under section 19E of the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended) will report to Parliament via the Secretary of State on the likely effect of authorisations made by Ministers and on how they are operated in practice by officials.

A copy of the additional authorisation has been placed in the Library. Any future additional or amended authorisations will also be placed in the Library.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Unqualified Teachers (Maintained Schools)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of unqualified teachers in maintained schools in each of the last five years. [7483]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Full-time equivalent teachers without Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in the maintained schools sector, England 1997 to 2001 are as follows:

Year	*Teachers on routes to QTS*[1]	*Instructors and other teachers without QTS*[2]	*Total*
1997	460	2,480	2,940
1998	570	2,640	3,220
1999	470	3,070	3,540
2000	580	3,240	3,820
2001	1,280	4,340	5,620

[1] Those on the Graduate Teacher Programme, Registered Teacher Programme, Licensed Teacher Scheme and Overseas Trained Teacher Scheme

[2] On contracts of at least one month

Note:

Totals may not sum due to rounding; all figures have been rounded to the nearest 10

Teachers (Age Profile)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of teachers in work are due to retire in the next *(a)* five years, *(b)* 10 years and *(c)* 15 years. [8029]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* In March 2000, 5.9 per cent. of full-time regular teachers in the maintained schools sector in England were aged 55–59, and will reach the retirement age of 60 during the next five years. 23.5 per cent. were aged 50 to 59, and will reach age 60 during the next 10 years. 44.5 per cent. were aged 45–59, and will reach age 60 over the next 15 years.

The Department takes teacher demographic changes into account when setting annual initial teacher training targets.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints have been received about the Individual Learning Accounts scheme. [9687]

John Healey: Between 4 September 2000 and 30 September 2001, the Individual Learning Accounts Centre received 6,053 complaints. This represents 0.25 per cent. of over 2.3 million learners.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has of the cost of the abuse of the operation of the Individual Learning Account scheme; and if she will make a statement. [11196]

John Healey: It is not possible at this stage to determine costs in relation to the abuse of the Individual Learning Account programme. It will only become clear once we have concluded the investigations we are currently undertaking into providers about whom we have received complaints.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints had been received in relation to the operation of Individual Learning Accounts *(a)* before 31 July and *(b)* at the latest available date; and when the first complaint was received. [11298]

John Healey: The national framework for ILAs first became operational on 4 September, and in that month the Individual Learning Account (ILA) Centre received five complaints out of a total of over 100,000 learners.

At 31 July 2001, 3,096 complaints had been received, representing 0.19 per cent. of more than 1.5 million learners.

At 30 September 2001, 6,053 complaints had been received, representing 0.25 per cent. of over 2.3 million learners.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what allegations of criminal conduct have been received by her Department in relation to the operation of individual learning accounts. [11459]

John Healey: The Department has received a number of complaints from individuals alleging that providers have claimed their ILA incentives without their knowledge. A number of these allegations are currently under investigation by both the Department and the police. Until these investigations have been completed the Department will be unable to confirm if any criminal activity has taken place.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints about the Individual Learning Accounts scheme have been upheld when investigated by an external body. [9688]

John Healey: To date, the police have undertaken suspected fraud investigations into three providers resulting in a total of 29 arrests. They are also investigating one other provider's ILA activities following their arrest in connection with a suspected fraud on an unrelated matter. In addition, the Department's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) continues to investigate a further 29 providers. Police are in the early stages of investigating suspected fraud by two of these and have expressed an initial interest in another nine providers. SIU is undertaking investigations work on these nine cases prior to a possible formal police investigation.

As a result of these and other investigations by officials, three learning providers have so far been permanently removed from the list of registered providers and another 37 providers have been removed pending the outcome of investigations into the complaints received.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what controls her Department put in place at the commencement of operation of the Individual Learning Account scheme; how the scheme was monitored while it was in operation; and if she will make a statement. [11194]

John Healey: ILAs were an innovative initiative that put learning power in the hands of the individual. The system was designed to make the learning process as simple and straightforward as possible, cutting down on bureaucracy, in order that the individual could access learning opportunities in an easy, user-friendly way.

We have undertaken audits and inspections in cases where we received complaints that learning providers were misusing ILAs or provided poor value for money. We introduced a revised learner provider agreement that made it harder for providers to act against the ethos of the programme. We also made changes to the applications process, for the same purpose. It is our careful monitoring of the scheme that has enabled us to take prompt action to safeguard public funds.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to order an inquiry into alleged abuse of the operation of the individual learning accounts scheme; and if she will make a statement. [11195]

John Healey: Our policy is that all complaints that we receive alleging misuse of ILAs should be investigated. In cases where we believe criminal activity is involved, they will be referred to the police for investigation.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evidence she has that the Individual Learning Account scheme was being abused by offering low value, poor quality learning; and if she will make a statement. [11295]

John Healey: Our investigations into the practices of some learning providers have revealed low-quality learning provision and poor value for money as well as a number of marketing practices which are unacceptable. Individual Learning Account holders have reported many of these instances to us and to Trading Standards Officers, as have other learning providers who did not want to see an innovative, progressive and successful initiative being exploited.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to discover the extent of the abuse of the operation of the Individual Learning Account scheme; and if she will make a statement. [11296]

John Healey: We are working closely with individuals, learning providers, local Trading standards Officers, the Individual Learning Account (ILA) Centre and the police to identify and fully investigate all potential abuses of the ILA scheme. We are also writing to all 2.5 million individual learning account holders to inform them of the withdrawal of the scheme, and any additional allegations of abuse we receive as a result will be investigated.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what date she was first informed of complaints concerning the operation of the individual learning account; and what action she took at that time. [11297]

John Healey: In July of this year, the Department started to receive increasing numbers of complaints from individuals and local Trading Standards Officers. In response the Department took action to tighten up the ILA system to address these problems. We re-registered all learning providers, withdrew blank application forms, suspended all new provider registrations, introduced a revised learning provider agreement that made it harder for providers to act against the ethos of the programme, and made changes to the applications process, for the same purpose. Everyone who opened an ILA received a copy of 'Choosing Your Learning', explaining the full range of options in using their ILA. However, it became clear that these changes were not sufficient by themselves to prevent the mis-selling of ILAs. At that point we decided we had no option other than to withdraw the programme.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if arrests have been made in relation to the operation of individual learning accounts; and if she will make a statement. [11460]

John Healey: There have been 30 arrests made by the police to date involving four registered individual Learning Account providers.

Classroom Assistants

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many employed classroom assistants worked in schools in England and Wales *(a)* at the latest available date, *(b)* in 1996 and *(c)* in 1997. [10403]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of full time equivalent teaching assistants employed in maintained schools in England in January 2001, 1997 and 1996 were 95,815, 61,262 and 56,692 respectively.

For information on teaching assistants in Wales, I refer the hon. Member to the National Assembly for Wales.

Teacher Vacancies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the scope and content is of the research project she is commissioning into the reasons why teachers are leaving the profession. [10406]

Mr. Timms: When the scope and nature of the study is finalised, we expect it to explore the factors affecting teachers' decisions to leave the profession, the characteristics of those leaving, their destinations and what might have convinced them to stay in teaching. This is likely to involve a nationally representative survey as well as more detailed in-depth work.

Ofsted

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many former employees of local authorities transferred to Ofsted on 1 September; how many of those who transferred are *(a)* women and *(b)* men; and when it is expected that Ofsted will have in place a child care strategy for its employees. [10725]

Mr. Timms: These are matters for HM Chief Inspector of Schools and I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to my hon. Friend and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Teacher Training

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers there were in training in each year since 1 May 1997. [10727]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of new entrants and continuing teacher trainees in Initial Teacher Training Courses in England in each academic year from 1997–98 to 2000–01 were as follows:

Number of trainees in Initial Teacher Training Courses, 1997–98 to 2000–01—England only

Year	*Total number*
1997–98	53,715
1998–99	49,826
1999–2000	46,132
2000–01	46,572

Source:
Teacher Training Agency (TTA), Survey of ITT Providers

Further places are available on employment-based training for graduate trainees. The total numbers of graduate trainees entering employment-based training each year from 1997–98 to 2000–01 in England were as follows:

Number of new entrants to Employment Based Training, 1997–98 to 2000–01—England only

Year	*Total number*
1997–98	420
1998–99	634
1999–2000	925
2000–01	1,879

Note:
Figures show the number of entrants to the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes and the former Overseas Teacher and Licensed Teacher Schemes.
Source:
TTA

Teachers (East Yorkshire)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision she will make to ensure the recruitment of 600 new teachers in the East Riding of Yorkshire; and if she will make a statement. [10731]

Mr. Timms: The East Riding of Yorkshire will continue to benefit from Government teacher recruitment and retention initiatives that have already delivered an increase of 11,000 between 1997 and 2001 in the numbers of full-time equivalent regular teachers working in England, and which will deliver a further increase of at least 10,000 over the next five years.

Specialist Status

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what average length of time it takes schools to raise the necessary sponsorship to gain specialist status. [10953]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected by the Department.

Literacy and Numeracy Results

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what inquiries her Department is undertaking into the premature disclosure of literacy and numeracy test results in September; and if she will make a statement. [11141]

Mr. Timms: An inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the release of the 2001 Key Stage results is under way.

New Schools

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what guidance she proposes to issue on determining the need for the creation of new schools; [11290]

(2) what guidelines she plans to give to local education authorities on the establishment of new faith schools. [11291]

Mr. Timms: The White Paper "Schools achieving success" said that we wish to welcome faith schools, with their distinctive ethos and character, into the maintained sector where there is clear local agreement. Local education authorities cannot establish schools with a religious character. Current guidance to School Organisation Committees (which decide proposals and on which the local education authority is represented) will be revised to ensure that proposals from promoters of new faith schools are given the same consideration as other proposals for new schools. Guidance on the factors to be considered in deciding whether there is a need for a new school more generally is given in the Guidance on Statutory Proposals which will be updated as necessary. We will also issue guidance to local education authorities about the new arrangements for inviting proposals when they consider that a new secondary school is required that is not to replace existing provision. Such proposals will be decided by the Secretary of State and may include proposals for church and other faith schools.

Funding

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01 each fund stream for which (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools and (iii) further education colleges could apply, setting out for each stream (A) the total amount available, (B) the amount awarded, (C) the number of applicants, (D) the number of successful applicants and (E) the average amount awarded to a successful applicant. [11292]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not held centrally in the Department and could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Surplus Places

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will abolish the surplus places rule. [11294]

Mr. Timms: There is no rule on the permitted level of surplus places. The focus of all our policies is raising educational standards. In planning school provision, local education authorities should look for opportunities for removing surplus capacity, with a view to bringing supply and demand for school places into better balance. Their initial focus should be on those schools with 25 per cent. or more of their places unfilled, having particular regard to standards at those schools. The overall aim should be to maximise parental preference and to provide good quality education in the most cost-effective way. The Department's annual survey of surplus places allows us to monitor how local education authorities are meeting this challenge.

TREASURY

Retirement

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of *(a)* private sector employees and *(b)* all employees are due to retire in the next (i) five, (ii) 10 and (iii) 15 years. [10459]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Frank Field, dated 25 October 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your question about the proportion of private sector employees and of all employees who are due to retire within the next 5, 10 and 15 years (10459).

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) can provide estimates of the numbers and proportions of private sector employees, and those of all employees, who are due to reach state retirement age in the next 5, 10 and 15 years. That is, men aged 60–64, 55–64 and 50–64 and women aged 55–59, 50–59 and 45–59 respectively. These are given in the tables below.

The LFS does not collect information on the retirement intentions of individuals.

Table 1: Proportion of private sector employees of working age[1] reaching state retirement age in the next five, 10 and 15 years; United Kingdom; spring (March to May) 2001; not seasonally adjusted

	Thousand	*Percentage*
All persons—due to retire in the next:		
Five years	886	5.0
10 years	2,330	13.1
15 years	4,093	23.1
Men—due to retire in the next:		
Five years	378	3.6
10 years	1,081	10.4
15 years	2,106	20.2
Women—due to retire in the next:		
Five years	508	6.9
10 years	1,249	17.1
15 years	1,988	27.2

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

Note:

Percentages are based on the number of private sector employees in the relevant age group as a percentage of all employees in the private sector

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 2: Proportion of all employees of working age[1] reaching state retirement age in the next five, 10 and 15 years; United Kingdom; spring (March to May) 2001; not seasonally adjusted

	Thousand	*Percentage*
All persons—due to retire in the next:		
Five years	1,353	5.6
10 years	3,587	14.9
15 years	6,273	26.1
Men—due to retire in the next:		
Five years	490	3.8
10 years	1,404	10.9
15 years	2,756	21.5

Table 2: Proportion of all employees of working age[1] reaching state retirement age in the next five, 10 and 15 years; United Kingdom; spring (March to May) 2001; not seasonally adjusted

	Thousand	*Percentage*
Women—due to retire in the next:		
Five years	864	7.7
10 years	2,183	19.5
15 years	3,517	31.4

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

Note:

Percentages are based on the number of employees in the relevant age group as a percentage of all employees

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Community Sports Clubs

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to HM Treasury of giving charitable status to community sports clubs. [8857]

Mr. Boateng: No such estimate has been made.

Private Finance Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the terms of reference of the Mott MacDonald study of PFI; when he expects it to reach its conclusions; and if he will make a statement. [9385]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The study is intended to assess the scale of cost and time overruns and benefit shortfalls in major public sector procurement over a 20-year period. Projects in the defence, energy, health, IT, prisons and transport sectors are being examined, together with a few other projects of outstanding importance. No date has yet been set for the concluding report of the study because the second phase of work has not yet been agreed.

VAT Payers

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxable persons were registered for VAT in each of the financial years since the introduction of VAT in 1972 *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down into (i) individuals and (ii) companies. [9171]

Mr. Boateng: Where available, information on the numbers of VAT-registered traders in the UK since 1972 has been published in Customs' annual departmental reports.

Customs' Estate

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the current estimate is of *(a)* the completion date and *(b)* the final cost of the (i) Southampton Rationalisation, (ii) Dorset House and (iii) Glasgow Estates projects. [9182]

Mr. Boateng: Where available, information on projects undertaken in relation to Customs' estate will be published in the Department's spring report.

Smuggling

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many smugglers' vehicles were *(a)* seized and *(b)* restored to their owners by HM Customs and Excise in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02 to the latest date for which information is available. [9188]

Mr. Boateng: Figures for the number of vehicles seized by Customs during 2000–01 are contained in the Government's response to the independent report by John Roques into "The Collection of Excise Duties in HM Customs and Excise", House of Commons, Command 5329, July 2001, a copy of which was placed in the Library on 19 July. Information on the number of vehicles which were restored is not available. The number of vehicles Customs seize from smugglers during 2001–02 will be published on a full financial year basis during 2002–03.

Partnerships UK

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage stake in Partnerships UK has been sold to private investors; and how much has been raised by the sale of shares to date. [10250]

Mr. Andrew Smith: HM Treasury sold a 51 per cent. shareholding in PUK plc to private sector investors, following an offer for sale issued on 26 February 2001. A further 4.4 per cent. was legally transferred to the Scottish Ministers on 23 April.

A total of £45 million was raised by the transaction for Partnerships UK. Of this amount £24,949,998 was raised by the sale to the private sector and Scottish Ministers. The remainder represents the Treasury's investment in Partnerships UK.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the HM Treasury review of the landfill tax credit scheme will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [10232]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are committed to meeting the challenging targets for waste recycling set out in Waste Strategy 2000. As stated in Budget 2001, we are attracted to replacing all or part of the landfill tax credit scheme with a public spending programme to direct resources towards Government priorities on sustainable waste management. The Government, together with the devolved Administrations, are beginning work on developing options for a spending programme for consideration as part of the spending review 2002. In taking forward this work, the Government will consult with interested parties on the shape of any replacement scheme and the transition to any replacement.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are taken to ensure that parents do not enrol their children in nursery on a temporary basis in order to claim working families tax credit. [10676]

Dawn Primarolo: Applicants for the working families tax credit provide confirmation from child care providers of the charges they have agreed with parents and that the service they provide is eligible for support through the child care tax credit.

Applications may be selected for further inquiry on the basis of a risk assessment. Specialist staff may inquire formally into applications identified as requiring investigation.

Tax Revenue (Football)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much tax revenue was generated from football in the last 12 months. [10988]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates are not available of the tax revenue from football.

Railtrack

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when his Department was involved in the discussions between Railtrack and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions after 1 July on Project Rainbow and related matters. [10916]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury officials are in contact on a daily basis with a wide variety of organisations, both inside and outside government, concerning a wide range of issues.

Brownfield Sites

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the uptake has been of the advance payable tax credit for clearing and developing brownfield sites; and if he will make a statement. [10973]

Mr. Boateng: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the Economic Secretary on 25 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 375W.

Manufacturing

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the impact of business tax and regulation upon the profitability of British manufacturing; [10657]

(2) if he will make a statement on the effects of business tax and regulation upon the competitiveness of manufacturing. [10656]

Mr. Boateng: Successive Budgets have set out new measures as part of the Government's clear strategy to boost competition, productivity, enterprise and innovation, skills, investment and encourage economic growth across all regions. The Government seek to make Britain the most competitive environment for business in the world.

The Government are committed to tackling regulatory burdens and supporting business. Lord Haskins' better regulation task force has been established to advise the Government on regulatory issues. The new Regulatory Reform Act 2001 will also play a vital role in the drive to reform over-burdensome legislation. Under this Act, over 50 potential reforms have been identified, with nine measures out to consultation and one potential regulatory reform order already laid. The panel for regulatory accountability calls departmental regulatory reform Ministers to account for their Department's regulatory performance. The Government are also committed to publishing regulatory impact assessments for all new measures having an impact on business.

Correspondence

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Northavon of 9 August regarding a lorry belonging to Westfield International Transport seized by HM Customs; and if he will ensure that the lorry is released as soon as possible. [11140]

Mr. Boateng: I have already replied to the hon. Member.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage share of *(a)* UK gross domestic product and *(b)* the total to be raised by the climate change levy, the UK engineering industry will contribute in the next financial year. [10696]

Mr. Boateng: On the most recently available figures, engineering represents an estimated 6 per cent. of gross domestic product.

The impact of CCL on any sector will be determined by a number of factors, including:

The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.

Employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded national insurance contribution cuts.

The number of energy intensive firms in that sector that are eligible to receive a discount on the main rates of the levy by signing up to an energy efficiency agreement.

What use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt 'new' renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power.

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessments he has made of the costs of the climate change levy to British industry. [10640]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy will raise an estimated £1 billion a year, all of which will be recycled back to business through cuts in employers' national insurance contributions and support for energy efficiency. While the levy is broadly revenue neutral across manufacturing and service sectors, it is not possible to say exactly what effect the levy will have on any specific sector or industry. That will depend on a number of factors including:

The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.

Employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded national insurance contribution cuts.

The number of energy intensive firms in that sector that are eligible to receive a discount on the main rates of the levy by signing up to an energy efficiency agreement.

What use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt 'new' renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power.

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was raised from the engineering industry by the climate change levy in the first six months of its operation. [10650]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy only became operational in April this year and the first payments are still being received by Customs and Excise. It is too early to assess its impact, but the levy is operating in the planned revenue neutral manner.

The impact on any specific sector will depend on a number of factors including:

The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.

Employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded national insurance contribution cuts.

The number of energy intensive firms in that sector that are eligible to receive a discount on the main rates of the levy by signing up to an energy efficiency agreement.

What use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt 'new' renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide an estimate of the revenues the Government will receive from the aggregates tax in the current financial year. [10642]

Mr. Boateng: The aggregates levy will not be operational until April 2002. Therefore the Government will receive no revenue in the current financial year.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an estimate of the revenues the Government will receive from the aggregates tax in the next financial year. [10994]

Mr. Boateng: An assessment of the revenues expected from the introduction of the aggregates levy was given in the Financial Statement and Budget report 2001. Forecast revenues will again be published in autumn's pre-Budget report. The revenues raised from the levy will be returned to business and local communities affected by quarrying through a 0.1 percentage point cut in employers' NICS and a new Sustainability Fund.

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the aggregates tax upon the construction industry. [10644]

Mr. Boateng: Budget 2000 announced that the Government had decided to introduce an aggregates levy with effect from April 2002. It will be charged at £1.60 per tonne on the commercial exploitation of primary aggregates in the UK, including those imported from abroad. Aggregates exported from the UK will be exempt.

A full regulatory impact assessment was published at the time of Budget 2000.

It is envisaged that a higher price of primary aggregate will provide an incentive to make better use of recycled aggregates and other alternatives, and more efficient use of primary aggregate. The impact on the actual costs to the end user will be dependent on the commercial decisions of those in the supply chain.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the Morley and Rothwell constituency are benefiting from the minimum wage. [10278]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Colin Challen, dated 30 October 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of people in the Morley and Rothwell constituency who are benefiting from the national minimum wage (NMW). (10278)

The Office for National Statistics has published estimates of the number of jobs paid at less than NMW rates for 1998, 1999, and 2000. These estimates are based on an improved methodology using data from the New Earning Survey (NES) and Labour Force Survey (LFS). This methodology provides the best estimates for the number of jobs in the UK paid below low hourly rate thresholds and was developed to overcome the deficiencies inherent in using the NES and LFS separately for measuring low pay.

Estimates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions are posed on the National Statistics website at:

www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/themes/labour_market/nmw_lowpay_tables.asp

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies of numbers of jobs paid below NMW rates are not available on the basis of the methodology applied for producing the national and regional level figures.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people employed in the agricultural sector have benefited from the introduction of the national minimum wage; [10276]

(2) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are paid the national minimum wage in the UK. [10946]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 October 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions about the number of people in the agriculture sector who have benefited from the introduction of the national minimum wage (NMW) and the number of men and women who are paid the NMW in the UK. I am replying in his absence. (10276, 10946)

The latest available information is for spring 2000. At that time the NMW for people aged 22 or over was £3.60 per hour. Estimates based on the New Earnings Survey and Labour Force Survey show that in spring 2000 there were 150,000 men and 440,000 women aged 22 or over earning between £3.60 and £3.70 per hour.

The estimates requested for the agriculture sector are not available as the sample size is too small for these to be reliable.

Manufacturing Sector Redundancies

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many redundancies there were in the manufacturing sector in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* the UK as a whole in each year since 1997. [11422]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Adam Price, dated 30 October 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about redundancies in the manufacturing sector in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. I am replying in his absence. (11422)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) can provide estimates of the numbers of people who have been made redundant from a job in the manufacturing sector in the United Kingdom as a whole. However, the sample size is too small to provide reliable estimates for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The LFS estimates of the numbers of redundancies in the manufacturing sector in the United Kingdom for each summer (June to August) quarter from 1997 to 2001 are given in the table.

Redundancies in the manufacturing sector[1]: United Kingdom

Not seasonally adjusted	*Thousand*
Summer (June to August)	*Number*
1997	49
1998	57
1999	64
2000	50
2001	70

[1] The number of people who were made redundant from a job in the manufacturing sector in the same calendar month as, or the two calendar months prior to, the reference week.

Source:
ONS Labour Force Survey

GDP

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product was generated by the *(a)* manufacturing sector and *(b)* service sector in each of the last five years. [10088]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, dated 30 October 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your question on the percentage of gross domestic product generated by the manufacturing and service sectors in each of the last five years (10088).

Information on the contribution of individual industries is not available. However, it is possible to analyse gross value added (GVA) at basic prices by industry. GVA is similar in concept to gross domestic product, differing only in adjustments for taxes and subsidies on products.

The following table shows the percentage of GVA generated by manufacturing and services.

Manufacturing and service contribution to Gross Value Added: 1996 to 2000

		Percentage
Calendar Year	*Manufacturing*	*Services*
1996	21.5	66.4
1997	21.1	67.6
1998	20.1	69.3

Manufacturing and service contribution to Gross Value Added: 1996 to 2000

		Percentage
Calendar Year	*Manufacturing*	*Services*
1999	19.2	70.3
2000	18.7	70.2

Source:
Table 2.3 United Kingdom National Accounts 2001 edition

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, in descending order, the GDP per head of each *(a)* county council, *(b)* unitary and *(c)* metropolitan area by (i) actual amount and (ii) percentage of the area with the highest GDP in the last year for which figures are available. [10789]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Charles Hendry, dated 30 October 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on local area estimates of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head (10789). I am replying in his absence.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) does not produce estimates of GDP per head for the geographical breakdown requested. Instead, estimates are produced by Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS) areas. There are five levels of NUTS in the UK and GDP estimates are produced for the first three. NUTS level 3 is the geography that is most closely aligned to county councils, unitary authority and metropolitan areas and is also the lowest geographical level that data are available.

GDP is a workplace measure of economic activity in a given area regardless of whether the persons engaged in the activity live in that area. GDP per head is calculated by using the resident population in the area. In the absence of another indicator this has been used as a measure of well being at the sub-regional and local area level. However, a better measure would be household income per head as this would be a truly residence based measure. This is not currently available but the ONS is planning to produce estimates of household disposable income for sub-region and local area in early 2002.

Estimates of GDP per head and GDP per head as a proportion of the NUTS level 3 area with the highest GDP per head (Inner London-West) are shown in the following table. The GDP per head for Inner London - West is much larger than any other area due to the high amount of commerce in the area and a fairly small resident population in comparison, which makes proportionate comparisons on this basis more difficult. For this reason, I have additionally provided a third column, showing the same data on our more usual basis of comparison, GDP per head expressed as a ratio to the UK average. Some NUTS level 3 areas correspond exactly to county council boundaries and these are marked with the letters cc.

Gross domestic product (GDP) per head by NUTS level 3 area at current basic prices 1998[1,2,3]

	£ million	*Inner London: West = 100*	*UK = 100*
Inner London: West	57,281	100	456
Berkshire	19,008	33	151
Edinburgh, City of	18,417	32	147
Swindon	18,129	32	144
Portsmouth	18,012	31	144
Milton Keynes	17,557	31	140
Nottingham	17,373	30	138
Belfast	17,159	30	137
Peterborough	17,158	30	137
Glasgow City	16,495	29	131
Surrey	15,945	28	127
Cambridgeshire cc	15,783	28	126
Inner London: East	15,496	27	123
Bristol, City of	15,472	27	123
Shetland Islands	15,107	26	120

Gross domestic product (GDP) per head by NUTS level 3 area at current basic prices 1998[1,2,3]

	£ million	Inner London: West = 100	UK = 100
Telford and Wrekin	14,843	26	118
Southampton	14,675	26	117
Halton and Warrington	14,660	26	117
Derby	14,629	26	117
Luton	14,400	25	115
York	14,305	25	114
Cheshire cc	14,172	25	113
Outer London: West and North West	14,045	25	112
Oxfordshire	13,983	24	111
Leicester	13,973	24	111
Buckinghamshire cc	13,813	24	110
Hertfordshire	13,717	24	109
West Sussex	13,622	24	109
North and North East Lincolnshire	13,402	23	107
Northamptonshire	13,369	23	107
Leeds	13,322	23	106
Warwickshire	13,288	23	106
Greater Manchester South	13,204	23	105
Hampshire cc	13,173	23	105
Suffolk	13,143	23	105
Thurrock	13,055	23	104
Gloucestershire	12,772	22	102
Solihull	12,757	22	102
Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan	12,714	22	101
Birmingham	12,456	22	99
Monmouthshire and Newport	12,424	22	99
Flintshire and Wrexham	12,404	22	99
Falkirk	12,227	21	97
East Cumbria	12,217	21	97
Perth and Kinross and Stirling	12,203	21	97
Leicestershire cc and Rutland	12,139	21	97
Bournemouth and Poole	12,078	21	96
Coventry	12,013	21	96
South Ayrshire	11,934	21	95
Bedfordshire cc	11,874	21	95
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	11,850	21	94
Norfolk	11,825	21	94
Kent cc	11,800	21	94
North and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire	11,730	20	93
Wiltshire cc	11,708	20	93
West Lothian	11,683	20	93
Essex cc	11,640	20	93
Worcestershire	11,467	20	91
Plymouth	11,437	20	91
Blackburn with Darwen	11,420	20	91
Angus and Dundee City	11,387	20	91
Darlington	11,254	20	90
Sheffield	11,171	20	89
North Yorkshire cc	11,085	19	88
Dumfries and Galloway	11,063	19	88
Southend-on-Sea	11,016	19	88
Herefordshire, County of	11,011	19	88
Liverpool	10,886	19	87
Somerset	10,877	19	87
Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees	10,872	19	87
Lincolnshire[4]	10,751	19	86
Stoke-on-Trent	10,738	19	86
Medway	10,639	19	85
West Cumbria	10,556	18	84
Inverclyde, East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire	10,510	18	84
Tyneside	10,469	18	83
Dudley and Sandwell	10,428	18	83
Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield	10,423	18	83
South and West Derbyshire	10,404	18	83
Outer London: South	10,358	18	83
Bradford	10,339	18	82
South Teeside	10,299	18	82
Clackmannanshire and Fife	10,275	18	82
Shropshire cc	10,231	18	82
Brighton and Hove	10,206	18	81
Walsall and Wolverhampton	10,191	18	81

Gross domestic product (GDP) per head by NUTS level 3 area at current basic prices 1998[1,2,3]

	£ million	Inner London: West = 100	UK = 100
North Nottinghamshire	10,176	18	81
Staffordshire cc	10,176	18	81
Lancashire cc	10,173	18	81
Powys	10,144	18	81
Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot	10,121	18	81
East Riding of Yorkshire	10,051	18	80
Dorset cc	10,016	17	80
Scottish Borders	9,974	17	79
Swansea	9,943	17	79
Gwynedd	9,876	17	79
Orkney Islands	9,799	17	78
Devon cc	9,636	17	77
North Lanarkshire	9,573	17	76
Eilean Siar (Western Isles)	9,555	17	76
South Lanarkshire	9,544	17	76
Inverness and Nairn and Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey	9,456	17	75
Sunderland	9,209	16	73
Blackpool	8,899	16	71
Northumberland	8,818	15	70
East Derbyshire	8,802	15	70
Torbay	8,655	15	69
Greater Manchester North	8,636	15	69
Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh and Argyll and the Islands	8,630	15	69
North of Northern Ireland	8,502	15	68
East and West Dunbartonshire, Helensburgh and Lomond	8,489	15	68
Caithness and Sutherland and Ross and Cromarty	8,467	15	67
South Nottinghamshire	8,448	15	67
Central Valleys	8,422	15	67
Isle of Wight	8,397	15	67
East of Northern Ireland	8,351	15	67
Conwy and Denbighshire	8,295	14	66
Outer Belfast	8,282	14	66
East Merseyside	8,270	14	66
South West Wales	8,258	14	66
Durham cc	8,199	14	65
East Ayrshire and North Ayrshire Mainland	8,191	14	65
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly[4]	8,185	14	65
Isle of Anglesey	8,047	14	64
Outer London: East and North East	8,017	14	64
Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham	7,992	14	64
Gwent Valleys	7,981	14	64
West and South of Northern Ireland	7,862	14	63
West and South of Northern Ireland	7,862	14	63
East Sussex cc	7,847	14	63
Wirral	7,525	13	60
East Lothian and Midlothian	7,503	13	60
Sefton	7,313	13	58
United Kingdom[5]	12,548	22	100

[1] Estimates are provisional
[2] Includes taxes less subsidies on production
[3] Components may not sum to totals due to rounding
[4] This area is represented at more than one NUTS level
[5] Excluding GDP for Extra-region, which comprises compensation of employees and gross operating surplus which cannot be assigned to regions
Source:
Regional Accounts, Office for National Statistics

Manufacturing and Service Sectors

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the population was employed in the *(a)* manufacturing sector and *(b)* service sector for each of the last five years. [10086]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, dated 30 October 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the proportion of the population employed in (a) the manufacturing sector and (b) the service sector for each of the last five years (10086).

The table below shows the number of workforce jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors in June for each year from 1997 to 2001.

UK workforce jobs by industry

As at June (seasonally adjusted)	Manufacturing Section D of SIC (92) Numbers (000s)	Manufacturing Section D of SIC (92) Percentage of workforce	Services Sections G-Q of SIC(92) Number (000s)	Services Sections G-Q of SIC(92) Percentage of workforce	Other industries[1] Number (000s)	Other industries[1] Percentage of workforce
1997	4,495	15.9	21,123	74.9	2,576	9.1
1998	4,525	15.8	21,433	75.0	2,605	9.1
1999	4,347	15.1	21,972	76.1	2,551	8.8
2000	4,218	14.5	22,267	76.6	2,579	8.9
2001	4,079	14.0	22,558	77.2	2,592	8.9

[1] 'Other industries' include agriculture, fishing, mining and quarrying, utilities and construction (sections A, B, C, E and F of SIC(92)).

These estimates are based on the results of regular sample surveys of employers which count the number of employee jobs. Data on self-employment are obtained from the Labour Force Survey. An individual with two jobs would count twice in these figures: in order to avoid double-counting, the percentages are related to total workforce jobs rather than the UK population.

Job Losses

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs were lost in the *(a)* tourism, *(b)* agriculture, *(c)* fishing and *(d)* defence-related industries in Devon and Cornwall in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [10395]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 30 October 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of jobs that were lost in tourism, agriculture, fishing and defence related industries in Devon and Cornwall in the last 12 months. I am replying in his absence. (10395)

Information is not available for job losses.

Census

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what national allowance he will make for unreturned census forms; and how this allowance will be calculated; [11145]

(2) if he will list Government and non-government departments that depend on census information for the distribution of Government funds. [11144]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, dated October 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions concerning the government departments and non-government departments that depend on Census information for the distribution of government funds and what national allowance will be made for unreturned Census forms; and how this allowance will be calculated. I am replying in his absence. (11144,11145)

In answer to the first question, extensive consultation was carried out among government departments, public authorities and private sector organisations on the needs and requirements for information to be collected from the 2001 Census. The purposes for which information from each census question is required were set out in the Government's White paper *The 2001 Census of Population* (Cm 4253), published in March 1999.

The Government needs information that must be authoritative, accurate and comparable for all parts of the country in order to form policy, to plan services for specific groups of people and, in particular, to distribute resources effectively to local and health authorities to enable them to direct resources to where they are needed.

Those Government Departments that primarily depend on census information for the purposes of the distribution of public funds include the Departments for Health; Work and Pensions; Education and Skills; Transport, Local Government and the Regions; the Home Office; and the National Assembly for Wales.

Extensive use is also made of census information by each local government authority and health authority in the distribution of funds and resources at the more local area level.

With regard to the second question, the extent and nature of any under-enumeration in the 2001 Census will be more accurately assessed than in any previous census by the extensive, separate, follow-up Census Coverage Survey carried out by interviewing around 300,000 households shortly after the Census enumeration was completed.

Once the interview responses and all the Census returns have been analysed, we will have a definitive picture of how well we have done at both the national and local authority area level. Information from the Census Coverage Survey will thus enable the extent of any under-coverage to be assessed and the characteristics of the population missed in the Census to be estimated. This information will be used to supplement the counts from the Census itself to provide a more complete base of the population for statistical purposes.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reasons for changes in the percentage of households that failed to return Census forms in the last 10 years. [11143]

Ruth Kelly: The information falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, dated 30 October 2001:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question on what assessment has been made for the reasons for changes in the percentage of households that failed to return Census forms in the last 10 years (11143). I am replying in his absence.

Evidence from the 2001 Census does not yet give a clear indication of the percentage of households that failed to make a return. Early indications suggest that the overall level of response should be at least as good as that to the 1991 Census.

The extent and nature of any under-enumeration will be more accurately assessed than ever before by the extensive and separate follow-up Census Coverage Survey carried out by interviewing around 300,000 households shortly after the Census enumeration was complete.

Results form the Census Coverage Survey will be used together with information from the Census itself, to provide the best estimate of the extent of any under-enumeration in the Census and the characteristics of the population missed.

Commercial Banks

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will investigate the role of collections units of the commercial banks, with particular reference to their policies towards pensioners and those soon to become pensioners. [10636]

Ruth Kelly: The Banking Code sets standards of banking practice for banks and building societies when they are dealing with all personal customers, including pensioners. The Chancellor set up the independent Banking Services Consumer Codes Review Group last year. As part of its work the group examined how banks treat individuals in financial difficulties. The group reported in May 2001 and recommended revisions to the Code to ensure consumers in financial difficulty are dealt with appropriately. The financial services industry is already taking forward work to revise this part of the Code.

Debt collecting is also a licensable activity under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. The licensing system is administered by the Director General of Fair Trading who has the power to revoke a licence if he believes that a business is not fit to engage in the activities covered by it. In reaching his decision, he will take account of any business practices which appear to him to be deceitful or oppressive, or otherwise unfair or improper.

Exchange Rate Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his exchange rate policy. [10508]

Ruth Kelly: The Government do not have a target for sterling, but a stable and competitive rate is sought over the medium term, consistent with the objective of price stability. The way to ensure long-term exchange rate stability is through the pursuit of sound macroeconomic policies aimed at achieving sustained growth and low inflation.

Motoring

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure that taxes on motor fuel cover the congestion and environmental costs of motoring. [11548]

Mr. Boateng: The Government's approach to environmental taxation was set out in their Statement of Intent on environmental taxation in the July 1997 Budget and restated in the November 1999 pre-Budget report, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that decisions on future changes in fuel duty would be taken in the light of environmental, social and economic factors.

EC Finance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to Article 9 of the Council Decision on the system of the European Communities' own resources on 29 September 2000, what his interpretation of the word autonomous is in the phrase "new autonomous own resources"; and if he will outline the measures which will be considered as new autonomous own resources. [11204]

Ruth Kelly: Article 9 of the Council Decision, of 29 September 2000, on the system of the European Communities' own resources replaces Article 10 of the Decision of 28 October 1994. Like the Article it replaces, this simply allows the European Commission to undertake a review of their own resources system and to put forward proposals for modifying the system if necessary. What modifications the European Commission will choose to consider at the time is, of course, a matter for them. However, it will remain the case that any proposals for modifying the system of own resources which they decide to put forward would then have to be considered, and agreed, by all member states unanimously.

Euro

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what work his Department has undertaken to assess progress on meeting his five economic tests; which independent economists have been invited to contribute to the assessment; how many officials are involved; and when the assessment will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* published. [11098]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 372–73W.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish assessments made by the Treasury since 1997 of the economic consequences of UK membership of the euro. [10556]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the reasons for the United Kingdom not joining the euro. [10666]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's policy on membership of the single currency remains as set out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in October 1997. The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy to publish an assessment of the consequences for UK fiscal policy of *(a)* joining and *(b)* preparing to join the euro, in advance of a referendum on British membership of the euro. [10562]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete another assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Bank of England/FSA Joint Committee

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Joint Treasury/Bank of England/FSA Standing Committee met in 2001; who the Treasury representative on the Committee was; what the titles are of the papers submitted by the Treasury representative; and if he will make a statement on the present work and future programme of the Joint Committee. [10919]

Ruth Kelly: HM Treasury, the Bank of England and the FSA meet approximately once a month under the aegis of the UK Standing Committee on Financial Stability. The meetings are chaired by the Treasury's Managing Director, Financial Regulation and Industry. Much of the Committee's work is confidential, and discussions are often subject to statutory protections of information under the acts that govern financial regulation.

Financial Stability

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Financial Stability Forum met in 2001; who were the Treasury representatives; what issues were raised at the forum; and if he will make a statement. [10920]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Stability Forum met this year in London on 6–7 September and in Washington, D.C. on 22–23 March. The Treasury's Forum member is the Managing Director, Financial Regulation and Industry. Information on these meetings can be found at the Forum's website at http://www.fsforum.org/Press/P20010323.html

Liberalisation of Trade in Services Committee

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Liberalisation of Trade in Services Committee in the last 12 months. [10280]

Ruth Kelly: I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 417W.

Electronic Communications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made towards delivering all of his Department's services electronically by 2005; and what services are provided online by HM Treasury and its executive agencies. [10509]

Ruth Kelly: Services currently provided online by the Treasury are: the provision of information and publications via the Internet, correspondence with Treasury Ministers, and responding to public inquiries via email.

The Office of Government Commerce (OGC), which is an office of the Treasury, publishes information and best practice guidance on its website, and through OGCbuying.solutions provides electronic catalogues for the procurement of goods and services by Government Departments, their Agencies and NDPBs. The catalogues are available to the wider public sector. OGC also facilitates the use of the Government Procurement Card across all Government bodies.

The Debt Management Office (DMO), an agency of the Treasury, publishes data on gilts, treasury bills and other information including all its publications on its website.

Future developments will include the extension of electronic publishing and the introduction of e-tendering.

Of the services provided by the Treasury, OGC and the DMO, 70 per cent. are now online. This will rise to 90 per cent. by the end of 2002, and 100 per cent. by 2005.

Productivity Gap

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the latest trends in the productivity gap in terms of GDP per worker between the UK and the US. [10254]

Ruth Kelly: The Government make regular assessments of trends in productivity. The most recent assessment was given in Budget 2001. The Government set out a further statement of policy in "Productivity in the UK: Enterprise and the Productivity Challenge", published in June 2001. An updated assessment will be given in the pre-budget report 2001.

Savings Ratio

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the UK's savings ratio on the imbalances in the UK economy between consumption spending and internationally exposed sectors. [10281]

Ruth Kelly: The Government publish assessments of UK economic developments and prospects as part of its pre-Budget and Budget reports.

Growth Competitiveness Index

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reasons for Britain's changed position between 2000 and 2001 in the growth competitiveness index published by the World Economic Forum. [10260]

Ruth Kelly: The Government make regular assessments of UK productivity and competitiveness, drawing on a wide range of indicators. For example, the Department of Trade and Industry has a Service Delivery Agreement to publish regularly a comprehensive set of Competitiveness Indicators for the UK, designed to monitor progress in closing the productivity gap.

Pension Policies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his written answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 203W, on pensions policies, if he has asked Lord Penrose to investigate. [11049]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 851W.

Labour Force Survey

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the latest trends in Labour Force Survey unemployment; and how he expects these trends to develop in the next two quarters. [10263]

Ruth Kelly: This year the ILO unemployment rate, as measured by the Labour Force Survey, has been at its lowest since the 1970s. While the Government are conscious of the fact that no country can insulate itself from world economic events, our new macroeconomic framework has delivered low inflation and sound public finances, leaving the UK better placed than in the past to cope with global developments, following the tragic events in America.

Income Statistics

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the percentage real terms increase in disposable income for the lowest earning quintile in each year since 1992. [9756]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available.

Departmental Budgets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the amount by which budgets were over or under spent in each financial year since May 1997 in the *(a)* Department for Education and Employment, *(b)* Department of Health and *(c)* Ministry of Defence. [7785]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The table sets out the cash underspends against final Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) provision for the Departments requested. Provisional figures for 2000–01 were published in the July 2001 Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper (Cm 5243), and are subject to revision on production of the Appropriation Accounts. Since 1998–99 Departments have been allowed to carry forward any DEL budget provision which is not spent in one year into the following year. (More limited end year flexibility applied before this date). This means that underspends are available to Departments to spend in later years.

Underspend against Departmental Expenditure Limits

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–100*
Department for Education and Employment	359	659	828
Department of Health	169	285	177
Ministry of Defence	225	74	318

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of budget underspend so far in the current financial year in *(a)* the Department of Health, *(b)* the Department for Education and Skills and *(c)* the Ministry of Defence. [R] [10257]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There is no in-year target for the profile of departmental spending. Outturn against six-month forecast for each Request for Resources will be published in Winter Supplementary Estimates as usual.

WORK AND PENSIONS

State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter from his Department to those people who will be unaffected by the changes in inherited SERPS, but have reached state pension age since the first letter was issued, and to those who will reach state pension age by 5 October 2002; and when he expects to issue a further letter to those people who will be affected by the reduction in SERPS on the sliding scale. [8966]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 685W. A copy of the letter from the Department to those people who will be unaffected by the changes in inherited SERPS but have reached state pension age since the first letter was issued, and those who will reach state pension age by 5 October 2002, has now been placed in the Library.

A further letter will be issued to those people who will be affected by the reduction in SERPS on the sliding scale in the first part of next year—2002.

Benefit Repayments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what powers exist to recover benefits paid to those ineligible to receive such benefits by reason of *(a)* fraud and *(b)* mistake. [7959]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 16 October 2001]:* Where an overpayment has arisen as a result of a claimant's misrepresentation or failure to disclose a change of circumstances, section 71 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 allows recovery of that overpayment. This covers most of the overpayments we seek to recover. However, there are also other regulations permitting recovery of overpayments, for example, where means-tested benefits are overpaid due to the late payment of income or other benefits.

The Department's policy is to obtain recovery of the sum overpaid as quickly as possible, and by the most cost-effective method, without causing hardship.

Where the person overpaid receives benefit, deductions can be made from future payments of that benefit. The Social Security (Payments on Account, Overpayments and Recovery) Regulations 1998 place restrictions on those deductions, including limits on the amount which can be deducted from certain benefits. The regulations allow higher rates of recovery to be made in cases of fraud.

For those not in receipt of benefit, voluntary arrangements are sought in the first instance. Where voluntary arrangements are unsuccessful or break down, civil proceedings will be considered.

National Insurance

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what percentage of United Kingdom citizens have a National Insurance number. [9054]

Malcolm Wicks: The vast majority of the approximate 48 million UK adult population have a National Insurance number (NINO).

Child Poverty

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures the Government will take to prevent an increase in the level of child poverty in areas not subject to Government targets. [10109]

Malcolm Wicks: Details of the progress we are making in tackling child poverty can be found in our third annual report on poverty and social exclusion, "Opportunity for all—Making progress" (Cm. 5260), published on 19 September.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what reason was given to him by the Social Security Advisory Committee for its decision not to

enforce the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001; what discussions he had with SSAC prior to that decision; and if he will publish the minutes of such discussions. [11190]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Social Security Advisory Committee is not responsible for enforcing regulations.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what further assistance the Government plan to give to those who cannot work owing to disability, health problems, caring duties and difficulties with child care or transport. [10110]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Government believe that all those who are unable to work, for whatever reason, should have the opportunity to play as full a part in the community as possible. In "Towards Inclusion", our response to the Disability Rights Task Force, we set out proposals for improving disabled people's lives—whether or not they can work—in areas including education, transport, health and social services. Taken together, these measures will create a much fairer and inclusive society for disabled people.

From April 2001, we introduced a package of changes, providing extra help for disabled people in greatest need. For severely disabled people who cannot work and are receiving Income Support, the Disability Income Guarantee ensures an income of at least £142 a week for a single person aged 25 or over and £186.80 for a couple. It also benefits families on low incomes who are caring for a severely disabled child. In addition, from last April, we increased the disabled child premium in income-related benefits to £30 a week—substantially more than the normal uprating.

Sick or disabled young people who have never been able to work and pay National Insurance contributions will in future be able to receive a higher level of support from access to Incapacity Benefit. Those aged under 20 on 6 April 2001 and receiving Severe Disablement Allowance will transfer to the long-term rate of Incapacity Benefit from April 2002, providing an increase of £27.60 a week at current rates.

We are also introducing changes to the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979, by means of a Regulatory Reform Order, to extend significantly the time limit for making a claim, and to reduce the level of disability necessary for a claim to succeed. Those severely disabled people whose claims were previously disallowed for being over the current time limit and under the disability threshold will be able to make a fresh claim.

On 28 February 2001 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced that a National Service Framework would be developed for long-term conditions, and that this would have a particular focus on the needs of people disabled by neurological disease and brain and spinal injuries.

Last year, the Government announced a package of measures to enhance the current social security provision for carers, worth more than £500 million over a three-year period. From April 2001, we increased the carer premium in the income-related benefits by £10 a week above the normal uprating. We also helped those carers who can undertake some work, by increasing the earnings limit in Invalid Care Allowance from £50 to £72 a week: in future the carers' earnings limit will be increased in line with the lower earnings level for National Insurance contributions. We plan to amend the law, by means of a Regulatory Reform Order, to allow people aged 65 and over to claim Invalid Care Allowance, and to extend entitlement for up to eight weeks after the death of the person being cared for.

For those who may have difficulties with child care, the Government have already introduced a new child care tax credit in Working Families Tax Credit, and will continue to help working families meet the costs of child care.

The Government are committed to providing an accessible public transport system in which disabled people will have the same opportunities to travel as everyone else. Accessibility regulations for new trains, buses and coaches have been introduced under Part V of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Similar regulations for taxis are planned. The 10-Year Transport Plan introduced a new commitment to ensuring that access for disabled people is a condition of all new public investment in transport.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Service Pension Scheme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what are the approved additional voluntary contribution providers under the Civil Service Pension Scheme; how many outstanding contracts there are with each provider; when these AVC providers were first selected; when that selection was reviewed; and what was the source of the professional advice as to that selection and renewal. [10921]

Mr. Leslie: The Equitable Life Assurance Society and the Scottish Widows' Fund and Life Assurance Society were appointed as AVC providers for the civil service by the Treasury in December 1988. Responsibility for the civil service additional voluntary contribution scheme transferred to the Cabinet Office on 1 April 1995 under the Transfer of Functions (Treasury and the Minister for the Civil Service) Order 1995, SI 1995/269. The continuing suitability of both providers for investment under the civil service AVC scheme is subject to regular review by the Cabinet Office taking account of expert professional advice. Bacon and Woodrow are the appointed civil service AVC scheme advisers to the Cabinet Office.

Member of the civil service pension scheme are provided with a wide choice of AVC investments. Both providers offered a with-profits investment route; a deposit based fund; and unit linked investment through a wide range of investment funds. There are approximately 6,800 active contributing civil service AVC members with Equitable Life and 8,800 members with Scottish Widows. During 2001, a competitive selection process was carried out to identify a further AVC providers for the Civil Service. The Standard Life Assurance Company was selected. It will offer members investment in with-profits and through a wide choice of unit linked funds.

HEALTH

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reform the Mental Health Act 1983; and if he will make a statement. [9507]

Jacqui Smith: We published the White Paper "Reforming the Mental Health Act" in December 2000. The White Paper made clear our intention to reform mental health legislation and bring it into line with the contemporary patterns of care and treatment including the changes and new investment set out in the NHS Plan, and to improve the provisions for high risk offenders, including those who are dangerous and severely personality disordered.

New legislation will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase recruitment of mental health professionals in London. [9505]

Jacqui Smith: We are implementing a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention in the National Health Service for all staff, including in London. Examples include investing in fair pay, encouraging the NHS to become a better employer, increasing training commissions for all professional groups, providing additional funding to support those undertaking a return to practice programme, and supporting more effective, collaborative international recruitment where appropriate.

For example, between April 2001 and the end of September 2001, 138 mental health and learning disabilities nurses returned to the NHS, 18 of these were in London.

Furthermore, a workforce action team (WAT) was set up by Ministers to look at the workforce, education and training issues to support implementation of the National Service Framework (NSF) for mental health and the NHS Plan. Their final report was published in August and it has been warmly welcomed in the field as a practical and useful piece of work.

Included in the WAT programme of work was a key area group looking at recruitment and retention issues. The Group made some 23 recommendations for action which the mental health care group workforce team, working in conjunction with the human resources directorate of the Department and the relevant professional bodies, will be considering as part of an implementation plan to take forward the work of the WAT.

In conjunction with this work, the National Director of Mental Health has set up a specific working group to look at ways of improving recruitment and retention of psychiatrists. Representatives from within the Department, the Royal College of Psychiatry and others are contributing and investigating both long and short-term interventions.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much money the Government have spent on the Mind Out for Mental Health campaign; and what steps have been taken; [9510]

(2) how many of those with a diagnosis of severe mental illness he estimates have found employment as a result of the Mind Out for Mental Health campaign. [9519]

Jacqui Smith: In the financial year 2000–01, the Department spent £573,000 on the mind out for mental health campaign. £900,000 is allocated to the campaign in the year 2001–02.

The mind out for mental health campaign is a sustained programme of activity with partners in the voluntary sector, the media and business working together to change attitudes and behaviour surrounding mental health. Through such partnerships (both on a national and local level), and through high profile communications and events, mind out for mental health is reaching out to key audiences. For example, mind out for mental health is working with UK Youth, the Guides and the Scouts to develop an activity pack to help groups explore mental health issues. It is also working with journalist colleges in the development of training seminars and packs for student journalists. In addition, a stop the stigma information pack has been developed for individuals or local groups—a step by step guide to planning effective action to help change attitudes towards those with mental health problems. A copy of this action pack has been placed in the Library.

"Working Minds" is the employer programme of mind out for mental health. This part of the campaign works in partnership with employers to create positive shifts in workplace attitudes and behaviour surrounding mental health. Its objectives are far greater than helping people with mental health problems to find employment; the programme seeks to bring about a fundamental, long-term change in employers' policy and practice so that people with mental health problems are able to participate fully in the workplace. Its success will be measured against this objective.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the success of guardianship under section 7 of the Mental Health Act 1983; and if he will make a statement. [9520]

Jacqui Smith: The results of the first stage of a multi-centre research study commissioned by the Department in 1997 showed that guardianship is generally not widely used. There is, however, marked variation in use with some authorities being more proactive. The reasons for variation in use of the order and further exploration of the outcome and satisfaction with the use of guardianship is being explored in the second phase of the study. We expect to receive a report on the second phase work in the next month.

Maternity Services

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the transfer of maternity services from Hemel Hempstead hospital to Watford will be temporary; [9377]

(2) if he will make a statement on the transfer of the special care baby unit, maternity, gynaecological and children services from Hemel Hempstead hospital to Watford. [9376]

Jacqui Smith: The decision to transfer the special care baby unit, maternity and in-patient gynaecology services from Hemel Hempstead to Watford hospital was made following difficulties in recruiting specialist paediatric nurses to the special care baby unit. The decision to transfer these services was made in the best interests of patient care and safety.

This transfer is a temporary arrangement which will be kept under constant review as further attempts are made to recruit the necessary staff.

In the meantime, two reviews are being undertaken across Hertfordshire which may have an impact on acute children's services, namely the Hertfordshire children's services review and the Hertfordshire and south Bedfordshire acute services review.

Any proposed permanent changes to acute children's services which may result from these reviews will need to be the subject of formal public consultation.

Any contested change of service will be considered by the new and independent reconfiguration panel.

Hearing Aids

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the full cost is of providing a hearing aid. [9596]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is collecting information on the cost of providing hearing aids as part of the annual Reference Costs Collection, which provides unit cost information for a wide range of national health service treatments and procedures. The information is expected to be published in November and will be available on the Department's internet site at www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/refcosts.htm.

Child Protection

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many child deaths have been notified under Part 8 reviews under the "Working Together" Guidance under the Children Act 1989 in which domestic violence was involved, in the past six years. [9608]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, research has highlighted that children are likely to be at risk of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse if they live in households where there is domestic violence. We also know that exposure to domestic violence can have a serious impact on a child's development and well-being. We are committed to raising awareness of domestic violence and its impact on children. We have done this through commissioning resources such as the Making an Impact—Children and Domestic Violence Training Pack, which helps front-line staff to deal effectively with families where domestic violence is occurring. We have also been careful to recognise the links between child protection and domestic violence in the revised Working Together to Safeguard Children child protection guidance and in the Framework for the Assessment of Children in need and their Families.

Beta Interferon

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his written answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1027–28W, on beta interferon, what estimate he has made of the annual additional cost of prescribing beta interferon to 12 per cent. of British sufferers from multiple sclerosis. [9923]

Ms Blears: We have made no such estimate.

Waiting Times

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England have been waiting more than *(a)* six, *(b)* 12, *(c)* 18 and *(d)* 24 months for an (i) out-patient and (ii) in-patient appointment for each reporting period since 1995; and if he will make a statement. [8926]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* The information requested is given in the tables.

A proportion of patients who have waited over 18 and 24 months are awaiting tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy procedures. This is because the National Health Service has been advised only to carry out these procedures (when routine) using single-use supply instruments, due to the theoretical risk of contracting vCJD. There are now sufficient supplies of these instruments; therefore, patients awaiting these procedures should not be waiting as long in the coming months.

Two NHS trusts were responsible for the number of patients waiting over 24 months during the quarters ending March and June 2001. Appropriate corrective action is in place to ensure these patients are treated.

We are determined to reduce waiting times through implementing shorter maximum waiting times. By the end of March 2002, the maximum in-patient waiting time will be 15 months and the maximum waiting time for a first out-patient appointment will be six months.

In-patient waiting times data for England, March 1995 to present

		Of those on the list, number who have waited:			
Quarter	*Size of in-patient*	*More than 6 months*	*More than 12 months*	*More than 18 months*	*More than 24 months*
March 1995	1,044,051	241,218	32,194	280	121
June 1995	1,052,958	244,360	32,759	118	0
September 1995	1,040,152	243,987	27,938	43	0
December 1995	1,054,948	229,659	20,488	2	0
March 1996	1,048,029	208,484	4,576	14	0
June 1996	1,056,122	223,412	10,399	9	1
September 1996	1,061,557	239,690	14,993	25	1
December 1996	1,104,983	255,482	22,161	123	1
March 1997	1,158,004	289,574	31,208	150	1
June 1997	1,189,962	318,024	46,684	385	13
September 1997	1,207,515	337,739	57,666	794	7
December 1997	1,261,915	367,558	68,332	972	58
March 1998	1,297,662	382,432	68,023	4	0
June 1998	1,287,543	381,937	72,746	0	0

In-patient waiting times data for England, March 1995 to present

Quarter	Size of in-patient	Of those on the list, number who have waited: More than 6 months	More than 12 months	More than 18 months	More than 24 months
September 1998	1,213,839	347,757	63,480	0	0
December 1998	1,173,598	315,724	56,094	0	0
March 1999	1,072,860	279,627	47,304	0	0
June 1999	1,094,251	279,118	49,442	1	0
September 1999	1,084,157	280,775	50,801	99	3
December 1999	1,108,006	285,440	52,147	105	48
March 2000	1,037,066	268,275	49,046	7	1
June 2000	1,047,890	273,023	51,381	1	0
September 2000	1,031,824	275,204	51,115	2	0
December 2000	1,034,381	267,127	49,215	10	0
March 2001	1,006,727	245,991	42,158	217	54
March 2001[1]	—	—	—	84	0
June 2001	1,037,875	267,160	46,689	356	10
June 2001[1]	—	—	—	205	0

[1] Number of T&As

Source:

KH07 quarterly waiting times return. Department of Health

Out-patient waiting times data for England, March 1995 to present

Quarter	Of those still waiting at quarter end for a first out-patient appointment following GP referral, number who have waited: More than 6 months	More than 12 months	More than 18 months	More than 24 months
March 1995	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1995	87,398	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1995	72,667	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1995	60,894	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1996	58,503	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1996	52,382	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1996	61,936	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1996	68,495	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1997	70,689	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1997	84,983	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1997	90,112	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1997	106,961	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1998	112,250	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1998	108,684	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1998	126,312	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1998	144,404	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1999	152,787	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1999	145,896	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1999	149,247	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1999	159,211	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 2000	132,223	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 2000	130,335	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 2000	125,840	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 2000	113,618	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 2001	81,847	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 2001	85,099	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source:

QM08 quarterly waiting times return. Department of Health

Ambulance Services

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* ambulances, *(b)* paramedics and *(c)* ambulance medical technicians there were in Sussex in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [10397]

Ms Blears: Figures for the number of ambulances and ambulance medical technicians are not collected centrally.

The number of ambulance staff in Sussex for each year at 30 September are in the table.

Year	Paramedics	Other ambulance personnel
2000	230	350
1999	240	310
1998	210	370
1997	230	390
1996	220	280

Source:

Department of Health Non-medical work force census

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason ambulance services in Hampshire are to be reorganised; [10572]

(2) how many organisations in the Hampshire health economy favoured proposals to reorganise the ambulance services in the south-east; [10573]

(3) how many representations during the consultation on reorganising ambulance services in the south-east were in favour of the proposals; [10574]

(4) if he will make a statement on the consultation on reorganising ambulance services in the south-east. [10577]

Ms Blears: Over 100 bodies and individuals responded to the consultation proposals. The South East Regional Office of the Department will make a detailed summary to Ministers shortly.

Anthrax

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has concerning the possible continuing incidence of anthrax at the former Thanet Isolation (Haine) hospital; and if he will make a statement on possible long-term contamination of the burial grounds. [11142]

Ms Blears: I have been advised by the Director of Public Health at East Kent health authority that there is no risk of anthrax from this site to the general public or anyone working at the Haine hospital site.

In the event of graves being excavated, workers should be advised to take normal precautions to prevent infection from pathogens in soil; namely the use of protective gloves and washable or disposable overalls.

NHS Boards (Disabilities)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the chairs and non-executive directors of NHS boards have a disability. [11415]

Ms Blears: The proportion of those appointed to National Health Service boards who identify themselves as being disabled is shown in the tables.

Disabled candidates appointed to National Health Service Boards at 29 October 2001

	Total	*Number disabled*	*Per cent. disabled*
Chairs			
Health authorities	90	2	2.2
NHS trusts	304	2	0.7
Primary care trusts	166	8	4.8
Special health authorities	16	0	0
Total	576	12	2.08
Non-executives (NEDs)			
Health authorities	480	18	3.8
NHS trusts	1,547	45	2.9
Primary care trusts	773	49	6.3
Special health authorities	274	11	4.0
Total	3,074	123	4.0
Total chairs and NEDs	3.641	135	3.7

NHS Appointments Commission

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of the chair and members of the new Independent NHS Appointments Commission and indicate how they were *(a)* selected and *(b)* appointed. [11251]

Ms Blears: The membership of the National Health Service Appointments Commission is as follows:

Chair:

Sir William Wells

Regional Commissioners:

Eastern—Mrs. Rosie Varley

London—Sir Ian Mills

North West—Mr. Michael Taylor

Northern and Yorkshire—Dr. John Marshall

South East—Mr. Bernard Williams

South West—Mrs. Gillian Camm

Trent—Mrs. Brenda Sills

West Midlands—Mrs. Jane Isaacs.

The posts were advertised nationally and the appointments procedures followed were in line with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, involving interview panels including an independent assessor. A copy of the information pack sent to all candidates is in the Library. This includes the job descriptions and the qualities required of the chair and commissioners.

Endometriosis

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of endometriosis have been treated within the Dorset health authority in the last 12 months; [10304]

(2) how many cases of endometriosis the NHS has referred abroad for treatment; [10306]

(3) how many endometriosis cases there are within the Dorset health authority. [10305]

Ms Blears: The following figures are taken from the hospital episode statistics database, which contains details of patients admitted to and treated in national health service hospitals in England.

The number of finished consultant episodes for endometriosis treatment in hospitals in the Dorset health authority area for the 1999–2000 data year are as follows:

Primary diagnosis: Endometriosis—286

(ICD10 code N80).

The number of finished consultant episodes for endometriosis treatment for residents of the Dorset health authority area for the 1999–2000 data year are as follows:

Primary diagnosis: Endometriosis—303

(ICD10 code N80).

A finished consultant episode is a period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. These figures do not represent the number of patients as a person may have more than one episode within the year.

Information on cases of endometriosis referred abroad for treatment is not collected centrally.

Private Sector Concordat

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been *(a)* the total cost to the NHS of treatment under

the concordat with the private sector, *(b)* the average cost of treatment per patient and *(c)* the average cost of similar treatment as in (b) above in the NHS. [10635]

Mr. Milburn: Contracts agreed under the concordat are signed at the local level and the Department does not have complete information on expenditure. £20 million was made available to the national health service to purchase treatment in the private sector last winter, which funded just over 10,500 cases, for example an average cost per case of approximately £1,900. However, in the absence of information on the mix of cases this figure is not particularly meaningful.

The Department has recently surveyed NHS health authorities and trusts on their use of the private sector. Analysis is not yet complete.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on delayed discharges in acute hospitals of treatment under the concordat with the private sector. [10490]

Mr. Milburn: Treatments provided under concordat arrangements will generally take patients off existing national health service waiting lists for elective surgery. I am not aware of any adverse impact on delayed discharges in acute hospitals as a result of patients receiving treatment under the concordat.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been treated under the concordat with the private sector since its implementation. [10492]

Mr. Milburn: Between 1 November 2000 and 30 September 2001 there were 64,136 national health service funded elective cases in the private sector.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the extent of bed blocking in each health authority and trust at the most recent available date; what was the basis on which the social services authorities with the most serious bed blocking problem, requiring extra priority allocations were identified; and for what reason the Newcastle city and North Tyneside borough social services authorities were not on the priority list. [10933]

Jacqui Smith: The latest figures on delayed discharges for each health authority and National Health Service trust are shown in the table. The decision on which councils should receive extra help was taken on the basis of the councils with the highest rate of delayed discharge and also councils, which the Department has identified as needing extra help through our performance monitoring arrangements. Newcastle city and North Tyneside borough social services did not meet these criteria.

Delayed discharges of patients all ages
Collection: Quarter 1 2001–02

Area	*Total delayed*	*Delayed discharge rate (percentage)*
National summary:		
England	6,361	6.3
Regional summary:		
Northern and Yorkshire	687	4.6
Trent	325	2.8
West Midlands	1,080	8.4
North West	607	4.4
Eastern	421	7.2
London	792	6.0
South East	1,550	9.5
South West	899	7.8
Health authority summary:		
Bradford	20	1.7
Durham	69	7.5
East Riding	20	1.6
Gateshead and South Tyneside	56	6.4
Leeds	90	3.9
Newcastle and North Tyneside	69	3.9
North Cumbria	101	13.8
Northumberland	8	2.4
Sunderland	25	3.7
Tees	76	5.5
Wakefield	33	4.5
North Yorkshire	92	5.6
Calderdale and Kirklees	28	2.4
Barnsley	7	1.5
North Derbyshire	16	1.9
South Derbyshire	10	0.9
Doncaster	18	3.0
Leicestershire	47	2.4
Lincolnshire	31	2.2
North Nottinghamshire	29	3.4
Nottingham	53	2.9
Rotherham	16	2.9
Sheffield	53	3.8
South Humber	45	6.3
Birmingham	474	14.7
Coventry	62	5.4
Dudley	56	8.5
Herefordshire	18	5.8
Sandwell	42	4.4
Shropshire	27	3.2
Solihull	26	7.0
North Staffordshire	99	7.7
South Staffordshire	102	12.4
Walsall	31	5.9
Warwickshire	56	5.4
Wolverhampton	27	4.1
Worcestershire	60	5.8
South Lancashire	11	4.2
Liverpool	84	5.3
Manchester	31	2.3
Morecambe Bay	66	8.3
St Helens and Knowsley	68	6.8
Salford and Trafford	43	3.2
Sefton	38	5.3
Stockport	12	1.8
West Pennine	30	3.0
Bury and Rochdale	16	2.9
North Cheshire	33	4.6
South Cheshire	42	4.6
East Lancashire	2	0.2
North West Lancashire	111	10.6
Wigan and Bolton	—	—
Wirral	20	2.0
Bedfordshire	37	3.9
North Essex	—	—
South Essex	—	—
Suffolk	195	13.6
Cambridgeshire	100	5.4
Norfolk	89	5.5
Hertfordshire	—	—
Hillingdon	60	16.1
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	—	—
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	107	10.0

Delayed discharges of patients all ages
Collection: Quarter 1 2001–02

Area	*Total delayed*	*Delayed discharge rate (percentage)*
Croydon	37	5.0
Kingston and Richmond	59	5.4
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	39	2.1
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	49	3.7
Barking and Havering	68	9.2
Brent and Harrow	41	18.2
Camden and Islington	62	6.8
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	108	7.7
East London and City	53	2.6
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	109	7.4
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	—	—
Berkshire	183	13.3
Buckinghamshire	170	17.4
East Kent	60	4.8
West Kent	63	4.3
East Surrey	59	6.5
West Surrey	183	12.8
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	—	—
West Sussex	219	7.8
Northamptonshire	136	12.3
Oxfordshire	66	5.4
North and Mid Hampshire	160	18.6
Southampton and South West Hampshire	172	14.3
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	79	4.8
Somerset	46	6.5
South and West Devon	64	5.6
Wiltshire	125	9.7
Avon	233	9.5
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	87	6.1
Dorset	92	5.5
North and East Devon	139	9.3
Gloucestershire	113	9.0

Blood Donors

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has received from the National Blood Service of the effect on the number of blood donors of testing for vCJD; and what plans he has to ensure the supply of blood to non-emergency patients who require transfusions as part of their treatments. [10718]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is currently working with the National Blood Service on contingency plans related to the screening of blood donors for vCJD and the impact this could have on the blood supply.

In parallel with the four United Kingdom Health Departments alongside the National Audit Office and the National Blood Transfusion Services, the UK Chief Medical Officers sponsored a conference on better blood transfusion on 29 October. The aim of the conference is to help set the priorities for blood transfusion in the national health service for the coming three to five years including the more efficient and effective use of blood so that we ensure the supply of blood to all patients who require transfusions as part of their treatment.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 31 October 2001

DEFENCE

Submarines

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to sell submarines in the last two years; with whom he negotiated; and if he will make a statement. [10138]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my noble Friend Lord Robertson, the then Secretary of State for Defence, gave on 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 56W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey) and my answers to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 23 October 2000, *Official Report*, column 30W, and 19 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 89W, the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on 31 October 2000, *Official Report*, column 341W, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 20 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 184W, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 717W, and the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 717–18W.

Canada has acquired the four ex-Royal Navy Upholder class submarines. The acquisition takes the form of an eight-year lease with the option of outright purchase.

The first of the refurbished submarines was handed over to Canada on 6 October 2000, with the second submarine being handed over to Canada on 4 October 2001. It is planned that the two remaining submarines will follow over the next 14 months. Canada has exercised its option to purchase outright the first submarine, HMCS Victoria.

Military Equipment (Updating)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the armed forces have to update existing military equipment with particular reference to radio communications equipment, following the contribution of UK forces to the conflict in Afghanistan. [10498]

Dr. Moonie: I have nothing to add to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave on 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 513–14W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann).

Armed Forces (Recruitment)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent initiatives have been taken to increase the level of recruitment to the armed forces. [10571]

Mr. Ingram: All three services undertake numerous and varied initiatives, both at national and local level, aimed at increasing the level of recruitment to the armed forces. Included among the many current initiatives are:

The use of multi-media advertising campaigns.

Services' Recruiting Teams' attendance at schools, careers fairs and Graduate Recruitment Seminars, road shows, exhibitions, youth clubs and organisations.

Work experience placements within service establishments.

Personal Development Courses and 'Look at Life' Courses for people who express an interest in the armed forces.

Taster Day visits to HM ships and service establishments.

A dedicated careers website for each of the services.

Introduction by the Army of an 'on-line' recruiting office, with plans for this to be replicated by the other services.

Specialist Ethnic Minority Recruiting and Diversity Action Teams aimed at promoting armed forces careers to ethnic minority communities.

A partnership with the Employment Service, making use of its local outlets 'Jobcentre Plus'.

RAF St. Athan

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the consultants' report on the relocation of the fixed wing aircraft repair business of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency from RAF St. Athan to Cardiff International airport. [10765]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 707W. The position has not changed.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from business in the Vale of Glamorgan on the Defence Aviation Repair Agency's unsuccessful attempt to relocate its fixed wing aircraft repair business from RAF St. Athan to Cardiff International airport. [10766]

Mr. Ingram: The only representation received to date by the Chief Executive of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) was from Mr. Derek Gaynor, the landlord of the Highwayman Inn in Nurston.

Mr. Gaynor has since been informed about the current position concerning Cardiff International airport by officials from the Welsh Development Agency.

Armed Forces (Training)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding the *(a)* Defence Intelligence and Security Centre defence agency review of training of armed forces and *(b)* other intelligence agencies; and if he will make a statement. [11453]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The Defence Intelligence and Security Centre (DISC) is not conducting a review of training, but is undergoing a Quinquennial Review (QQR) of its agency status, part of which will involve an analysis of current and future training activity. This review was announced on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 710W. Comments were requested by 15 September 2001 and to date we have received one representation. The review is due to be complete by February 2002.

Separately, the report of the Defence Training Review, announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 545W, included a proposal to collocate security training, language training and possible joint photographic training. On 19 July, I announced that the DISC was being examined as the Ministry of Defence's benchmark site for security, intelligence, language and photography training, *Official Report*, column 334W.

The only other intelligence agency within the MOD is the Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency (DGIA), which was launched on 1 April 2000, formed from the merger of two defence intelligence agencies, the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre (JARIC) and Military Survey. The DGIA provides imagery intelligence and geographic support to defence policy, planning, operations and training.

Road Safety Report 1999–2000

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Defence Annual Road Safety report for 1999–2000 will be placed in the Library. [11499]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 321–22W. I stated that the report would be placed in the Library of the House shortly, and I am pleased to confirm that this was done on 29 October 2001.

HMS Ocean

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what nature of refit is required by HMS Ocean; and if he will make a statement. [11497]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 20 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 12W.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mechanical problems are being repaired on HMS Ocean; when repairs are expected to be completed; when HMS Ocean will be ready for re-deployment; and if he will make a statement. [11815]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave him on 20 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 12W.

Subject to operational considerations, HMS Ocean will be available for operational tasking by late spring 2002, following completion of the routine docking period.

Defence Logistics Organisation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he expects Defence Logistics Organisation *(a)* current expenditure and *(b)* capital expenditure to be within their respective estimates provision in the current financial year; and if he will indicate the relevant figures. [11577]

Mr. Ingram: The estimates provision at the start of the year for the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) was made up of £3,421 million for current and £612 million for capital expenditure. As I explained in my reply of 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 405–06W, in the normal course of business there are adjustments to these limits as the year unfolds, which will be finalised in time for the spring supplementary estimates. We would expect DLO expenditure to be within estimates provision at the year end.

Joint Strike Fighter Programme

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Joint Strike Fighter programme. [11576]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 514W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy).

Territorial Army

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the decision taken in the Strategic Defence Review to reduce the role of the TA in nuclear biological chemical reconnaissance; and if he will make a statement. [R] [9671]

Dr. Moonie: There are no plans to review the decisions taken in the Strategic Defence Review with regard to the role of the Territorial Army in nuclear biological chemical reconnaissance. Since the SDR a regular Joint NBC Regiment comprising Army/RAF elements has been formed at RAF Honington, and became operational in December 1999. Its role is NBC reconnaissance, survey, detection/identification/monitoring and decontamination. Currently, two squadrons of the Royal Yeomanry form the reserve element of the Joint NBC Regiment.

Exercise Swift Sword

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to use Exercise Swift Sword to increase recruitment to the armed forces. [10580]

Mr. Ingram: An Army recruiting initiative 'Operation London Soldier', from 10 to 23 September 2001, culminated in a competition on 30 September. The planned prize had been a period with Exercise Swift Sword. However, due to the events of 11 September, a replacement prize of one week of military/adventure training in Gibraltar was introduced instead.

Exercise Swift Sword, as with all such large exercises, served to heighten awareness of the armed forces, with considerable daily coverage in the media. In addition, the live footage and photographs from the exercise will be used to enhance and update the services' recruiting libraries and will provide up to date and topical material for future recruiting literature.

Afghanistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will urge his American counterpart to stop US forces using cluster bombs over Afghanistan. [10788]

Mr. Hoon: The cluster bombs used in Afghanistan do not contain anti-personnel landmines and are, therefore, legitimate weapons that have not been prohibited by any treaty or convention. They are used with discretion and

proportionality and against legitimate and appropriate terrorist and military targets that are selected with great care.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* use of and *(b)* preparedness to use napalm in Afghanistan of coalition forces. [11448]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* No napalm has been used by coalition forces operating in the Afghanistan region and there are no plans to do so.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on a bombing pause to assist the more effective delivery of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [11647]

Mr. Hoon: As the UN has made clear, the military campaign as such has not hampered the delivery of assistance in any significant way. We have no plans at present to suspend military activity in Afghanistan in order to facilitate the delivery of aid, not least because a pause in the bombing would simply encourage the Taliban to harass humanitarian supplies more than at present.

Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme; and when he expects studies to be complete. [10600]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme was completed in August 2001. An unclassified summary of the final report is in preparation for publication and copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House in due course.

Drugs (Armed Forces)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if disciplinary action over drug taking is exercised consistently between the three services. [10703]

Mr. Ingram: All the services have similar disciplinary procedures for dealing with drugs offences which include trial by court martial and, on a verdict of guilty, usually results in dismissal from the service following a period of military detention.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been tested under the Compulsory Drug Testing programme in the last year in each of the three services; and how many have tested positive in each case. [10701]

Mr. Ingram: The figures for all service personnel in the calendar year 2000 are as follows:

Service	*Underwent Compulsory Drug Testing (CDT)*	*Tested positive*
Royal Navy	13,951	50
Army	117,659	609
Royal Air Force	11,610	14

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what disciplinary action was taken by each of the three services in the last year in respect of service personnel who tested positive under the Compulsory Drug Testing programme. [10702]

Mr. Ingram: During the year 2000, no disciplinary action was taken against personnel from any of the three services for testing positive at a Compulsory Drugs Test (CDT). Failure of a CDT will normally lead to the Administrative Discharge of an individual on the basis that drugs are incompatible with service in the armed forces. A positive test by itself is not a criminal or disciplinary offence. Disciplinary action will only be invoked, in relation to CDT, if an individual commits the offence of failing to provide a urine sample for the purpose of testing.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to alter regulations and penalties for possession of cannabis among servicemen and women, following the changes proposed in civilian life by the Secretary of State for the Home Department. [11090]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's proposal concerned the reclassification of cannabis. However, misuse of drugs, of all classes, will remain incompatible with the requirements of life in the armed forces.

Porton Down Veterans Support Group

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will invite the Porton Down Veterans Support Group to the next meeting of the Veterans Forum. [10902]

Dr. Moonie: Yes. The next meeting of the Veterans Plenary Forum is scheduled to take place on 17 April 2002.

Tomahawk Cruise Missiles

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tomahawk cruise missiles have been fired by British forces during the present action in Afghanistan. [11014]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Royal Navy submarines fired a small number of Tomahawk land attack missiles on 7 October and 13 October.

I am withholding the precise information requested under Exemption 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to national defence.

Regular Commission Boards

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future location and organisation of the regular commission boards. [R] [11270]

Mr. Ingram: The Regular Commission Board (RCB), which is currently based at Westbury in Wiltshire, is part of the Army Training and Recruiting Agency (ATRA). Its role is to select potential officers for entry to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS), also part of ATRA.

Historically, the RCB was part of the Directorate of Army Recruiting but in 1998 it was placed under the control of RMAS, as there is clearly a synergy between the selection and training of potential officers.

We have now decided that RCB should be collocated with RMAS as from February 2003. Collocation of the two parts of what is essentially a single operation will further enhance coherence, achieve economies of scale and could enable ATRA to achieve a degree of estate rationalisation. The role and ethos of RCB will not change.

Territorial Commissioning Board

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future locations and organisation of the territorial commissioning board. [R] [11271]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is examining various options to determine the best way to operate the Territorial Commissioning Board and I expect a decision to be made by the end of the year. I will write to the hon. Member when I know the outcome and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Industry

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the paper being prepared by the Defence Procurement Agency on the future of the defence industry to be published; and if he will make a statement. [11455]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* It is not intended to publish this paper as it is for the purposes of internal discussion and advice only. I am therefore withholding it under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Armed Forces (Advanced Driving)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many active servicemen successfully completed advanced driving safety courses in the last 12 months. [11450]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence does not run specific courses teaching advanced driving safety, although service personnel do attend courses provided by organisations such as the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA). This training is arranged locally. The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

MOD does, however, provide training for all categories of driving licences. This includes basic training plus familiarisation training on the relevant type of vehicle, refresher training, and any specialist courses required. All these courses stress the importance of driving safely. More specifically, MOD has recently introduced a defensive driving training programme—some 4,000 personnel were given this training over the year April 2000 to March 2001.

Nuclear Installations

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if security at nuclear installations has been upgraded in respect of terrorist threat; and what plans he has to take further measures. [11777]

Mr. Ingram: The standing level of security at Ministry of Defence nuclear installations is maintained at a high level and is specifically designed to counter an attack by armed terrorists. This high baseline level of security is maintained at MOD nuclear installations irrespective of fluctuations in the terrorist alert states that may apply to other Government establishments or MOD installations. Security measures at defence nuclear establishments include armed guarding and strict control of access. As my hon. Friend would expect, these security arrangements are kept under constant review.

My hon. Friend would not expect me to go into detail regarding any additional security measures that may be adopted in the future.

MOD F680 Export Control Applications

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many MOD 680 export control applications *(a)* are awaiting decision and *(b)* have been waiting for (i) one month or more, (ii) two months or more, (iii) three months or more, (iv) six months or more and (v) one year or more. [9470]

Dr. Moonie: The F680 is an informal process under which companies can obtain advice on the prospects for approval of exports at the marketing stage. The F680 also gives formal clearance for release of classified information, where required, for marketing purposes. The information sought is not currently held in the form requested. However, the Ministry of Defence is carrying out an audit of extant F680 applications as part of a programme to improve this service to industry. I will write to the hon. Member when this work is completed and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Biological Warfare

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with pharmaceutical companies about facilities used for the creation of biological organisms and toxins with potential for warfare. [8620]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has had no such discussions.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what vaccines the Government have in place to treat biological agents, organisms and toxins affecting the population. [8619]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

We have existing stocks across the whole range of potential bioterrorist threats. Our contingency planning is responsible and proportionate. For security reasons, we cannot reveal levels or locations of either vaccine or antibiotic stocks.

PRIME MINISTER

Interception of Communications Commissioner

Brian White: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to publish the next annual report of the Interception of

Communications Commissioner; and if it will be available electronically. [10773]

The Prime Minister: I have today laid before the House the annual reports for 2000 of the Interception of Communications Commissioner, the right hon. Sir Swinton Thomas, and the Intelligence Services Commissioner, the right hon. Lord Justice Simon Brown. The confidential annexes have been excluded in accordance with section 58(7) and 60(5) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act. The annual reports will be available on the Cabinet Office website. I am grateful to the Commissioners for their work.

Occupational Health and Vocational Rehabilitation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will clarify departmental and agency responsibilities for occupational health and vocational rehabilitation. [11312]

The Prime Minister: The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), is responsible for occupational health services provided by the NHS. The Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), is responsible for vocational rehabilitation.

Afghanistan

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister what British planes taking off from the base in Diego Garcia have dropped cluster bombs during the military action in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement on the use of cluster bombs in Afghanistan, with particular reference to British involvement. [11574]

The Prime Minister: No UK aircraft have directly taken part in the bombing campaign.

The cluster bombs used in Afghanistan are legitimate weapons, which have not been prohibited by any treaty or convention. They are used only with discretion and proportionality, as international law requires, and against legitimate and appropriate terrorist and military targets.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with President Bush on the armaments used during the military action in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [11579]

The Prime Minister: We are in close contact with the US on all aspects of the response to the attacks of 11 September, including at the military planning level.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care Facilities

Caroline Flint: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, in what ways the Commission plans to assist access for children of staff, hon. Members and hon. Members' staff to daycare facilities. [10287]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Commission already provides child care vouchers for staff of the House with small children. The vouchers are very flexible, and can be exchanged for various forms of daycare, including nursery places and care by nannies, childminders or certain relatives.

For school aged children the House also ran a subsidised holiday playscheme for children of hon. Members and hon. Members' staff and staff of the House for six weeks in the summer. The Board of Management will be considering whether to extend the scheme for the future. Staff of the House are also eligible to use Westminster Playscheme run by the civil service.

There is no specific responsibility on the Commission to provide facilities for children of Members and their staff, but Members can use their allowances to purchase vouchers or daycare facilities for their staff. The Department of Finance and Administration publishes information about finding child care facilities in the Westminster area on the intranet.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Zimbabwe

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of number of farm occupations taking place in Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [10576]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Committee of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers visited Zimbabwe on 25–26 October. They found a divergence in the views and facts relating to farm occupations. The Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) have reported that occupations continue unabated, and that since the Abuja meeting on 6 September, 688 farms had new people join the occupations. The CFU estimate 200–300 new occupations since 6 September. The Government of Zimbabwe dispute these figures. The Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe have cited several new occupations since Abuja in Mashonaland West. At Abuja, the Government of Zimbabwe gave an assurance that there would be no further occupation of farm lands. We continue to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to abide by this commitment.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policy initiatives he plans to promote democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [10578]

Mr. Bradshaw: We remain concerned about the situation in Zimbabwe. At Abuja, the Government of Zimbabwe agreed to abide by the democratic and human rights principles contained in the Harare Declaration. My noble Friend Baroness Amos accompanied Commonwealth partners on a visit to Zimbabwe on 25–26 October, to assess implementation of the Abuja Agreement and to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to abide by their commitments. The EU opened Article 96 consultations on 29 October, to press for closer engagement with the Government of Zimbabwe on human rights, democratic principles and the

rule of law. We continue to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to admit international election observers and to create a climate conducive to free and fair elections.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the level of political violence in Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [10579]

Mr. Bradshaw: We remain concerned about political violence in Zimbabwe. In the Abuja Agreement, the Government of Zimbabwe agreed to take firm action against violence and intimidation. But the Chikomba by-election on 22–23 September was marred by violence. We continue to press the Government of Zimbabwe to permit the entry of international election observers, and to create a climate conducive to free and fair elections. My noble Friend Baroness Amos accompanied Commonwealth partners to Zimbabwe on 25–26 October, to assess implementation of the Abuja Agreement and to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to abide by their commitments.

Visa Centres

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to open the proposed visa centres in Jallandhar, Ahmedabad and Sylhet. [11430]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have recently received formal approval from the Indian Government to open visa liaison offices in Jallandhar and Ahmedabad. We are identifying suitable premises and aim to open both offices by mid-2002. Work is almost complete on the Visa Liaison Office in Sylhet, which should open on schedule in November.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Nuclear Waste (Transportation)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if permission has been given to DRS railway transport company to increase the operating speed on trains moving spent nuclear fuel to Sellafield. [9103]

Mr. Jamieson: No such permission has been given by the Department.

Railway Industry

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, local Government and the Regions when he informed the Rail Regulator of his Department's discussions with *(a)* passenger rail franchisees and *(b)* train operating companies for taking over responsibility for operating and maintaining railway infrastructure in the areas where they run train services. [9832]

Mr. Spellar: Officials have had meetings on such matters with train operators' representatives or their advisers at their request. These have not resulted in any change in policy about which the Rail Regulator needed to be informed.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money was invested in Railtrack in each of the years since privatisation. [10470]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1315W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money he estimates will be required to meet the 10-year plan's objectives for higher safety; and how this estimate has changed since the plan was published. [10440]

Mr. Jamieson: Transport safety is a major priority for this Government and our £180 billion 10-year-plan will contribute towards delivering a safer transport system. It is not possible to give a precise figure about how much of that money will be required to meet the plan's safety objectives, because much of this expenditure will simultaneously deliver a range of benefits, including safety.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the requirement for public sector investment in rail during the period of the 10-year plan will change as a result of the transfer of Railtrack assets to the proposed successor body. [10401]

Mr. Jamieson: No change is expected.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many times he has met the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority since June; and what the date of their last meeting was. [10443]

Mr. Spellar: The Secretary of State and I have met the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority on several occasions—specifically to discuss the Authority's work, as part of wider industry meetings and at the High Level Group for London Rail Projects, which last met on 4 October.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if Railtrack is able to meet the requirements of the Late Payments of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1999 in paying its contractors and suppliers. [10448]

Mr. Jamieson: Yes.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 195–97W, to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), on the successor to Railtrack, what the credit rating of Railtrack was on 4 October. [10445]

Mr. Spellar: The Standard & Poor's credit rating for Railtrack plc on 4 October 2001, based upon their research dated 2 May 2001, was single A-1 (short term).

The Moody's credit rating for Railtrack plc on 4 October 2001, last updated in June 2001, was A2 (long term) and P-1 (short term).

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the relationship between the future track access charge regime and the non-profit making status of the successor to Railtrack. [10475]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on Tuesday 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 195–97W.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans for placing responsibility for safety on stakeholder directors of Railtrack. [10285]

Mr. Spellar: I have no such plans.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements he will make for the financing of the successor body to Railtrack so that it can meet its *(a)* network maintenance and *(b)* other obligations. [10532]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 195–97W.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure train operating companies maintain the wheels of rolling stock and locomotives to minimise damage to the track. [10393]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive advise that there are Railway Group Standards governing the maintenance of the wheel profiles of rolling stock and locomotives. The train operating companies have systems in place regularly to monitor wheel profiles. Proper maintenance of the track is also an important issue, and the industry has set up a joint systems authority to develop solutions to the difficulties at the wheel/rail interface.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on the rail manufacturing and renovation industry of the decision to extend existing franchises by two years. [10813]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's policy is not to treat all franchises alike but to replace them early, or when they expire, or to extend their current term, whichever is most likely to deliver benefits to passengers. The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan will set out plans for applying this policy franchise by franchise and will thus provide a firmer basis for business planning by the rail manufacturing industry.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what issues he will consider when exercising his powers under schedule 7 to the Railways Act 1993 in approving the transfer of Railtrack plc out of railway administration. [12144]

Mr. Byers: Schedule 7 to the Railways Act 1993 makes provision for a transfer scheme mechanism to be used for the transfer of the undertaking of a protected railway company which is the subject of a railway administration order.

Paragraph 2(2) of schedule 7 provides that a scheme made under that schedule shall not take effect unless (in the case of the undertaking of Railtrack plc) it is approved by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

I will consider carefully all of the terms of any proposed scheme submitted to me by Railtrack plc (acting by its administrators). However, in order to assist potential bidders for the undertaking of Railtrack plc this answer sets out, by way of guidelines, the principal issues upon which I will need to be satisfied before approving a proposed scheme. These guidelines may change from time to time (in which case I will publish the revised guidelines) and they are not intended to be exhaustive and are issued as guidance.

Guidelines

My principal objective, in determining whether or not to approve a proposed transfer scheme, is to ensure that the operation of the network will, after the proposed transfer, be undertaken efficiently, safely and economically.

I also intend to ensure that I am satisfied on the following issues:

1. Efficiency and Viability

The technical expertise of the proposed transferee to operate, maintain, renew and enhance the railway network. This will include:

presenting proposals for focused and effective management (particularly in relation to contract management and planning, and a willingness to facilitate enhancement by special purpose vehicles or alternative structures for financing enhancements and developments which separate enhancement and development risk from operation, maintenance and renewal), and

demonstrating that employees with appropriate skills will be retained and, where applicable, recruited;

A proper understanding of the projected liabilities of the transferee and the performance risks it faces;

A proper understanding of Railtrack plc's network operating licence and a demonstrable intention and ability to comply with it;

A proper understanding of the Government's strategic plans for the railway industry and a demonstrable commitment to them (including the 10-Year Plan and the SRA's Strategic Agenda);

A coherent and cost-effective business plan for:

ascertaining the condition of the network assets and life cycle cost minimisation;

implementing output based contracts for maintenance and renewal;

facilitating the successful implementation of special purpose vehicles (or equivalent arrangements) delivering large scale enhancements and renewals; and

the maintenance of an assets register, including a description of process and timetable;

Proposals for ascertaining the cost structure of the network business and the control systems to be implemented at both central and regional levels and how successful reporting mechanics are to be achieved;

A cohesive, achievable and cost-effective strategy for dealing with those renewals and small enhancements that are not to be delivered by special purpose vehicles (or equivalents).

2. Safety

An ability to run the network safely, with a clearly defined safety policy;

Evidence that the Heath and Safety Executive has confidence in the proposed transferee and that the relevant Safety Case will be in place immediately following the transfer.

3. Key Relationships

Proposals for creating, at regional level, relationships with railway passenger and freight service operators and other stakeholders;

Evidence of support from employees and their representatives;

Evidence of the confidence of relevant stakeholders in the industry, for instance railway passenger and freight service operators and suppliers of finance.

4. Financial viability and value for money

A demonstrated ability to finance the activities of the proposed transferee in a cost-effective manner (including its proposed treatment of existing and future, short and long term finance creditors, and a demonstration that it will have a sufficiently high, investment grade, credit rating to raise the necessary finance for its activities);

A coherent plan for the treatment of existing trade and other creditors;

A demonstration that its approach would ensure that effective maintenance and renewal takes place at the lowest practical cost.

Proposals for the transfer of liabilities which relate to the operation, maintenance, renewal and development of the parts of the network that are to be transferred.

In addition, and to achieve my overall objective, I will have regard to the extent and nature of Government support that will be required to operate the network after the proposed transfer and the value for money that this would represent for Government. I will expect any proposal for a transfer to address very clearly the basis, extent and nature of support that will be required from the Government.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice he has received on the strength of balance sheet needed by the new Railtrack company to obtain a BBB credit rating. [11091]

Mr. Byers: As I have stated in an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 195–97W, it is my firm intention to ensure that our proposal to the administrator would, if accepted, result in the transfer of the business of the company and its finance creditor's indebtedness to a new, financially sound, vehicle and that the debt transferred will have a long-term credit rating of at least BBB/Baa2 and a short-term credit rating of at least A-2/P-2.

In relation to the proposal that we will be putting to the administrator for a company limited by guarantee, we will be targeting a long-term credit rating of A/A2 or higher, to reflect the financing capacity requirements of the rail infrastructure business. I am advised that this would secure a robust balance sheet for the company.

I can also reaffirm my firm intention that our proposal will, taken in the round, preserve the economic rights of the current finance creditors in all material respects. Such proposals must, however, retain the flexibility to translate some of the detailed terms and conditions of the debt into a form that reflects the different structure and credit rating of a company limited by guarantee.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how his Department will provide further financial assistance for Railtrack plc in administration. [12222]

Mr. Byers: Full details of the funding arrangements agreed with the administrators are in the loan agreement. Parliamentary approval for this new expenditure in the form of a voted loan (to be repaid when Railtrack plc moves out of administration) will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for DTLR. Pending that approval, and further to my answer of 17 October 2001 to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn), *Official Report*, column 1230W, up to an additional £800 million of expenditure has been approved to be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Merseyside Rail Franchise

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Strategic Rail Authority will announce *(a)* the rail franchises for the north-west region of England and *(b)* its decision on whether Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive will let the Merseyside rail franchise alone or jointly with the Strategic Rail Authority. [10812]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has reviewed its franchise replacement programme in light of the statement made by the Secretary of State on 16 July and will announce its plans for further replacement or extension of franchises when these are agreed with Ministers in due course.

Petrol Storage

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what conditions are attached to the licences for underground storage tanks to prevent and detect leakages; and how the proposed removal of licences will change this. [10524]

Dr. Whitehead: Licences for underground petrol tanks have conditions attached which are intended to prevent and detect leaks. The conditions are based on guidance issued by HSE and the Local Authorities Co-ordinating body on Food and Trading Standards (LACOTS).

HSC are to consult early next year on a proposal to remove licensing at all workplaces except retail petrol filling stations. All workplaces storing petrol, whether licensed or not, will be subject to the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations (DSEAR) which will come into force in the summer of next year.

DSEAR places comprehensive duties on employers to eliminate or reduce fire and explosion risks from dangerous substances including petrol. DSEAR will require measures to reduce risk of releases and the escape of petrol.

Because of the close involvement of the public at retail petrol filling stations it is proposed to develop additional controls to supplement DSEAR, as a replacement for the current licensing regime. Until these are developed and consultation has taken place with stakeholders, licensing will remain in force at retail petrol filling stations.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he is implementing to encourage petrol retailers to report leakages. [10564]

Dr. Whitehead: Repair of leakages is already one of the standard licence conditions imposed by Petroleum Licensing Authorities. Control of leakages will also be subject to the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations (DSEAR) which will come into force in the summer of next year. HSE will be publicising the new regulations and associated guidance.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many breaches of licensing conditions of underground storage tanks have *(a)* been reported and *(b)* resulted in prosecution in each of the past five years. [10568]

Dr. Whitehead: HSE does not collect statistics on breaches of licence conditions and prosecutions by Petroleum Licensing Authorities (PLAs). The information would be disproportionately expensive to obtain retrospectively.

New reporting arrangements are being developed in conjunction with PLAs so that this information can be obtained in the future.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if his Department will carry out a full condition audit of all underground storage tanks in the United Kingdom. [10569]

Dr. Whitehead: Neither HSE nor the Environment Agency has any plans to commission a full condition audit of all underground storage tanks. Safety and environmental legislation provide adequate safeguards to prevent and control leaks from underground storage tanks. The powers are available to conduct investigations where necessary.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he plans to incorporate the recommendations of the Institute of Petroleum and the Association for Petrol and Explosive Administrators into its new Code of Practice relating to petrol retailers. [10567]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs has recently completed a public consultation on a groundwater protection code of practice for petrol stations and underground storage tanks for hydrocarbons. All responses to the consultation will be taken into account when finalising the code.

HSE are carrying out a major review of petrol legislation with a view to modernising it. The review is being carried out in three phases which will look at:

Phase 1: workplace storage of petrol except for retail petrol filling stations.

Phase 2: retail petrol filling stations.

Phase 3: non-workplace storage of petrol (mainly domestic premises).

As part of phase 2 of the review HSE will consider all existing guidance, including that jointly produced by the Institute of Petroleum and the Association for Petrol and Explosive Administration, when making recommendations regarding the future of petroleum legislation for retail petrol filling stations.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the report into modernising petrol legislation will be published. [10522]

Dr. Whitehead: Although the licensing system under the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928 (PCA) has worked well for many years, it is now outdated and does not easily sit alongside the modern risk-based approach to health and safety. HSE are therefore carrying out a major review of the legislation with a view to modernising it. The review is being carried out in three phases which will look at:

Phase 1: workplace storage of petrol except for retail petrol filling stations.

Phase 2: retail petrol filling stations.

Phase 3: non-workplace storage of petrol (mainly domestic premises).

The HSC will publish consultative documents detailing its proposals for each of the three phases of the review of petroleum legislation. The consultative document for phase 1 will be published early next year but it is too early yet to give an indication of when the remaining two will be published.

Firefighters

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on firefighter numbers in South Yorkshire; [10386]

(2) what the average number of firefighters is per 10,000 population in *(a)* South Yorkshire, *(b)* the Metropolitan fire authorities and *(c)* England. [10384]

Dr. Whitehead: Based on annual returns to HM Fire Service Inspectorate, actual firefighter numbers for South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Services as at 31 March 2001 were as follows:

	Number
Whole time	920
Retained[1]	38.83

[1] Expressed as 24-hour units of cover

Statutory responsibility for the provision of an efficient fire service, including maintenance of a firefighter establishment sufficient to meet national standards of fire cover, rests locally with the fire authority, in this case the South Yorkshire Fire and Civil Defence Authority.

According to the latest available information the number of firefighters, including retained firefighters in terms of units of 24 hour cover, per 10,000 population at 31 March 2001 was:

	Number
South Yorkshire	7.4
Metropolitan fire authorities	8.1
England	8.4

Note:
Firefighters numbers are provisional derived from annual returns to HM Fire Service Inspectorate. Population figures are taken from the 2000 'mid-year estimates prepared by the Office for National Statistics

Council Tax Exemptions (Students)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how local authorities are compensated for properties exempted from

council tax on the grounds that they consist of student households; and what his estimate is of *(a)* the numbers of such properties and *(b)* the council tax revenue lost in 2000–01 for each local authority in England. [10940]

Dr. Whitehead: Local authorities receive an additional amount of revenue support grant to compensate them for properties exempted from the council tax because they consist of student households. Such properties are exempt from council tax because, unlike other people on low incomes, full-time students are not normally entitled to council tax benefit.

We do not have information for 2000–01 on the number of such properties for each local authority in England. We are, however, collecting it for the current year. We estimate that around 120,000 properties in England qualify for the exemption in 2001–02, and that the council tax income forgone as a result is about £90 million.

London Underground (Line Closures)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many line closures there were of more than one day on each of the lines of the London Underground network since 1 January. [10945]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

London Underground have not closed any whole line on the underground network for a day or more in the period since 1 January 2001.

South East England Regional Assembly

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes in expenditure by the South East England Regional Assembly on *(a)* regional intelligence, *(b)* communications and *(c)* publications there have been for the 2001–02 financial year. [10777]

Dr. Whitehead: These are matters for the South East England Regional Assembly.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to control expenditure by the South East England Regional Assembly. [10775]

Dr. Whitehead: The South East England Regional Assembly has been established voluntarily by bodies representing the interests of the south-east region. Their expenditure is a matter for the chamber and its members. The Government have, however, allocated £500,000 this year to SEERA to help the Assembly to establish a stronger strategic and scrutiny role within the region. The Government Office for the South East will be monitoring that part of SEERA's expenditure which relates to the £500,000 grant.

Traffic (Cheltenham)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of GCHQ's New Accommodation Project on traffic in Cheltenham; and if he will make a statement. [10984]

Mr. Jamieson: Cheltenham borough council granted planning permission to GCHQ and Group 4/Tarmac on 10 August 1999 for the construction of new buildings and associated engineering operations to provide for the consolidation of GCHQ operations. The application was accompanied by a Traffic Assessment. This, together with the proposal that the development should be related to a Green Travel Plan, was taken into account by the then Secretary of State when the application came before him in August 1998 as a departure from the development plan. The Secretary of State was content to leave jurisdiction for the application with Cheltenham borough council.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy towards rerouting traffic away from the A40 through Cheltenham; and if he will make statement. [10983]

Mr. Jamieson: In the Roads Review published in 1998 the Government announced their intention to detrunk the A40 through Cheltenham and Gloucester. When the A40 is detrunked it will be for Gloucestershire county council as the local transport authority to decide how it wishes to manage the traffic on the A40 through Cheltenham.

Replacement Rail Services (Arriva)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority about the replacement of rail services with bus services by Arriva; and if she will make a statement. [11084]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The Strategic Rail Authority and the Passenger Transport Executives have agreed to the implementation of a mitigation plan. The Secretary of State has been kept informed and I understand that an amended timetable came into effect on 29 October and will run until 24 February 2002.

Pedestrian Deaths

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* car occupants and *(b)* pedestrians were killed in car crashes since 1971, broken down into five-yearly intervals. [11135]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Figures for fatalities in Great Britain are as shown below:

	Car occupants[1]	*Pedestrians hit by cars*
1971–75	14,291	—
1976–80	12,237	—
1981–85	10,989	6,353
1986–90	10,633	6,163
1991–95	6,288	4,508
1996–2000	5,927	3,350

[1] Figures for 1971–79 inclusive include data for car and taxi occupants only. For 1980 to 1998 they include occupants of minibuses, three wheelers, invalid tricycles and motor caravans. The latter two categories are excluded from figures in 1999 and 2000.

Note

Figures for pedestrians hit by cars are not available for years prior to 1979.

Vehicles (Pedestrian Protection Standards)

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will publish the Transport Research Laboratory's estimate of the comparative effects of the full mandatory pedestrian protection standards for cars and the voluntary approach; [11138]

(2) which EC directorate proposed the voluntary proposals for pedestrian protection standards for vehicles; and if he will publish the scientific basis and assessment of the consequences of the differences from the mandatory Working Group 19 proposals. [11134]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The proposals originated from DG Enterprise, who have been engaged in discussions with the vehicle manufacturers' representatives on this issue over the past year.

The work by TRL assessing the benefits of the first phase of the negotiated agreement relative to the benefits of the full EEVC WG17 proposals (which would be delivered in the second phase) has been within a tight timescale, so any figures provided have been on an informal basis. Figures may evolve or be refined before they can be incorporated into an intermediate or final publishable report.

Benefits of the first phase of the negotiated agreement relative to EEVC WG17:

The initial work focused on a critique of the 80 per cent. relative benefit for killed and seriously injured pedestrians claimed by industry. Using what was believed to be similar assumptions, TRL arrived at relative benefits of 60 per cent. for fatals and 70 per cent. for seriously injured. We said, when we recently consulted on the Commission's proposal, that the benefits were being looked at afresh. This new approach uses databases from Europe, Japan and the USA and test and other data. This suggests that the relative benefit is around 25 per cent. for fatals and 60 per cent. for seriously injured.

Absolute benefits:

The benefit for the full EEVC proposals changes slightly to 10 per cent. fatals and 20 per cent. seriously injured compared with the values of 8 per cent. and 21 per cent. which we have traditionally used.

TRL's work on this will be available in an interim report in early 2002.

Abandoned Cars

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on abandoned cars. [11720]

Mr. Byers: Today we have published in a consultation document the Government's proposals to deal with the growing problem of abandoned cars. Copies of the document will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Abandoned cars are an increasing eyesore on our streets and a real danger to children who are attracted to them as playgrounds. Too often they are also a target for local arsonists and also can be useful to criminals as a pool of cars that cannot be traced back to them. Our proposals published today aim to get abandoned cars off the streets, quickly and efficiently.

The measures will give local councils increased powers to deal with these cars and get rid of the bureaucratic boundaries that make it easier for irresponsible people to abandon cars at will. They will also reduce the demands on the police and fire services who have to deal with the vandalism, arson and other crime resulting from, and facilitated by, abandoned cars.

It is the Government's firm intention and belief that these measures will contribute to making our neighbourhoods better places in which to live.

Disabled Drivers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish his review of the blue badge scheme for disabled drivers. [11317]

Ms Keeble: The review of the blue badge scheme is under way. A discussion paper is being prepared. We will announce the outcome of the full review, including any proposals for change, in due course. We will keep the House in touch with progress.

Merchant Navy (Cadets)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans for cadet training within the Merchant Navy. [11307]

Mr. Jamieson: Cadet training is a matter for the shipping industry itself. But the Government provide financial support for training under the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme. A company entering the UK tonnage tax has to meet a training commitment equivalent to one officer trainee per year for every 15 officer posts in its fleet. We believe these measures will increase cadet training.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his Department; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current comprehensive spending review; and if he will make a statement. [10844]

Dr. Whitehead: There are no stocks of antiques, paintings or fine wines recorded in the relevant departmental chapter of the National Asset Register published in 2001 or in the 1997 version of the National Asset Register. Since there are none recorded, there are no plans to sell any such assets.

Planning Guidance

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when regional planning guidance for Yorkshire and the Humber will be published. [12006]

Ms Keeble: My right Hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is today publishing Regional Planning Guidance for Yorkshire and the Humber (RPG12).

RPG12 provides the spatial development framework for the Yorkshire and Humber region. Its core objectives are to support sustainable economic growth and regeneration and to achieve urban and rural renaissance in the region. Development will be focused on the region's main towns and cities making best use of previously-developed land and helping to reduce the need to travel.

The new Yorkshire and Humber Assembly, launched on 22 October, will be at the heart of the implementation of the strategy, working with the region's local authorities, Yorkshire Forward and other stakeholders.

I am pleased that much of the format and content of RPG12, including the vision, objectives and core strategy, carries forward what was proposed in the original draft RPG prepared by the Regional Assembly. RPG12 reflects very effective working between the Assembly, local authorities and other stakeholders who have made valuable contributions to refine and enhance the original draft strategy. It builds on the new inclusive process for preparing RPG that the Government have put in place. Many of the comments received in response to the consultations carried out earlier this year were constructive suggestions and have been taken on board in finalising the guidance.

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly will now take the strategy forward and work with partners to ensure its effective implementation, monitoring and review.

Building Regulations

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish guidance on amendments to Part L of the Building Regulations, which deals with energy efficiency, to Part H of the Building Regulations, which deals with drainage and solid waste, and to Part J of the Building Regulations, which deals with combustion appliances; and if he will make a statement. [12012]

Mr. Raynsford: The 2002 editions of the Approved Documents which give guidance on ways of meeting the new requirements of Part L1, Conservation of fuel and power in dwellings, Part L2, Conservation of fuel and power in buildings other than dwellings, Part H, Drainage and waste disposal, and Part J, Combustion appliances and fuel storage systems, as introduced by the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2001, SI 2001/3335, were published today by The Stationery Office.

The Building (Amendment) Regulations 2001, SI 2001/3335 and the Building (Approved Inspectors etc) (Amendment) Regulations 2001, SI 2001/3336 were laid before the House on 11 October 2001. The Building (Amendment) Regulations 2001 made changes to the technical requirements with regard to Part L, Conservation of fuel and power, Part H, Drainage and waste disposal, and Part J, Combustion appliances and fuel storage systems in the Building Regulations 2000, SI 2000/2531. Both sets of Regulations also made some consequential administrative changes to both the Building Regulations 2000, SI 2000/2531 and to the Building (Approved Inspectors etc) Regulations 2000, SI 2000/2532. Both sets of Regulations will come into force on 1 April 2002.

Taken together, these new regulations and their supporting Approved Documents introduce a package of measures that will bring a number of environmental, safety and economic benefits.

The review of Part L has been a noteworthy example of the good relations the Government wish to forge with industry and others with interests in our energy policy and the development of proportionate regulations. The performance standards in the new Approved Documents L1 and L2 are significantly higher than those introduced in 1995 and will set most builders and building services engineers something of a challenge. However the close contact with industry has ensured that the new standards can be achieved by adopting reasonable standards of design and construction practice. They will yield substantial benefits for the occupiers of new dwellings and other buildings through lower heating bills (up to 25 per cent. in the case of dwellings), lower air conditioning bills and/or improved comfort and productivity, and for the nation in the avoidance of carbon emissions. It is estimated that these measures will contribute 1.4 MtC in 2010 of the overall 23 per cent. cut in the UK's greenhouse gas emissions that we set out in our Climate Change Programme published last November, and of course those savings will continue to accumulate thereafter.

On 5 March 2001 I announced the package of amendments that were to be made to Part L following consultation. As industry requested, the material has been split into two Approved Documents, L1 for dwellings and L2 for other buildings. The guidance in the new Approved Documents raises the performance standards for building insulation, introduces new ones for airtightness and solar shading, widens the standards for heating to include boiler performance, widens the lighting standards to include luminaires and display lights, and introduces new ones for air conditioning systems including their controls. To back these physical measures up there are new requirements for testing and commissioning that will help to make designers' intended performance capabilities a reality, and the provision of users' manuals and log books so that occupiers can obtain all of the potential benefits.

To back up the guidance in these Approved Documents we have also published today "Limiting thermal bridging and air leakage: Robust construction details for dwellings and similar buildings". This document was prepared in collaboration with industry and provides construction details which are a way of showing compliance with the new standards for thermal insulation and airtightness.

Part L now also addresses summer performance as well as insulation against winter cold and heating and hot water systems. There are new building fabric provisions aimed at limiting solar overheating, and new air conditioning and mechanical ventilation measures aiming to ensure that, when specified, they can perform efficiently.

These new provisions are not restricted to new buildings. Around half of the carbon benefits mentioned will come from the application of the new requirements for work in existing buildings. For dwellings, we have introduced provisions that apply whenever new windows and glazed doors, boilers and hot water vessels are to be replaced. For buildings other than dwellings the same provisions apply for windows and all the building systems addressed by Part L, such as heating, ventilation, air conditioning and lighting, are also included. These provisions are qualified

however, in that reasonable provision depends on the circumstances in the particular case. Sympathetic treatment of historic buildings is necessary for instance to enable conservation and restoration and new guidance in both the Approved Documents will help to establish what reasonable provision is in these special cases.

The review of Part J has addressed the increasing risks of carbon monoxide poisoning, the ill-health effects of flue-gas entering living space, and the risks of injuries caused by fires, and also to address for the first time the oil pollution threat from domestic central heating oil storage systems.

The outcome of investigations into possible additional risks posed by lower specification concrete flue liners was announced in November 2000. These investigations found no certain evidence of additional risk but made a series of recommendations. The amendments to Part J and the publication of the 2002 edition of Approved Document J complete our response to these. They incorporate a new requirement (J4) to fix permanent notices indicating hearth, fireplace and chimney performance limits, and the Approved Document gives examples of what are satisfactory provisions using the new European Method for specifying performance of all types of flue liners.

A new requirement J5 makes provisions for reasonable steps to be taken to ensure that when external liquid fuel storage (oil and liquefied petroleum gas) systems are provided they are protected from fire in adjacent buildings or premises.

The new requirement J6 makes provision for oil storage tanks and connecting pipework serving buildings used wholly or mainly as private dwellings to be constructed and protected to reduce the level of risk of oil escaping and causing pollution. This new requirement also makes provisions for notices which give information on how to respond to an oil escape to be fixed in a prominent position.

The publication of a consultation on amendments to Part H of the Building Regulations was announced in July 2000. The outcome of that review is reflected in the amendments to Part H of the Building Regulations and in the 2002 edition of the Approved Document.

The new requirement H4 applies when building work takes place over sewers. This has enabled the repeal of Section 18 (building over sewer etc) of the Building Act 1984. Provision of foul drainage is now required by the Regulations, and this has enabled the repeal of Section 21(1) and (2) of the Act. These changes bring necessary requirements all together into the Regulations, and should simplify matters for practitioners.

The new requirement H2 includes the provision of a durable notice giving information on necessary continuing maintenance for septic tanks, wastewater treatment systems and cesspools. Lack of maintenance is one of the main causes of failure of septic tanks and other non-mains drainage systems, and this new requirement seeks to address this. There is also improved guidance on drainage fields from septic tanks.

Guidance in the Approved Document includes guidance on the use of infiltration drainage systems and a presumption that this method of drainage is the preferred option for rainwater disposal rather than storm sewers. This will ease the load on storm sewers and may reduce the risk of flooding due to run off from new development. Guidance in the Approved Document recommends that drains serving more than 10 properties should have a minimum diameter of 150 mm. This should help to reduce the incidence of private sewers and drains.

Copies of "Limiting thermal bridging and air leakage: Robust construction details for dwellings and similar buildings" have also been placed in the Libraries of the House.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment has been prepared in relation to these Regulations and it too was published today. It has also been placed on the DTLR website at (http://www.safety.dtlr.gov.uk/bregs/brpub/02.htm).

European Railways (Interoperability)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 192W, what practical changes will be required in the UK rail network as a result of Directive 2001/16/EC. [10950]

Mr. Jamieson: The Directive requires that all projects relating to the construction, upgrading, renewal and operation of the trans-European conventional rail system conform to European Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSIs). This system includes all the main rail lines in the UK. These TSIs will set out the detailed technical requirements that must be met, at both component and overall system levels.

They do not yet exist and the drafting process has only recently begun, so it is not possible at this stage to state what practical changes will be necessary to the UK rail network.

Cleaner Vehicles

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what guidance he has given to car manufacturers on the future for LPG cars; [9939]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the potential for LPG cars to improve air quality; [9940]

(3) what plans the Government have to encourage manufacturers to make LPG cars. [9944]

Mr. Jamieson: The changes I announced recently to my Department's PowerShift programme, following consultation with vehicle manufacturers, fuel suppliers and others, indicate the Government's strong continuing commitment to supporting the wider introduction of vehicles running on LPG, natural gas and electricity, reflecting their contribution to improving air quality and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Availability of production-line LPG vehicles will help consumers to take up the gas option, and the Government have introduced an additional 20 per cent. grant for production-line LPG vehicles. I am pleased that several manufacturers are already introducing such vehicles.

The PowerShift programme monitors the environmental performance of LPG vehicles to ensure that PowerShift-approved vehicles and conversions deliver consistently clean performance.

Speed Restrictions

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to issue revised guidance on factors affecting the imposition of speed restrictions on roads. [10000]

Mr. Jamieson: The Road Safety Strategy committed us to an assessment framework for determining the appropriates speeds for roads and a simplified method of making speed limit orders.

Starter Home Initiative

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason teachers in further education are not eligible for the Starter Home Initiative. [10231]

Ms Keeble: The Starter Home Initiative assistance available for teachers is being targeted on the compulsory education sector where the most severe recruitment and retention problems for teachers, which the Initiative aims to help alleviate, are being experienced.

We recognise that other key workers, including teachers in further education, need to be able to find affordable homes within a reasonable distance of their workplace. Our wider housing policies to increase the supply of affordable homes, particularly in areas where demand is high, will benefit other groups of key workers. By 2003–04 capital investment in housing will have risen to more than £4 billion compared with planned spending of £1.5 billion in 1997–98. We plan to provide 100,000 new or improved homes for low cost renting or home ownership over the next three years.

We are also looking afresh at planning guidance as a means of providing more opportunities for key worker housing.

National Air Traffic Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the financial position of National Air Traffic Services; and if it is seeking new public finance. [10439]

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has received an application for additional funding from the National Air Traffic Services; and what effect additional funding would have on the proposed National Air Traffic Control Centre at Prestwick. [10246]

Mr. Jamieson: National Air Traffic Services (NATS) is in the process of reviewing its financial position, following the downturn in the demand for air travel arising from the events of 11 September.

The Government have received no request for financial assistance for NATS.

Port of London Authority

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what application he has received from the Port of London Authority under section 14 of the Harbours Act 1964 concerning *(a)* changes to the Act and *(b)* proposals for a statutory instrument; and if he will make a statement. [10455]

Mr. Jamieson: The Port of London Authority (PLA) applied in February this year for a Harbour Revision Order under section 14 of the Harbours Act 1964. The order contains a number of provisions for amending existing legislation, mainly relating to the licensing and registration scheme for craft and boats for hire. Following advertisement of the order the PLA are currently engaged in discussions with relevant parties in an attempt to resolve objections that have been made to the order.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will estimate the number of trucks of food which have been transported into Afghanistan *(a)* in the last week, *(b)* on average on a daily basis since 7 October and *(c)* since 11 September. [9076]

Clare Short: In the week ending 28 October, which is the latest information received from WFP in the field, a total of 8,048 tonnes of food were dispatched to Afghanistan. The table shows the daily breakdown.

On information received to date the daily average food despatch between 7 and 28 October has been 771 tonnes.

Table of food aid dispatched to Afghanistan

Week ending 28 October 2001	*Tonnes despatched*
22 October 2001	104
23 October 2001	1,857
24 October 2001	2,729
25 October 2001	946
26 October 2001	1,469
27 October 2001	0
28 October 2001	943
Total	8,048

Note:
Data from WFP, 29 October. Further confirmed data not yet available from the field.

Papua New Guinea

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid projects in Papua New Guinea are supported by her Department *(a)* bilaterally, *(b)* from EU sources and *(c)* multilaterally; what is their value for each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [11446]

Clare Short: We do not provide direct bilateral assistance to Papua New Guinea, but it benefits from our contributions to multilateral agencies, including the European Union, Asian Development bank and World

bank, all of which have substantial programmes in PNG totalling some £8 million per year. PNG also benefits from the UK's support to Pacific regional organisations and a small gifts scheme of some £70,000 per year. The details we have available are as follows:

European Union Programme

PNG benefits from:

(i) the current National Indicative Programme (50 meuro) which focuses on education, forestry and fishers. Projects comprise:

(a) the Regional Indicative Programme on agriculture (phase 1) which has now been completed (1.2 meuro);

(b) the Island Region Environment programme (phase 1) which has also been completed (6 meuro):

(c) budgetary support which is provided through the Structural Adjustment Programme (10.4 meuro).

(ii) SYSMIN (50 meuro) which is providing support for highways, mining, roads and bridge construction.

(iii) STABEX (12 meuro).

World bank

1. The current programme comprises:

(a) the last tranche of the Structural Adjustment Operation (totalling 90 million dollars) which is due in December 2001;

(b) projects in education ($30 million); health ($20 million) and infrastructure ($32 million);

(c) technical assistance forming, gas and agriculture (oil palm).

2. The World bank's indicative lending programme for PNG currently totals $210 million.

($)

Asian development bank	*Total value*	*Of which:* *OCR*[1]	*ADF*[2]	*TA*[3]
1997				
Health Sector Development Programme	50 million	45 million	5 million	—
Health Sector Development Project[4]	13 million	—	10 million	—
Improving Provincial Agricultural Support Services[5]	150,000	—	—	150,000
Financial Management[5]	150,000	—	—	150,000
Development Strategy Workshop	62,000	—	—	62,000
Strengthening Financial Management of the Health Sector	600,000	—	—	600,000
Restructuring Plan for the Department of Agriculture and Livestock	150,000	—	—	150,000
1998				
Smallholder Support Services Pilot Project[4]	11.49 million	7.6 million	—	—
Fisheries Development[4]	9.3 million	6.5 million	—	—
Financial Management (Supplementary)[5]	72,500	—	—	72,500
Skills Development[5]	500,000	—	—	500,000
Social and Environmental Studies[5]	150,000	—	—	150,000
Road Upgrading and Maintenance[5]	750,000	—	—	750,000
Road Asset Management System	1.0 million	—	—	1.0 million
Review of Foreign Aid Management	115,000	—	—	115,000
Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council	50,000	—	—	50,000
1999				
Financial Management[4]	46.9	25.8	—	—
Employment-Oriented Skills Development[4]	39 million	—	20 million	—
Road Maintenance and Upgrading[4]	114.7 million	63 million	—	—
Rehabilitation of Navigation Aids system[5]	500,000	—	—	500,000
Provincial Towns Water Supply and Sanitation[5]	908,000	—	—	908,000
Governance and Public Sector Reform Programme[5]	600,000	—	—	600,000
Microfinance and Employment[5]	150,000	—	—	150,000
Road Sector Cost Recovery Improvement	350,000	—	—	350,000
Financial Management Strategic Framework	500,000	—	—	500,000
Provincial Road Asset Management System	581,000	—	—	581,000
2000				
Rehabilitation of Maritime Navigation Aids System[4]	30.12 million	20.6 million	—	—
Microfinance and Employment[4]	20.51 million	—	9.6 million	—
Provincial Towns Water Supply and Sanitation[4]	23.3 million	—	15.34 million	—
Governance and Public Sector Reform Programme (Supplementary)[5]	381,000	—	—	381,000
Agro-Industry Development[5]	500,000	—	—	500,000
Coastal Fisheries Management and Development[5]	340,000	—	—	340,000
Community Water Transport Project[5]	580,000	—	—	580,000
Strengthening Financial Management of the Health Sector (Supplementary)	186,000	—	—	186,000
Review of Mining and Hydrocarbons Tax Regimes	325,000	—	—	3250,000
Review to Constraints to Informal Sector Development	225,000	—	—	225,000
Rehabilitation of Maritime Navigation Aids System	800,000	—	—	800,000

[1] Ordinary Capital Resources

[2] Asian Development Fund

[3] Technical Assistance

[4] Project Preparatory TA

[5] Total project cost includes financing by the ADB, governments, borrowers, beneficiaries, sub-borrowers; co-financing from official, export credit, and commercial sources; equity sponsors; and local participating private companies and financial institutions.

The Gambia

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department gave to the Independent Electoral Commission in The Gambia *(a)* prior to and *(b)* during the presidential election held on 18 October. [10979]

Clare Short: Since 1999 we have provided support to the Independent Electoral Commission to develop and upgrade its electoral records database. In the run up to the presidential elections we provided consultancy support and various items of equipment in support of the voter re-registration exercise.

During the elections themselves we contributed to the costs of international observers to monitor the election process.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she will give to the Independent Electoral Commission in The Gambia prior to its 2002 parliamentary elections. [10980]

Clare Short: The support we have already provided to the Independent Electoral Commission prior to the presidential elections, particularly on voter re-registration, will also be relevant to the Parliamentary Assembly elections in 2002. We have not yet had discussions with the IEC about any additional requirements for the Assembly elections, but when we do so we will take into account possible support from other donors and experience in the presidential elections.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will review her programme of assistance to The Gambia following the presidential election held on 18 October. [10981]

Clare Short: Over the past year our assistance to The Gambia has been concentrated on facilitating the electoral process, and on the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy. The future of the programme will depend on our overall assessment of The Gambian Government's commitment to poverty reduction, democracy and human rights. We will review the programme early in 2002.

China

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will increase funds for her Department's HIV/AIDS programme in China. [10590]

Clare Short: We are financing a £15.3 million HIV/AIDS prevention and care project in China, which aims over five years to help the Government of China develop an effective national response to HIV/AIDS. We are also working with the Government of China to design specific support for the delivery of HIV/AIDS education to young people, where funding is likely to be in the region of £5 million over three years.

The Government of China recently launched their first five year action plan to contain, prevent and control HIV/AIDS. We are currently considering what further support we can offer the Government in helping them achieve this plan.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by her Department; if she will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans she has to sell further such assets over the period of the current comprehensive spending review; and if she will make a statement. [10846]

Clare Short: My Department has seven antiques (clocks) but no paintings (the only paintings we have are on loan from the Government Art Collection) and no fine wines. No such assets have been sold in the last three years, and there are no plans to sell these items.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [10286]

Clare Short: The needs of the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo are desperate. Some progress on the peace process and a gradual improvement in access for humanitarian agencies has enabled my Department substantially to increase the level of our support for humanitarian work through well-established non-governmental organisations.

We have contributed funding towards direct humanitarian assistance particularly in the areas of health and nutrition, water and sanitation, prisoner protection, and assistance to refugees, child soldiers and other vulnerable groups. We have also funded human rights projects in the DRC and in the wider Great Lakes region. Since January 2001 we have committed £5.5 million to the ICRC's emergency appeal.

The Government are also working to promote an end to the country's conflict and a secure and lasting peace. We are providing support to the peace process through the office of the Facilitator for the National Dialogue had peace-building projects, and we are actively exploring opportunities to support the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants in the country.

Sustainable Development Summit

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department plans to achieve at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg; and if she will make a statement. [8311]

Clare Short: The latest version of the inter-departmentally agreed HMG objectives for WSSD is available on the Government's Sustainable Development website www.sustainable-development/gov/uk. In support of this strategy DFID will work to highlight the way more effective use of environmental resources can contribute to poverty reduction; and gaining wider international acceptance of the principles of strategic planning for sustainable development, which have already been agreed at ministerial level in the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD.

Argentina

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to her Argentinean counterparts regarding the imprisonment of a group of Argentinean farmers who grew British hemp seed certified for industrial purposes only; and if she will make a statement. [8308]

Clare Short: None.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by her Department; if she will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans she has to sell further such assets over the period of the current comprehensive spending review; and if she will make a statement. [10840]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department holds no stocks of antiques, paintings or fine wines. No such assets have been sold in the last three years and we have no plans for any future sales.

Details of assets held by the Scotland Office are set out in the National Assets Register (Cm 5521, July 2001).

CABINET OFFICE

Better Regulation Task Force

9. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress the better regulation task force is making in relation to speeding up decisions required by existing environmental regulations and diminishing their burden on business. [9289]

Mr. Leslie: The task force looked at environmental regulations last November, when it reported on their impact on farmers.

As with all its reports, the task force follows closely the Government's progress in implementing its recommendations and publishes updates on its website.

Special Advisers

10. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish new guidelines on the employment of special advisers. [9290]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) at column 866.

13. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will take steps to reduce the number of special advisers employed by Her Majesty's Government. [9293]

Mrs. Roche: The rules on the appointment of special advisers continue to be as set out in paragraph 50 of the Ministerial Code.

Emergency Planning

11. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his Department's co-ordination role in emergency planning. [9291]

15. **Gillian Merron:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his Department's role is in emergency planning. [9296]

Mr. Leslie: I refer my hon. Friends to my oral answer to the hon. Member the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) today at column 863–64.

18. **Ms Walley:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the progress made in the work undertaken by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat. [9302]

Mr. Leslie: Led by the Civil Contingencies Committee, the Secretariat is co-ordinating a review of our tried and tested contingency plans in the light of the events of 11 September. We are taking all sensible steps to make sure the country is well prepared for any emergency or threat, including chemical and biological ones.

Regulatory Reform

14. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if his Department proposes to publish a regular progress list on items being considered under the regulatory reform procedure. [9294]

Mr. Leslie: The Government set out last week their plans for regulatory reform order-making for the period up to the new year in the memorandum responding to the Deregulation Committee's 4th Report of last session.

Government Office for the North-West

16. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the operational priorities for the Government office for the north-west. [9298]

Mrs. Roche: The Government office for the north-west's overall aim is to work with regional partners and local people to maximise competitiveness and prosperity in the region, and to support integrated policies for an inclusive society. A complete list of their objectives are contained in the Government office for the north-west's document 'Corporate Objectives 2001–02', a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Departmental Co-ordination

17. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Office what steps he is taking to improve co-ordination between Government Departments, the Prime Minister's office and his Department. [9299]

The Deputy Prime Minister: It has been the traditional role of the Cabinet Office to serve Ministers collectively under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister and co-ordinate business between Departments. This continues to be the case. The creation of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the restructuring of the Cabinet Office after the election have strengthened our ability to help ensure that all Departments are able to deliver the Government's key priorities.

Kyoto Protocol

19. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Office what role his office is playing in promoting the implementation of the Kyoto protocol. [9303]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I continue to play a role in international climate change discussions and negotiations on behalf of the Prime Minister, which includes promoting the implementation of the Kyoto protocol.

British-Irish Council

20. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Office when the British-Irish Council last met; and what was on the agenda for that meeting. [9304]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The British-Irish Council meets in different formats. Since the first summit meeting held in London in December 1999, a number of meetings have taken place in different sectoral areas at ministerial and official level.

The most recent meeting of the Council took place in Dublin on 13 September last. Officials discussed the issue of misuse of drugs, the area of work for which Ireland is the lead Administration within the Council.

The Irish Government will host the next British-Irish Council summit. The drugs issue will be the main item for discussion at the Summit. Progress in the other areas of work of the Council will also be reviewed. The Government also look forward to further meetings taking place in the agreed areas of work.

Government Office for the East Midlands

21. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what are the operational priorities for the Government office for the east midlands. [9305]

Mrs. Roche: The Government office for the east midlands has three strategic aims: to achieve a lasting better quality of life for people and communities in the east midlands socially, economically and environmentally; to encourage and enable people and communities suffering from, or vulnerable to, social exclusion to fulfil their potential; and to help the region, its people and its businesses continuously improve their capability to compete successfully. Details of these aims and other operational priorities are in the Government office for the east midlands annual report 2000–01, available on line through their website.

Government Office for the East of England

22. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he last met representatives of the east Anglia Government office; and if will make a statement. [9306]

Mrs. Roche: The Deputy Prime Minister last met GO-East officials on 13 March. Since then I have met them on 19 July and 18 October.

Modernising Government White Paper

23. **Brian White:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made in achieving the Government targets as set out in the modernising Government White Paper. [9308]

Mr. Leslie: The Government made significant progress towards the targets set out in the White Paper before the last election. Improved delivery and public service reform is a key priority for this Parliament.

Civil Service Pay

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to audit civil service pay to assess the impact of pay policy on *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [9292]

Mr. Leslie: Under civil service reform, Departments and agencies are reviewing their pay systems. By April 2003 they should have prepared an action plan for addressing any equal pay gaps.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Development Agencies

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in implementing Recommendation 17 of the report, Strategy Development and Partnership Working in the RDAs. [10932]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The RDAs have taken on board Recommendation 17 of the DETR report on Strategy Development and Partnership Working in the RDAs. The principles for successful partnership working used in the original development of the Regional Economic Strategies are now reflected in the preparation of RDA Action Plans and the revision of their RESs. Under a new fund worth £15 million over three years, the regional chambers have been awarded a total of £5 million in 2000–01 to enhance their RDA scrutiny role and thus strengthen regional accountability. Part of that scrutiny will be a closer involvement in the revision of strategy process.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the report "Reaching Out The Role of Central Government at Regional and Local Level" that there should be *(a)* a review of the regional development agencies' first year performance and *(b)* a review of the relationship between the strategies of the regional development agencies and regional planning guidance. [10931]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Ministers took the RDA's first year performance into account in determining the framework of targets the RDAs should follow under the Single Programme Budget, which was announced on 9 March 2001. The RDAs' Regional Strategies and the Regional Planning Guidance are being treated as equal and complementary documents.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department has recorded in 2000 and 2001; and on how many occasions in 2000 and 2001 computer systems in her Department have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside her Department. [10999]

Ms Hewitt: Records of IT security incidents reported within my Department for the period in question show:

	2000	*2001*
Hacking incidents	0	0
Fraud	0	0
Theft	11	16

There have been no recorded incidents in 2000 or 2001 of my Department's computer systems being illegally accessed by computer hackers within or outside my Department.

Petrol Retailers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many petrol retailers *(a)* are in operation and *(b)* have been closed and sealed since 1990, classed in the categories (i) oil company sites, (ii) main retailer sites, (iii) supermarket sites, (iv) smaller retailer sites and (v) other unbranded sites; and if she will make a statement. [10462]

Mr. Wilson: The Institute of Petroleum's (IP) annual "UK Retail Marketing Survey" (last published in March 2001) provides data on the total number of petrol retail outlets in operation in the UK.

The following table, using the IP data, shows the number of petrol retail outlets in operation in the UK in 1990 and 2000, broken down by the specific categories outlined in the question.

Site category	*1990*	*2000*
Oil company sites	16,044	8,420
Main retailer sites	2,819	2,483
Supermarket sites[1]	58	1,027
Smaller retail sites[2]	40	247
Other unbranded sites	504	866
Total	19,465	13,043

[1] In 1990, some supermarket sites displayed oil company brands and the IP subsumed these sites within the oil company site and main retailer site totals. The total number of supermarket sites retailing petrol in 1990 was 294

[2] The smaller retail site category accounts for those companies with 50 petrol retail sites or less

Data on petrol station sites that have been sealed after closure are not collated centrally.

Post Office Card Accounts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government's target is for the number of Post Office Card Accounts to be operational in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2006; and what the estimated cost is to the Government of those accounts. [10454]

Ms Hewitt: Targets for Post Office Card Account (POCA) will be developed within the context of a migration and marketing strategy which is in the process of being developed. On the cost of the POCA, it would not be appropriate to disclose current estimates as this is subject to commercial negotiations between Consignia and the Paying Departments and between Consignia and the potential supplier of the banking engine.

Microsoft Pricing Policies

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking in response to industry representations on Microsoft pricing policies. [10456]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Under UK competition law the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour and possible abuses of a dominant position. He can act where pricing levels appear to be the result of anti-competitive behaviour but has no powers to act in relation to prices as such.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has advised IT industry representative bodies that if they have evidence of anti-competitive behaviour by Microsoft they should forward it to the Director General of Fair Trading.

A380 Airbus

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the impact on competitiveness of British aerospace subcontractors of bidding for elements of the A380 Airbus project against European suppliers whose non-recoverable up-front costs are supported by their Governments' development assistance; [10814]

(2) what information she has collated on which of the countries engaged in the A380 Airbus project have divided Government financial assistance for project development between the prime contractor and subcontractors in the supply chain; and what the proportion is in each case; [10816]

(3) what assessment she has made of the impact on the British aerospace industry of the decision *(a)* to provide assistance in connection with the development of the A380 Airbus project to the prime contractor Airbus Industries UK and *(b)* not to provide assistance to both the prime contractor and subcontractors in the supply chain. [10815]

Mr. Wilson: The Government will provide £530 million of Launch Investment to Airbus UK for the Airbus A380 super jumbo project. The project will create and safeguard jobs in both Airbus UK and the supply chain. As in the case of our agreement with Airbus UK, details of agreements between other governments and their industries are commercially confidential.

The support provided to the prime contractor such as Airbus UK benefits the whole of the supply chain by securing strategically important projects for the UK. This has been the experience of past Launch Investment contracts.

The DTI continues to sponsor a programme of activities, operated by the Society of British Aerospace Companies, aimed at improving the competitiveness of the UK aerospace industry. This has had a beneficial effect on the industry as a whole and has contributed to the UK supply chain being in a strong position to compete globally.

Limited Liability Partnerships

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many partnerships have *(a)* applied for

and *(b)* been granted limited liability status; and whether such partnerships are required to make a disclosure of regulatory, disciplinary or legal actions they are defending. [11284]

Miss Melanie Johnson: 948 limited liability partnerships (LLPs) had been successfully registered with Companies House as of 29 October 2001. 16 refunds have been given to unsuccessful applicants. LLPs, like companies, are not required to make any disclosure of regulatory, disciplinary or legal actions that they may be defending.

Arms Exports

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the export of cluster bombs; how many licences for the export of cluster bombs are in force; and to which countries. [10918]

Nigel Griffiths: All licence applications covering the export of cluster bombs are considered on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

The export of cluster bombs is controlled under entries ML3 and ML4 in Part 3 of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended. Other bombs and munitions are also controlled under these entries. It would entail disproportionate cost to examine the records to establish which, if any, of the licences still in force cover the export of cluster bombs.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the value and country of destination of exports under the military list in categories *(a)* ML4a *(b)* P5030, *(c)* ML7, *(d)* ML7d, *(e)* ML7e and *(f)* ML7f from 1997 to 2000 inclusive. [10917]

Nigel Griffiths: It would entail disproportionate cost to establish the value and country of destination of exports controlled under entries ML4a, P5030, ML7, ML7d, ML7e and ML7f in Part 3 of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended; from 2 May 1997 to 31 December 2000.

Legal Profession

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the OFT report on the legal profession. [8662]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In the budget debate on 8 March 2001, my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced the Government's response to the OFT report, "Competition in Professions", published on 7 March 2001.

The Government agreed with the recommendation that Schedule 4 to the Competition Act 1998 should be repealed and that the professions should be fully subject to competition law. The Government also announced that they would consult on those areas of the report that fell to them to take forward.

The Government remain committed to ensuring that the professions are properly subject to competition.

Inward Investment

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of trends in foreign direct investment in Scotland, Wales and the English regions in the last 12 months. [10986]

Nigel Griffiths: The figures are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the companies' best estimate, at that time, of the number of jobs to be created/safeguarded by the investment in its first three years.

There is no requirement to notify inward investment decisions and so the figures include only those projects where Invest UK and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice.

On 12 July Invest UK announced at its Annual Review another record year for attracting inward investment projects into the UK. Between 1 April 2000 and 21 March 2001, Invest UK recorded 869 inward investment decisions to locate in the UK by foreign owned companies (an increase of 15 per cent. on the previous year) over the next three years.

2000–01	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*English Region*
Number of projects	72	39	639
Number of new jobs	9,274	4,520	52,812
Number of safeguarded jobs	4,231	1,833	45,318
Total of associated jobs	13,505	6,353	97,130

Figures published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 25 September showed that at the end of the second quarter of 2001 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock in the UK had risen to £389.5 billion—up 32 per cent. compared with a year earlier.

There are signs of a decrease in the total number of new inward investment inquiries. We are monitoring the position and working hard to maximise the level of inward investment.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the levels of inward investment in the UK. [10652]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The figures included are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the companies' best estimate, at that time, of the number of jobs to be created/safeguarded by the investment in its first three years.

There is no requirement to notify inward investment decisions and so the figures include only those projects where Invest UK and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice.

On 12 July Invest UK announced at its Annual Review another record year for attracting inward investment projects to the UK. Between 1 April 2000 and 21 March 2001, Invest UK recorded 869 inward investment

decisions to locate in the UK by foreign owned companies (an increase of 15 per cent. on the previous year) over the next three years.

Figures published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 25 September showed that at the end of the second quarter of 2001 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock in the UK had risen to £389.5 billion—up 32 per cent. compared with a year earlier.

There are signs of a decrease in the total number of new inward investment inquiries. We are monitoring the position and working hard to maximise the level of inward investment.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what measures she is taking to ensure that the UK remains attractive to foreign investment; [10659]

(2) what recent steps she has taken to promote investment in the UK from abroad. [10651]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Posts overseas have intense contacts with potential inward investors. Invest UK as the Government agency that promotes the whole of the UK as the best inward investment location in Europe is working in partnership with all UK Development Agencies to maximise the level of inward investment.

The Government are encouraging all Development Agencies to build on their strengths and on existing clusters in their regions to attract further inward investment. They are also increasingly collaborating with each other, on overseas promotional activities, to increase their attractiveness to investors.

Over the last two months Invest UK has been involved in the following events to promote the UK abroad.

The signing of UK China Partnership: September

Korean Hitech Forum in Bristol: 10–11 September

Biotechnia Trade Fair Hanover: 9–11 October

Greater Phoenix Electronics Show: 10–11 October

Inward Mission from China: Week of 24 September

IT Seminar Iceland: 25 October

UK with New York events including business lunches: 22–26 October

IT.Com Fair Bangalore, India: Week beginning 29 October.

The Government are continuing to pursue economic policies which enhance the UK's attractions including developing our skills base, providing flexible labour markets and a stable economy.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will provide an estimate of foreign direct investment for each region of the United Kingdom for each year since 1997, and the forecast for each region for 2001. [10995]

Nigel Griffiths: The figures in the table are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the companies' best estimate, at that time, of the number of jobs to be created/safeguarded by the investment in its first three years.

There is no requirement to notify inward investment decisions and so the figures include only those projects where Invest UK and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice.

Figures for 2001–02 are still being collected and will be available in July 2002 when Invest UK announces its annual results.

From 1 April to 31 March	*Number of projects*	*Total new jobs*	*Total safe jobs*	*Total associated jobs*
1997–98				
East	34	945	17,744	18,689
East Midlands	18	1,689	758	2,444
London	63	2,948	444	3,392
North East	48	2,764	9,890	12,654
Northern Ireland	24	3,357	2,416	5,773
North West	71	4,944	7,277	12,221
Scotland	75	7,688	4,869	12,557
South East	57	5,534	7,482	13,016
Wales	55	4,976	2,479	7,455
South West	40	3,205	1,735	4,940
West Midlands	81	5,641	12,546	18,187
Yorkshire and Humber	65	2,874	15,131	18,005
Total for year	631	46,562	82,771	129,333
1998–99				
East	41	1,411	2,575	3,986
East Midlands	21	2,096	1,176	3,272
London	105	4,125	1,796	5,921
North East	35	2,304	6,953	9,257
Northern Ireland	31	3,345	1,837	5,182
North West	65	3,224	9,123	12,347
Scotland	54	6,311	1,098	7,409
South East	73	4,497	13,957	18,454
UK	2	50	5,800	5,850
Wales	48	5,591	1,796	7,387
South West	34	3,008	1,417	4,425
West Midlands	71	5,478	9,323	14,801
Yorkshire and Humber	86	3,626	18,672	22,298
Total for year	666	45,066	75,523	120,589

From 1 April to 31 March	Number of projects	Total new jobs	Total safe jobs	Total associated jobs
1999–2000				
East	37	2,101	2,085	4,186
East Midlands	31	675	1,707	2,382
London	159	7,200	9,989	17,189
North East	49	3,479	8,431	11,910
Northern Ireland	20	2,353	1,710	4,063
North West	80	4,768	11,865	16,633
Scotland	76	10,804	3,095	13,899
South East	110	6,236	15,987	22,223
South West	47	4,814	3,263	8,077
UK	1	0	1,000	1,000
Wales	47	4,161	3,636	7,797
West Midlands	99	6,458	11,730	18,188
Yorkshire and Humber	44	1,362	7,089	8,451
Total for year	800	54,411	81,587	135,998
2000–01				
East	56	3,094	7,898	10,992
East Midlands	17	2,065	2,287	4,352
London	222	8,306	2,274	10,580
North East	35	4,959	2,859	7,818
Northern Ireland	22	4,906	909	5,815
North West	39	3,187	1,610	4,797
Scotland	72	9,274	4,231	13,505
South East	191	18,190	4,547	22,737
South West	38	4,109	2,182	6,291
UK	5	0	20	20
Wales	39	4,520	1,833	6,353
West Midlands	103	4,867	20,226	25,093
Yorkshire and Humber	33	4,035	1,415	5,450
Total for year	872	71,512	52,291	123,803
Report total	2,969	217,551	292,172	509,723

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by her Department; if she will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans she has to sell further such assets over the period of the current comprehensive spending review; and if she will make a statement. [10839]

Ms Hewitt: The Department does not hold stocks of antiques, paintings or fine wines. It holds a number of paintings and artwork on loan from the Government Art Collection, and a small collection of contemporary art purchased for the refurbished Conference Centre at 1 Victoria street. The only antique items owned by the Department are the Pyx chair and a Grandfather clock.

There has been no sale of such assets during the last three years nor are there any plans for sales in the future.

Small Business Service (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries the Small Business Service has had from the Chorley constituency. [10089]

Nigel Griffiths: Since April 2001, there have been 116 inquiries to the Small Business Service in the Chorley constituency.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many businesses have been started in the Chorley constituency with the help of the Small Business Service. [10090]

Nigel Griffiths: Since April 2001, there have been six business start-ups in the Chorley area. The number of businesses started in Chorley during 1999 was 285 (latest figures available).

Renewable Energy

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 11W, if he will list the location of the sites where tidal stream generators could be deployed. [10699]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The following is a list of identified sites in UK waters where tidal stream generators could be deployed.

Shetland:

Yell Sound—East Channel
Yell Sound—West Channel
Bluemull Sound—North
Bluemull Sound—South

Orkney:

North Ronaldsay Firth
Eday Sound—Lashy
Westray Firth—Falls of Warness
Westray Firth—Kili Holm to Fers Ness
Papa Westray

Pentland Firth:

Hoy

South Ronaldsay

Stroma

South Ronaldsay/Pentland Skerries

Pentland Skerries

Duncansby Head

Inner Sound

West Scotland:

Mull of Kintyre

Sanda Sound

Mull of Oa

Gulf of Corryvreckan

Dorus Mor

Kyle Rhea

Loch Linnhe—Corran

Irish Sea:

Rathlin Island, North Channel

Mull of Galloway

Wigtown Bay

North Wales:

Menai Strait—Belan

Menai Strait—Menai Bridge

Bristol Channel:

Barry

Foreland Point

Lundy (North)

Lundy (South)

Cornwall:

Cape Cornwall

Lands End

The Lizard

English Channel:

Portland Bill

Channel Islands:

Race of Alderney

Casquets

North West Guernsey

Big Russel, Guernsey

North East Jersey.

Additional sites may be identified in the course of continuing research.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the sites of the wind farm developments seeking sea-bed leases from the Crown Estate which have achieved pre-qualification status; and what the projected time scale is for their construction and commissioning. [10235]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the Crown Estate press release of 5 April 2001 which provides details on the 18 developers, including specific site information, that pre-qualified for Crown Estate leases. A copy is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Information on the construction and commissioning phases of projects is a commercial matter for the developers concerned.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she intends to implement the provisions of the EU Renewable Energy Directive for good quality energy from waste as part of the hierarchy of waste treatment. [10901]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The European Directive on Renewable Energy sets out the European context for support schemes for renewable forms of energy. It is for each member state to design and implement domestic support systems. In our recently published statutory consultations on the Renewables Obligations we do not propose to support energy from mixed waste incineration. This position is entirely consistent with the EU Directive, which we will be implementing in due course.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received on the need to include high quality energy from waste in the Renewables Obligation, consistent with the EU Renewable Energy Directive. [10899]

Mr. Wilson: *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* We published our Statutory Consultation on the Renewables Obligation in August this year. We have received responses both commending the Government's proposals to exclude energy from the incineration of mixed wastes from the Renewables Obligation, and advocating that it should be included. We are currently considering the comments we have received and hope to bring a draft order before the House as soon as possible.

Electricity Trading

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress she has made on reaching a settlement with the energy regulator on the viability of combined heat and power projects under the new electricity trading arrangements. [10648]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Ofgem published on 31 August their review of the impact of NETA on smaller generators. The report covered the first two months since the implementation of the new electricity arrangements (NETA). The Government will be issuing a consultation paper in response to the Ofgem report on smaller generators imminently which contains proposals aimed at addressing the issues surrounding NETA that have been raised by the smaller generator community, including the CHP generators.

As well as consideration of the impact of NETA, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will also be publishing wider proposals in the form of a CHP strategy in the coming months.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding the new electricity trading arrangements. [10647]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* In October 1997, the then Minister for Industry, Energy and Science proposed that the electricity pool system be reviewed. In the review and the subsequent development of regulations to implement new electricity trading arrangements (NETA), there were a number of consultations undertaken by my Department and Ofgem. During the development and implementation of NETA, numerous representations were received from a range of

organisations, in the form of letters, responses to consultation exercises and in meetings. Since NETA went live in March of this year, the DTI and Ofgem have consulted on further refinements to the trading arrangements in light of experience of the new system. This has prompted further representations from interested parties.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish her consultation document responding to the Ofgem report on the effects of new electricity trading arrangements on small generators. [10428]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The Government will be publishing their consultation document responding to Ofgem's reports on the operation of NETA and the initial impact of NETA on smaller generators in the near future.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the part aggregation could play in addressing the position of small generators under new electricity trading arrangements. [10429]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The impact of NETA on smaller generators, including renewables and CHP, was, and continues to be, of great concern. Following a request by the then Minister for Energy, Ofgem published on 31 August 2001 a report on the impact of NETA on smaller generators, based on the first two months of NETA operation, as well as a report on NETA operation generally.

Ofgem's report on the impact of NETA on smaller generators includes the finding that there is widespread concern that aggregation (or 'consolidation') services have yet to become fully operational.

The Government believe that effective aggregation services, which would group smaller generators into portfolios of predictable and less predictable generation, are one of the keys to addressing issues faced by smaller generators under NETA.

The Government will imminently be issuing proposals specifically aimed at addressing the concerns of the smaller generators community, including wind generation. These will include proposals on aggregation services under NETA and will set out the Government's views on aggregation services in detail.

Medicines (Developing Countries)

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if her Department will press the forthcoming WTO summit to take steps to ensure that developing countries have access to cheap medicines. [11466]

Nigel Griffiths: We are working with the European Union and others to ensure that the WTO's existing rules on intellectual property help developing countries gain access to medicines. This means making sure that new medicines are developed while at the same time allowing developing countries to take appropriate measures to protect public health in national emergencies.

Intellectual property rights need to be part of wider action to address the problems facing developing countries in delivering effective healthcare to all their citizens. That is why the UK strongly supports the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria and why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development to form a high level working group to report back by May 2002 on what else needs to be done.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices were closed in each quarter of each financial year for 1979–80 to 2000–01. [10134]

Ms Hewitt: I understand from Post Office Ltd. that compilation of post office closure statistics on a quarterly basis was only introduced last year. The available quarterly figures for net post office closures are:

October to December 2000—135

January to March 2001—113

April to June 2001—119.

Total closures for the year to March 2001 were 547. Of these, four were classified as permanent.

A £2 million fund to support relocation and refurbishment initiatives by volunteer or community groups to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where the traditional post office is closing received parliamentary approval in July.

Icelandic Trawlermen (Compensation)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims made under the Icelandic trawlermen's compensation scheme which have been refused at appeal have been taken to the independent adjudicator; and how many have been successful. [10783]

Nigel Griffiths: As at 29 October, 101 appeals have been sent to the independent adjudicator for consideration. So far three have been allowed.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the average length of time taken to settle claims made under the Icelandic trawlermen's compensation scheme. [10785]

Nigel Griffiths: Over half of the compensation payments were made within five months of the launch of the scheme.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims under the Icelandic trawlermen's compensation scheme from those who have continued to fish after 1979 have been paid. [10786]

Nigel Griffiths: Trawlermen who qualified for compensation under the initial rules of the scheme may have continued fishing on vessels other than former Icelandic water trawlers or moved out of fishing entirely. I regret that information differentiating these two groups is not available.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims under the Icelandic trawlermen's compensation scheme are outstanding; and if she will make a statement. [10457]

Ms Hewitt: All claims received have been scrutinised and entered into the special computer system established for the scheme. Some 1,781 claims have not yet been paid or rejected either because they were on hold or because further information is awaited, often from claimants themselves.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims made under the Icelandic trawlermen's compensation scheme have been refused; how many have been subsequently appealed; and how many appeals have been successful. [10784]

Nigel Griffiths: As of 29 October, 4,199 claims have been rejected. 101 appeals have been sent to the independent adjudicator for consideration, of which three have been allowed so far.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total amount paid so far is under the Icelandic trawlermen's compensation scheme. [10787]

Nigel Griffiths: At 22 October, £22.8 million had been paid out in compensation under the scheme.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Ladbroke Grove Rail Disaster

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Solicitor-General what the basis was for the advice of the Crown Prosecution Service to the British Transport police relating to a further investigation arising from the Ladbroke Grove disaster. [11719]

Mr. Drew: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service not to proceed with its case with regard to the Paddington rail disaster. [11457]

The Solicitor-General: I shall place in the Library tomorrow a statement by the Crown Prosecution Service explaining the basis for the advice that it has given to the British Transport police to enable the British Transport police to decide whether to conduct any further investigations arising out of the tragic circumstances of this disaster.

Personal Injury Claims

Mr. Drew: To ask the Solicitor-General what plans she has to review the process of personal injury claims, with particular reference to the role of insurance companies. [10697]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

There are no specific plans, but the Government keep developments in personal injury cases and their funding under general review and are currently evaluating the Civil Justice Reforms which have been implemented since April 1999.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Solicitor-General what powers she has to intervene in personal injury claims when it is clear that there is deliberate delay on the part of one party. [10698]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The Lord Chancellor has responsibility for civil court procedure and he has no power to intervene in individual cases.

Since the introduction of the Civil Procedure Rules in April 1999 the courts have been required to manage cases actively and may impose sanctions for delay or unreasonable behaviour either before or during a claim. A party who has experienced delays when attempting to resolve the dispute should bring the matter to the court's attention. The sanctions can vary according to the nature and the effect of the delay. They range from ordering additional costs to be paid by the party causing the delay to striking out a claim or a defence.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people have registered for individual learning accounts. [9684]

John Healey: By 26 October 2,490,966 individual learning accounts had been opened in England.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the total cost of the suspension of individual learning accounts. [11540]

John Healey: It is not possible to estimate the total cost at this stage. However, letters notifying our 2.5 million individual learning account (ILA) holders that the programme is to be withdrawn from 7 December were sent out from 29 October 2001. The cost to the Department to complete this is £789,000. In addition, notices were placed in nine national newspapers on 26 and 27 October at a cost of £37,679.

In addition, we will be working to ensure that existing account holders can take up learning opportunities booked by 7 December, and to look into complaints made against some learning providers.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost has been to date of the advertising campaign advising people of the suspension of individual learning accounts. [11541]

John Healey: Notices advising that the individual learning account programme is to be withdrawn in England from 7 December 2001 were placed in nine newspapers on 26 and 27 October—*The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Star*, *The Evening Standard*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Times*.

The cost was £37,679.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given to UK online centres following the suspension of individual learning accounts. [11542]

John Healey: We immediately acknowledged the concerns of UK online centres through the dedicated centre managers' online resource website. In addition, I wrote to all learning providers who are operating the individual learning accounts (ILAs) programme, informing them of the changes.

We have asked centres to inform our partners, the Government offices and the agencies responsible for the UK online centres application process of the impact that the withdrawal of ILAs will have on them. These partners will then be able to provide the Department with a clear picture of the position for UK online centres.

Teaching Materials

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received about the relaxation of guidelines over branding of teaching materials and activities by corporate sponsors. [10952]

Mr. Timms: In conjunction with the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers and the Consumers Association, we recently issued revised guidance, "Commercial Activities in Schools: Best Practice Principles". It revises and updates guidance produced by the National Consumers Council in 1996. Far from being a relaxation of criteria, the guidance makes it clear that schools should satisfy themselves that the educational benefits of the commercial activity outweigh the potential disadvantages; that explicit sales messages should be avoided wherever possible; and that the level of any branding should be appropriate to the activity. I have placed a copy of "Commercial Activities in Schools: Best Practice Principles" in the House of Commons Library.

We have received no recent representations about the new guidelines.

A-Level Results

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to address gender differences in A-level results. [8180]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our goal is, of course, that students of both genders fulfil their potential in higher education and the employment market. We are aware that boys' performance in the main A-level subjects has not equalled that of girls in recent years. The foundations for improvement need to be laid at earlier stages of schooling. That is why we have put resources into pre-16 initiatives that enhance boys' performance, such as the literacy strategy. We also have a major research project under way to identify successful strategies for raising boys' achievement that can be disseminated more widely. Examples of good practice are already being made available online to schools.

Social Exclusion Report

Ms Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made in implementing the social exclusion unit's report on 16 to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training. [9295]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are making excellent progress with implementing the social exclusion unit's report.

Fifteen ConneXions partnerships are currently operational, and 18 more partnerships have been invited to prepare business plans setting out how they will deliver the ConneXions service in their areas from April 2002. The service will be available across England by 2002–03. An independent report on the 13 ConneXions service pilots—which tested different aspects of the service—has shown that 80 per cent. of young people helped by personal advisers feel ConneXions has made a real difference to their future prospects.

The ConneXions card—which will offer rewards and incentives for participation in post-compulsory learning—is being trialled in a small number of schools and colleges in the north-east. Following completion of the trials, the card will be rolled out on a regional basis across the country, becoming available throughout England from autumn 2002.

Our education maintenance allowance (EMA) programme is having a positive effect on the lives of many young people. Around 100,000 young people have applied for an EMA to date in this academic year. Early evidence is encouraging: EMAs have produced a 5 percentage point increase in participation among the target group. Our EMA transport pilots and pilots for the homeless, teenage parents and people with disabilities are now in their second year of operation. Initial findings suggest that vulnerable young people are benefiting from EMAs.

In the "Schools: Delivering Success" White Paper, we set out our framework for a coherent phase of 14 to 19 learning. Key elements include tailored programmes of learning—offering more opportunities for vocational and work-related learning—through which young people could advance at their own pace. We are also looking at proposals for an overarching award covering challenging goals in formal qualifications, but in which other achievements—such as volunteering—might also be recognised.

We will be issuing a consultation document in the new year, which will set out our proposals for 14 to 19 learning in more detail.

School Exclusions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to increase the level of funding for education provision of excluded pupils. [9591]

Mr. Timms: Education standard spending will increase by 6 per cent. for 2002–03. Local education authorities will need to decide how much of that increase they spend on increased education provision for excluded pupils. They will have a duty to ensure that all children excluded for more than 15 days receive a full-time education from September 2002.

Further Education (West Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of *(a)* post A-level and *(b)* vocational school leavers in the constituency of West Chelmsford in (i) July 2001, (ii) July 2000 and (iii) July 1999 went on to: (A) university, (B) employment (C) unemployment and (D) Government sponsored training programmes. [9732]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The information is not available at constituency level.

National estimates of the main activity of what young people are doing after year 13 are available from the youth cohort study (YCS). The destinations of those in full-time

education in year 13 leaving with either two or more A-levels or a vocational level 3 qualification are shown in the following table.

Main activity in year following year 13 for post A-level[1] and vocational school leavers[2]—England and Wales

Percentage

	Post A-level[1]	*Vocational level 3*[2]
Full time education	74	49
of which:		
Higher education	62	32
Employment	19	39
Unemployment/Other/Not stated	6	9
Government supported training	1	3
Total	100	100

[1] Young people in full-time education in year 13 who attained two or more A-levels

[2] Young people in full-time education in year 13 who attained a level 3 vocational qualification

Source:

Youth Cohort Study, Cohort 9 sweeps 2 and 3

Sixth Forms (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list *(a)* the number of pupils in each sixth form and *(b)* the indicative budgets for each school sixth form in 2002–03 for every school with a sixth form in Worcestershire. [10205]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Learning and Skills Council allocations for schools in Worcestershire will not be announced until December, and work to calculate them is still under way.

Primary School Admissions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps are taken to prevent admission authorities from requiring parents to enter their children prematurely for reception classes to ensure admission to primary schools. [10677]

Mr. Timms: The Secretary of State has made it clear to admission authorities that parents should not be pressurised into sending their child to school before he or she has reached compulsory school age. The code of practice on school admissions encourages admission authorities to allow parents to secure a school place but defer their child's entry to school until later on in the same academic year. Admissions policy is under review with proposed changes currently the subject of consultation. The Secretary of State is looking to strengthen the message in the code by making it clear that she expects all admission authorities to allow parents to defer entry.

The consultation on admissions ends on 7 November.

Teachers (East Yorkshire)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the class sizes of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools were in the East Riding of Yorkshire on 31 March in each year since 1996. [10729]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools in East Riding of Yorkshire Local Education Authority: average class sizes[1]

	Average class size	
	Maintained primary schools	*Maintained secondary schools*
January each year		
2001	27.3	21.8
2000	27.4	22.0
1999	28.3	22.1
1998	28.7	21.6
1997	28.3	21.0
1996	27.7	21.2

[1] Classes taught by one teacher

Note:

East Riding of Yorkshire LEA was formed in April 1996 as part of the local government re-organisation.

Special Schools

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what consultation has been carried out with the parents of pupils in special schools on the policy of inclusion and the future of those schools; and what the results of that consultation were. [10962]

Mr. Timms: The Government have consulted widely on their strategy to raise standards for pupils with special educational needs. Like others, parents, pupils and staff from special schools have contributed to the consultations on the Green Paper, "Excellence For All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs" (October 1997), "Meeting Special Educational Needs: A Programme of Action" (November 1998) and the provisions of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (March 2000). The Government's proposals received broad support.

There is a continuing and vital role for special schools within an inclusive education system. Inclusion is not a drive to close special schools. Rather, the Government want all special schools to be outward-looking centres of excellence working hand in hand with each other and with mainstream schools. Special schools can act as a source of expertise, advice and professional development. When mainstream and special schools work together there are benefits for all.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his answer of 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1231W, on specialist schools, what proportion of the applicants who gained sponsorship arranged through the Technology Colleges Trust had such sponsorship make up 50 per cent. or more of the total sponsorship needed to gain specialist status. [11052]

Mr. Timms: Sponsorship arranged through the Technology Colleges Trust accounted for 50 per cent. or more of the sponsorship raised in the case of 51 per cent. of the applicant schools.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his answer of 17 October, *Official Report*, column 1231W, on specialist schools, what proportion of the applicants who gained sponsorship arranged through the Technology Colleges Trust were applicants for *(a)* arts, *(b)* technology, *(c)* language college and *(d)* sports status. [11053]

Mr. Timms: The proportion of applicants supported through sponsorship arranged through the Technology Colleges Trust were as follows: 32 per cent. arts applicants;

50 per cent. technology applicants; and 18 per cent. language college applicants. Support for schools applying for sports college status is provided through the Youth Sport Trust.

Special Educational Needs

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations have been received on the most recent SEN code document. [11129]

Mr. Timms: A draft special educational needs code of practice was laid before Parliament on 20 June. It was withdrawn in response to comments from members of both Houses, many on behalf of parents or parents' groups, in particular about the draft guidance on quantifying the provision in children's statements of special educational needs.

A revised draft addressing those concerns was placed before Parliament for approval on 23 October. The further revision has been widely welcomed.

Computers Within Reach

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which of the targets for Computers Within Reach were *(a)* achieved and *(b)* not achieved, indicating the reasons for not meeting the targets. [11206]

John Healey: The original target for the pilot phase of the Computers within Reach scheme was to supply up to 35,000 refurbished computers by March 2001 for those on certain benefits who were seeking to gain or retain employment. Due to problems associated with the sourcing of equipment and the logistics of delivery, the scheme was extended to 31 October 2001. This was to enable all individuals on waiting lists who had paid for a computer to receive one. Until figures from suppliers are collated I cannot give a final number for computers delivered through the scheme. However, it is anticipated that around 24,000 computers will have been delivered by the end of the pilot phase.

There is an on-going evaluation of the scheme and the initial findings show it has been successful in targeting the priority groups of those in receipt of:

jobseekers' allowance

income support

incapacity benefit

state pension with minimum income guarantee.

I am currently considering the way forward for the scheme in the light of lessons learned from the pilot phase, as well as the findings of the evaluation research which is currently under way.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans have been made by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* institutions involved in the preparation for Holocaust Memorial Day 2002. [11276]

Mr. Timms: The Home Office is the Government Department with responsibility for Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) 2002. It is working with a number of Government Departments and organisations on the preparations for the day.

Last year, this Department produced an education pack for all schools to support last year's Holocaust Memorial Day. New resources for schools to commemorate the day in 2002 have been developed and will be available at the end of November 2001. The resources are complementary to the education pack which the Department produced last year, and reflect this year's theme of Britain and the Holocaust.

The resources have been produced by an education working group of experts on the holocaust, racism, and education, from bodies such as the Wiener Library and the Imperial War Museum. I am grateful for their continued support and dedication to this work.

Capital Grants (Northamptonshire)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which schools in Northampton, South which have received capital grants; and what the value of grants was in each case. [11287]

Mr. Timms: Table A shows the new deal for schools devolved formula capital allocations made to schools in the Northampton, South constituency in 2001–02.

Table B shows those additional capital grants allocated to Northamptonshire local education authority for projects in its schools during 2001–02.

Table A—new deal for schools (NDS) devolved formula capital allocations made to schools in the Northampton, South constituency in 2001–02

School name	*Allocation (£)*
Abington Vale Lower School	9,566
Abington Vale Middle School	19,974
Ashton Church of England Primary School	6,676
Barry Lower School	10,534
Bellinge Lower School	8,567
Briar Hill Lower School	10,304
Chiltern Lower School	9,105
Cliftonville Middle School	11,949
Cogenhoe Primary School	8,336
Collingtree Church of England Primary School	6,830
Delapre Middle School	21,865
Denton Primary School	7,768
Duston Eldean Lower School	12,563
Duston Upper School	27,423
East Hunsbury Lower School	13,132
Ecton Brook Lower School	9,443
Ecton Brook Middle School	17,069
Gloucester Nursery School	6,769
Great Billing Church of England Lower School	7,576
Hackleton Primary School	9,197
Hardingstone Primary School	9,197
Harpole Primary School	9,074
Hartwell Church of England Primary School	9,274
Hopping Hill Lower School	10,411
Hunsbury Park Lower School	9,935
Kislingbury Primary School	8,044
Little Houghton Church of England Primary	6,802
Lyncrest Lower School	9,689
Mereway Lower School	9,420
Mereway Middle School	20,481
Mereway Upper School	21,842
Military Road Lower School	9,305
Millway Middle School	18,406
Milton Parochial Primary School	7,798
Northampton School for Boys	33,303
Preston Hedges Primary School	9,996
Queen Eleanor Lower School	10,672
Roade Primary School	9,673
Roade School	38,584

Table A—new deal for schools (NDS) devolved formula capital allocations made to schools in the Northampton, South constituency in 2001–02

School name	*Allocation (£)*
Ryelands Middle School	17,830
Simon de Senlis Lower School	11,034
Spring Lane Lower School	9,643
St. James Church of England Lower School	7,783
St. Lukes Church of England Lower School	7,506
St. Paul's Lower School	7,967
Standens Barn Lower School	9,581
Vernon Terrace Lower School	9,043
Weston Favell Church of England Lower School	9,043
Wootton Primary School	10,688
Yardley Hastings Primary School	7,122
Total	603,792

Table B—capital grant allocations to Northamptonshire local education authority 2001–02

£000

Grant name	*Allocation*
Voluntary Aided Schools	943
School Laboratories	360
School Security	166
School Access	581
NDS Condition	1,670
Seed Challenge	424
Total	4,144

Post-16 Education

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children remained in education after completing their GCSEs in *(a)* schools with sixth forms and *(b)* schools without sixth forms, in 2001. [11537]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The primary source of information on the changes in the activities of young people after completing compulsory education is the youth cohort study (YCS).

The table details the figures requested.

Percentage

Comprehensive schools	*In full-time education in year 12*
With sixth form	71
No sixth form	65

These estimates are for England and Wales. Equivalent estimates for schools other than comprehensive schools are not available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been imposed in the London Borough of Bromley and at what cost to public funds. [9996]

Mr. Denham: Information collected centrally identifies the number of antisocial behaviour orders issued by Magistrates' Court Committee (MCC) area only, not by local authority area. Information is not collected centrally on the costs to public funds such orders make.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been issued in each of the local authority areas covered by the Essex police; and if he will list those where no orders have been issued. [10505]

Mr. Denham: Information collected centrally identifies the number of antisocial behaviour orders issued by Magistrates' Court Committee (MCC) area only, not by local authority area.

Volunteer Bureaux

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning The Experience Corps Limited and funding for local volunteer bureaux. [10187]

Mr. Denham: I recognise that volunteer bureaux play a strong role in promoting volunteering and good practice locally; that is why the Home Office provides funding of about £170,000 annually to the National Association of Volunteer Bureaux. I have received representations on behalf of a number of volunteer bureaux concerning funding allocated to the Experience Corps. The Experience Corps was established specifically to support and mobilise older people to become active in their communities. I hope that these organisations will work together to build on and enhance what has already been achieved.

Chinese State Visit (Policing)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account he has taken of the findings of the High Court on 3 May 2000 in respect of the actions of the Metropolitan police in determining the appropriate level and nature of policing for the visit of the Chinese State Vice-President to the UK this month. [10716]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* I have been informed by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the planning for the policing operation during Vice-President Hu Jintao's visit has taken into account the findings of the High Court on the 3 May 2000.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what meetings have taken place between the Metropolitan police, his Department, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Chinese officials to discuss the policing of the UK state visit of the Chinese State Vice-President, Hu Jintao; and what decisions were taken on the policing of this visit. [10715]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials have held several routine meetings with the Chinese Embassy to discuss the programme for the Vice-President's visit. The Metropolitan police attended some of these, to enable them to make operational decisions on security for the visit. Decisions on the policing of the visit are a matter for the Metropolitan police alone.

Criminal Records (Discrimination)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures will be

introduced to prevent discrimination against those with criminal records when they apply for a job, following the Police Act 1997. [10115]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* We are determined that people who have offended in the past should not be unfairly discriminated against. The Code of Practice issued under the Police Act 1997, following extensive consultation, emphasises the need for information to be used fairly, and for guidance issued or supported by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to be observed. The Code also requires employers to have written policies in relation to the recruitment of ex-offenders. The CRB is working closely with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and with Nacro to develop guidance material for organisations that wish to use the CRB's service. Two publications have been issued so far. Both offer practical and policy recommendations on employing people with a criminal record. The Bureau will continue to work with these organisations and others on the creation of guidance materials. A publicity campaign aimed at offenders, ex-offenders, employers, volunteering groups and the public is currently being developed by the CRB, to help inform people about the disclosure service.

Special Constables

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the turnover rate was for special constables in each constabulary in England in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [10145]

Mr. Denham: Home Office-funded research into the premature wastage of special constables, completed last year, found that the primary reasons for leaving were often external to the service. However, the research identified some underlying management factors contributing to the decision to resign.

Recommendations aimed at reducing the wastage included making improvements to: the flexibility of duties and hours offered; the management structure within which specials operate; the quality of training provided locally; and to local efforts to monitor and prevent wastage.

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and as part of the police reform process we are looking at radical improvements in the management, welfare and deployment of special constables.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables are to be assigned to the Senlac Division *(a)* this year and *(b)* in the next five years. [9863]

Mr. Denham: I am informed by the Chief Constable of Sussex police that the force aims for a ratio of one special constable to every five regular officers. Establishment figures for regular officers are set on a yearly projection basis according to the budget; For the Senlac Division in 2001, this figure was 260 regular officers. There are currently 34 special constables deployed there.

No decisions have been made about the deployment of regular (and therefore special) constables for next year and beyond.

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and as part of the police reform process we are looking at radical improvements in the management, welfare and deployment of special constables.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables were with the Essex police at the end of *(a)* 1971, *(b)* 1981 and *(c)* 1991; and what the latest available figure is for 2001. [10506]

Mr. Denham: The number of serving special constables at force level has only been recorded centrally from 1991 onwards. Figures for 1971 and 1981 are not available. The total number of special constables in Essex police force for 1991 and 2001 are set out in the table.

Year	*Total number of special constables*
30 December 1991	642
31 March 2001	445

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and as part of the police reform process we are looking at radical improvements in the management, welfare and deployment of special constables.

Emergency Services Personnel (Assaults)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people convicted of assaulting *(a)* ambulance personnel and *(b)* other emergency services' personnel in the last 12 months for which figures are available received a (i) custodial sentence, (ii) community service order and (iii) fine. [9989]

Mr. Denham: The statistics held centrally on the Home Office's Court Proceedings Database include only the circumstances of an offence if such details are referred to in legislation. Assaults on ambulance personnel and other emergency services' personnel excluding the police are not separately identified in legislation from other offences of assault and so details of convictions of offenders found guilty of such offences are not centrally available.

Summary offences of assault on police officers can be identified and details of convictions for this offence in 1999, broken down by type of sentence, are given in the table. It is not possible to identify more serious offences of assault on the police.

Data for 2000 will be available in November.

Persons convicted and sentenced at all courts for assaulting a constable by type of sentence, England and Wales, 1999

	Offence/convictions
Offence description Principal statute	Assaulting a constable Police Act 1996, Sec. 89(1) and offences against similar provisions in Local Acts
Total convicted	6,117
Total sentenced	6,133
of which:	
Unsuspended sentence of imprisonment[1]	1,281

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Persons convicted and sentenced at all courts for assaulting a constable by type of sentence, England and Wales, 1999

	Offence/convictions
Community service order	971
Fine	1,319

[1] Comprises persons sentenced to a secure training order, to a young offender institution or to an unsuspended sentence of imprisonment
Note:
All data given refer to the principal offence. Some persons sentenced may have been convicted in a previous year

Prison Work

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received during the last 12 months on the impact of the price of goods manufactured by prisoners on similar products made by commercial businesses outside; and if he will make a statement. [10144]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service policy on pricing is that goods and services should be offered at a fair market price, which covers direct manufacturing cost plus a contribution to the recovery of overheads. Prison overheads are higher than outside because of high fixed costs, such as high ratios of costly supervision, a short working week and low productivity rates. Once a prison has recovered all variable costs and a contribution to the direct costs, its rates are in most cases no lower than those of comparable commercial ventures.

The Prison Service has dealt with three cases during the last 12 months in which concerns were expressed about under-cutting by prisons. All three cases were fully investigated and it was found in each case that Prison Service policy had been adhered to.

Nottinghamshire Police

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the budget for Nottinghamshire police in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms for each financial year since April 1996. [11305]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The information is set out in the table.

	Cash (£ million)	*Real (£ million)*	*Real terms increase (percentage)*
1996–97	115.3	130.6	1.6
1997–98	119.7	131.5	0.7
1998–99	124.7	133.3	1.3
1999–2000	129.6	135.3	1.5
2000–01	133.8	137.1	1.4
2001–02	140.3	140.3	2.3

Note:
Real terms figures are given at 2001–02 prices (GDP deflator)
Source:
Nottinghamshire police

Crime Reduction

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions he has held with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Trade and Industry, to co-ordinate initiatives to reduce crime through sport and recreation; [10141]

(2) what level of funding is available from his Department for initiatives to reduce crime through sport and recreation; [10140]

(3) what discussions he has held with professional sports clubs about using sports initiatives to reduce crime. [10139]

Mr. Denham: A number of professional sports bodies were involved in the discussions of the Football Working Group, which was chaired by former Home Office Minister, Lord Bassam of Brighton and which reported in March 2001. The working group report includes recommendations aimed at encouraging Premiership and Football League clubs to maximise and expand their community investment programmes, notably through developing partnerships with local communities, local authorities and businesses. The report highlights the social and public order benefits of encouraging, facilitating and funding young people to participate in grassroots football and other sports projects.

In January 2001 senior Home Office officials met officials from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Education and Skills (formerly Department for Education and Science) and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (formerly Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions) to discuss the contribution youth sport can make to crime reduction. Officials subsequently attended a seminar organised by the DCMS and featuring an American expert in this field. Further discussions took place in June and officials remain in touch with a view to identifying examples of effective schemes which can be recommended to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

The Home Office is currently funding a number of schemes which aim to use sport and recreation to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. There are several small schemes with total funding of £400,000 under the Reducing Burglary Initiative. The principal schemes are those involving the Youth Justice Board—ie Positive Futures (£6 million over three years to March 2003); Youth Inclusion (£15.6 million over four years to March 2003); and Easter and Summer 'Splash' schemes (£3.6 million over two years to March 2002).

Police Priorities

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many priorities he has set each police authority in England and Wales in the last three years. [10142]

Mr. Denham: The Police Act 1996 allows the Home Secretary to set objectives for policing, normally referred to as Ministerial Priorities.

For each of the years 1999–2000,2000–01, 2001–02 financial years there have been the same two Ministerial priorities.

1—to reduce crime and disorder in partnership with local authorities, other agencies and the public.

2—to increase trust and confidence in policing among minority ethnic communities.

In the first of these years, there were two additional priorities:

1—to deal speedily and effectively with young offenders and to work with other agencies to reduce offending and re-offending.

2—to target and reduce drug related crime in partnership with other local agencies, via the local Drug Action Team[1] in line with the Government's strategy "Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain".

[1] Drug and Alcohol Action Teams in Wales.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 24 July from the hon. Member for Torbay regarding Mr. Tuci of Chelston, Torquay. [10137]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to the hon. Member on 30 October. I am sorry I have been unable to send an earlier reply.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reply to the letter to him dated 21 September from the hon. Member for Solihull concerning the company known as A & N Trimmings Ltd. [8680]

Mr. Denham: I replied to the hon. Member's letter of 21 September on 19 October.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was, for each year since 1995, the average response time for providing a substantive answer to *(a)* hon. Members' correspondence, *(b)* correspondence from members of the public and *(c)* written parliamentary questions in the (i) House of Commons and (ii) House of Lords; [7007]

(2) what was, for each year since 1995, the total number of *(a)* letters from hon. Members *(b)* letters from members of the public and *(c)* parliamentary questions from (i) hon. Members and (ii) Lords dealt with by his Department; what percentage took (A) more than one month and (B) more than three months to provide a substantive answer; and if he will make a statement. [7008]

Mr. Blunkett: My Department receives large amounts of correspondence from hon. Members and members of the public. We aim to send a substantive reply to all letters as soon as possible. I am determined to achieve a high level of performance in dealing quickly with correspondence.

We are working with our information technology partners to develop next summer a customer contact centre which will radically change the way we handle letters, e-mails and telephone inquiries. In the short term we are implementing a number of organisational and process changes to bring about improvements in the quality and timeliness of replies and to prepare for the contact centre.

General information on the volumes of correspondence received across Whitehall and on overall performance is published by the Cabinet Office. Figures for 2000 were published on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 324W, and on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 454W.

The Home Office also receives a high number of parliamentary questions each Session and takes its responsibilities for answering them seriously. This is reflected in the performance levels indicated in the tables, which are, in the main, within the recommended response times required by both Houses. The Home Office has, since 2000, had a performance indicator of answering 95 per cent. of parliamentary questions within target. In the most recent financial year for which figures are available—2000/01—the figure achieved was 94 per cent.

The tables show the number of written parliamentary questions answered by the Home Office in the House of Commons and the House of Lords respectively since 1995; the percentage of those questions which took more than a month to provide a substantive answer; the percentage of questions which took more than three months to provide a substantive answer; and the average response time in days from the point at which the question is due for answer (ie the date on which it appears in the order book). The figures for questions in the House of Commons have been broken down in terms of questions which were for ordinary written and named day answer respectively.

Table 1: Written Parliamentary Questions (House of Commons)

	Number of ordinary written questions	*Percentage more than one month*	*Percentage more than three months*	*Average response time in days*	*Number of named day written questions*	*Percentage more than one month*	*Percentage more than three months*	*Average response time in days*
1995	1,968	1	1	5	1,591	0	0	2
1996	1,615	2	0	5	1,187	1	0	3
1997	1,515	0	0	4	1,300	0	0	2
1998	2,222	0	0	4	1,251	0	0	1
1999	2,200	0	0	5	1,661	0	0	1
2000	1,947	0	0	4	2,063	0	0	2
2001[1]	1,136	0	0	4	1,000	1	0	2

[1] As at 20 July 2001

Table 2: Written Parliamentary Questions (House of Lords)

	Number	Percentage more than one month	Percentage more than three months	Average response times in days
1995	219	0	0	8
1996	340	0	0	9
1997	367	2	0	8
1998	607	0	0	8
1999	573	1	0	9
2000	579	2	0	9
2001[1]	135	4	0	8

[1] As at 20 July 2001

Child Deaths

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many homicides there were of a child aged under one, broken down by the relationship of the victim to the principal suspect; and how many people were *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted of such offences in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [9882]

Mr. Denham: The requested details are in the table.

Homicide of children under one year

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000
Number of victims	16	28	30	42	37
Son/daughter (including adopted)	13	21	23	28	25
Stepson/daughter (including child of suspect's cohabitant/lover)	0	1	2	5	4
Other family (including foster children)	0	0	0	0	1
Friend, ex-friend	0	0	0	1	0
Professional (suspect killed customer or client in the course of carrying out their occupation)	1	1	0	1	0
Other known (acquaintance)	0	1	3	4	0
Not known (insufficient information)	0	0	0	1	0
No current suspect	2	4	2	2	7
Total	16	28	30	42	37
Outcome principal suspect—convictions					
Murder	5	1	5	5	3
Manslaughter	7	11	14	12	2
Infanticide	1	4	4	7	0
Suspect died	0	2	0	0	0
Acquitted/proceedings discontinued	0	1	1	1	0
Suspect committed suicide	0	1	1	0	0
Number of proceedings on advice of DPS	0	4	1	2	1
Other (eg under age)	0	1	0	0	0
Court proceedings pending, in progress	1	0	3	14	24
No suspect	2	3	1	1	7
Total	16	28	30	42	37

Statistics on homicides cover the latest published period and are as at 11 September 2000. Figures are subject to revision (usually downwards) as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child deaths where domestic violence is a factor were recorded in each police authority since such statistics were collated. [10461]

Mr. Denham: Statistics on the homicide of children killed by their parents are collected centrally, but those where domestic violence is a factor cannot be separately identified.

The following tables show currently recorded homicides of children less than 16 years, killed by their parents, for each police force area. Data are provided from 1977 to 1997 on a calendar year basis and from 1997–98 to 1999–2000 on a financial year basis. Information is as at 11 September 2000 when recording was closed for publication purposes. The outcome may result in some offences being reclassified as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available.

Table 1: Offences currently recorded as homicide for children less than 16 years where the relationship of the victim to the principal suspect is that of son or daughter

Police force	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Avon and Somerset	2	0	3	1	3	3	0	0	0	1	1	4
Bedfordshire	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	2
Cambridgeshire	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Cheshire	1	3	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	0
Cleveland	1	0	1	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
Cumbria	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Derbyshire	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	1
Devon and Cornwall	0	3	2	3	0	1	0	2	1	3	1	1
Dorset	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1

Table 1: Offences currently recorded as homicide for children less than 16 years where the relationship of the victim to the principal suspect is that of son or daughter

Police force	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Durham	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Essex	0	1	6	1	2	0	2	1	2	2	2	3
Gloucestershire	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1
Greater Manchester	4	2	4	2	4	3	2	3	5	2	5	5
Hampshire	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	4	0	0	2
Hertfordshire	0	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Humberside	2	1	2	1	3	2	0	2	1	0	0	1
Kent	1	2	1	0	1	0	4	2	1	1	4	0
Lancashire	4	2	2	2	0	5	1	1	1	1	2	5
Leicestershire	1	1	1	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	1
Lincolnshire	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1
London City of	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Merseyside	1	2	2	2	2	3	1	1	0	0	0	4
Metropolitan Police	8	6	13	10	7	9	6	7	18	4	16	8
Norfolk	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	1
Northamptonshire	0	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	0	0	1	0
Northumbria	0	0	1	1	2	0	3	3	4	0	2	1
North Yorkshire	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0
Nottinghamshire	2	1	0	2	4	0	1	0	1	3	2	4
South Yorkshire	0	3	1	0	0	0	2	3	1	1	1	0
Staffordshire	4	1	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	2	0	2
Suffolk	2	1	1	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	0	1
Surrey	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	2
Sussex	2	2	2	0	3	3	1	0	1	1	1	0
Thames Valley	0	4	1	0	1	3	0	8	3	1	1	5
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	2	0	0	0
West Mercia	1	0	0	0	1	3	2	0	2	1	1	1
West Midlands	5	4	5	2	2	3	6	5	5	4	2	8
West Yorkshire	2	3	5	5	3	3	2	5	4	3	4	5
Wiltshire	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
Dyfed-Powys	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Gwent	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
North Wales	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
South Wales	2	2	0	0	2	0	2	1	2	0	1	2
Total	55	63	64	40	54	58	53	62	72	36	55	76

Table 2

Police force	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1997–98*	*1998–1999*	*1999–2000*
Avon and Somerset	0	0	2	1	1	0	4	3	3	3	0	0
Bedfordshire	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Cambridgeshire	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1
Cheshire	0	0	3	2	3	0	4	0	0	0	5	0
Cleveland	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
Cumbria	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
Derbyshire	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	2	2	0	1
Devon and Cornwall	0	4	1	0	0	2	0	1	2	0	1	0
Dorset	0	1	0	1	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
Durham	1	0	1	1	2	3	1	0	1	1	0	0
Essex	0	4	0	0	1	1	1	3	1	0	3	0
Gloucestershire	1	0	2	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	2	0
Greater Manchester	5	2	3	4	2	3	3	6	1	1	6	3
Hampshire	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	3	1	1	1	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Humberside	1	1	0	2	1	3	2	1	3	2	2	0
Kent	1	1	4	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2
Lancashire	3	0	1	2	2	2	0	4	3	2	1	3
Leicestershire	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
Lincolnshire	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
London City of	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Merseyside	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	0
Metropolitan Police	6	6	8	3	8	4	8	7	8	10	7	4
Norfolk	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	1	3	0
Northamptonshire	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Northumbria	1	0	2	3	2	1	1	2	1	1	0	3
North Yorkshire	1	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1

Table 2

Police force	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1997–98*	*1998–1999*	*1999–2000*
Nottinghamshire	2	1	5	5	2	7	0	0	2	1	0	3
South Yorkshire	1	1	3	1	1	4	5	1	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	1	2	1	0	1	1	3	1	1	2	5	0
Suffolk	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	1
Surrey	2	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sussex	2	5	0	3	1	1	0	1	2	3	1	2
Thames Valley	1	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	3
Warwickshire	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
West Mercia	1	1	2	3	3	1	0	0	1	0	2	3
West Midlands	4	5	2	3	2	4	3	7	1	1	4	9
West Yorkshire	0	2	1	1	3	3	4	0	3	2	2	2
Wiltshire	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
Dyfed-Powys	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Gwent	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
South Wales	2	0	7	1	0	0	2	1	3	3	0	4
Total	44	49	63	51	49	53	52	58	50	45	59	53

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9230]

Mr. Blunkett: During the summer recess, my department issued 70 Home Office press notices and eight press notices were issued by the Prison Service.

All Home Office press releases are placed on its website at *www.homeoffice.gov.uk*

There were four Home Office publications.

1. Code of Practice on Visual Recording of Interviews with Suspects.
2. Implementation of the EU Driving Disqualification Convention.
3. Draft Code of Practice on Accessing Communication Data.
4. Review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997.

Data Retention (Communications Service Providers)

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what types of data are included within the code of practice which his Department is drawing up for data retention by communications service providers. [10420]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* I will draw up the Code of Practice in consultation with communications service providers and the law enforcement and security and intelligence agencies. The general definition of communications is in Part I, Chapter II of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. The types of data within that category that will be covered by the code will be agreed in the course of consultation. That way we can be sure that both sides are clear about the types of data which are retained.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has in respect of the retention of communications data by communication service providers; and whether this will be *(a)* voluntary or *(b)* mandatory. [10421]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* I intend to make it clear that communications service providers may retain data for up to 12 months for law enforcement and national security purposes. I will then work with the telecommunications industry to develop a voluntary code of practice on retention of data.

Sussex Police

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* special constables there were in Sussex in each of the last 10 years. [9766]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Sussex police

Year[1]	*Police officer strength*	*Special constable strength*	*Civilian support staff strength*
1991	2,969	[2]571	926
1992	2,984	[2]548	951
1993	3,008	[2]512	983
1994	3,009	527	1,013
1995	2,931	511	1,049
1996	3,074	511	1,132
1997	3,085	472	1,149
1998	2,996	442	1,185
1999	2,847	393	1,393
2000	2,822	352	1,328
2001	2,855	306	1,454

[1] As at 31 March

[2] Special constable numbers for 1991 to 1993 are for 31 December

In the latter part of the 1990s the chief constable civilianised a significant number of non-operational police posts, which accounts for the fall in police numbers from 1997 to 2000. At the end of August 2001 the force had 2,948 officers. Much of the recent increase reflects the success of the crime fighting fund.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, on Sussex police numbers, what are the working-time equivalent numbers for *(a)* the 2,963 police officers and 1,573 civilian support staff employed by the Sussex constabulary, *(b)* the 108

additional police officers and 119 additional civilian support staff taken on since March 2001 and *(c)* the expected 224 new recruits in the current year. [11025]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The figures provided by the acting chief constable of Sussex police in the answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, are full-time equivalent numbers for officers and civilian support staff except for the expected new recruits in the current year. The projection for new recruits (224) is actual officer numbers because predictions cannot be made on whether new recruits will be full or part-time officers.

Computer Errors (Exceptional Leave to Remain)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many days in 2001 the Home Office computer system has incorrectly issued permissions for exceptional leave to remain; and how many such permissions were issued. [10941]

Angela Eagle: Where appropriate, decisions on exceptional leave to remain are taken by caseworkers after a full consideration of the facts of the asylum application. I am not aware of any exceptional leave to remain decisions being made as a result of computer error.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* families, *(b)* single persons and *(c)* persons of all categories including dependants, received voucher-only support in each of the last six months for which data exist. [10721]

Angela Eagle: The table shows the number of asylum seekers, in each of the requested categories, who were receiving voucher-only support as at the end of each of the last six months for which data exist[1,2].

As at end of	*Families*[3]	*Singles*	*Total (excluding dependants)*	*Total (including dependants)*
February	1,030	8,780	9,810	11,360
March	1,180	10,210	11,400	13,470
April	1,270	11,160	12,430	14,660
May	1,370	12,010	13,380	15,790
June	1,520	13,150	14,670	17,370
July	1,640	13,960	15,600	18,520

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest ten. Figures may not sum owing to rounding.
[2] Cases where support has been ceased are excluded.
[3] A family, in this context, is defined as any principal applicant with at least one dependant.

Road Traffic Penalties

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the responses received to the consultation paper on road traffic penalties. [10293]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Officials in the three Departments concerned (Home Office, Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and Lord Chancellor's Department) are currently engaged in taking stock of the detailed and comprehensive responses to the Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper which was published on 19 December 2000. A considered Government report containing a summary of the responses received and final set of recommendations will be published in the near future.

Prisoners (Drugs)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners *(a)* are known to have taken illegal drugs and *(b)* have tested positive at a later date in each of the last three years; and what percentage the latter represents. [10667]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the use of illegal drugs in Prison Service establishments is provided by the random Mandatory Drug Testing (MDT) programme. Information as to how many prisoners tested positive more than once is not held centrally.

The table sets out the number of random MDT samples which tested positive over the last three full financial years and for this year to 31 August.

Year	*Number of positive random MDT results*	*Total number of random MDT tests*
1998–1999	11,552	63,209
1999–2000	7,682	54,013
2000–01	6,383	51,474
2001–02[1]	2,594	21,875

[1] Year to 31 August 2001.

Car Theft

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has collated on the proportion of those convicted of car theft who have previous car theft convictions; and what assessment he has made of the consequences of those figures for future policy. [10670]

Mr. Denham: Data held centrally do not distinguish car thefts from thefts of any type of motor vehicles.

An analysis of a sample of offenders sentenced for thefts of motor vehicles in 2000 reveals that 26 per cent. had one or more previous convictions for a similar offence.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the offending rate for car theft for *(a)* 14, *(b)* 15, *(c)* 16, and *(d)* 17-year-old (i) males and (ii) females in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [10669]

Mr. Denham: Information for 1997, 1998 and 1999 taken from the Home Office's Cautions and Court Proceedings Databases showing the number of persons aged *(a)* 14, *(b)* 15, *(c)* 16 and *(d)* 17, broken down into (i) males and (ii) females, cautioned by the police or convicted at all courts for: *(a)* theft of a motor vehicle, *(b)* aggravated vehicle taking, *(c)* being carried knowing vehicle to have been taken or driven away, unauthorised taking and carrying away of a motor vehicle (Theft Act Section 12(1) as amended by the Section 37 Criminal Justice Act 1998), per 100,000 population for each age is given in the table.

Data for 2000 will be available later in the year.

Offenders cautioned or convicted per 100,000 population by offence type, age and gender, England and Wales 1997–99

Offence type and gender	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Theft of a motor vehicle			
Males			
Age 14	57	52	59
Age 15	87	73	75
Age 16	86	79	82
Age 17	82	66	72
Females			
Age 14	3	2	3
Age 15	4	3	6
Age 16	5	5	5
Age 17	4	5	6
Aggravated vehicle taking			
Males			
Age 14	100	101	133
Age 15	193	206	224
Age 16	287	299	290
Age 17	346	319	327
Females			
Age 14	5	11	10
Age 15	18	18	21
Age 16	20	17	29
Age 17	17	22	21
Unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle[1]			
Males			
Age 14	221	252	302
Age 15	379	420	431
Age 16	465	474	518
Age 17	445	433	472
Females			
Age 14	27	25	29
Age 15	41	43	52
Age 16	43	51	50
Age 17	35	41	41
Total			
Males			
Age 14	378	405	495
Age 15	659	621	730
Age 16	838	852	890
Age 17	872	818	870
Females			
Age 14	35	38	43
Age 15	63	65	79
Age 16	68	73	83
Age 17	57	73	68

[1] Including offences of "being carried knowing vehicle to have been taken or driven away"

Police Recruitment

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average cost of recruiting, training and equipping a police officer is. [10671]

Mr. Denham: The recruitment of police officers is the responsibility of the Chief Officer of each force. No central records are kept of the overall cost of recruiting, training and equipping a police officer.

When rates of payment to be made under the Crime Fighting Fund in 2000–01 were agreed with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities, £1,000 was included for recruitment and £7,000 for the initial residential training for each new recruit. In 2001–02 the payment for recruitment has been up-rated to £1,030 per recruit.

Parole

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in the UK were granted parole in the last three years. [10668]

Beverley Hughes: The number of prisoners released on parole in the last three years is:

	Number
1998–99	2,383
1999–2000	2,561
2000–01	2,584

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Climate Change

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress of the climate change negotiations. [9281]

Mr. Meacher: Political agreement was reached between 177 countries on the implementation of the Kyoto protocol at the resumed Sixth Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn in July. This was a significant political achievement.

The Seventh Conference of the Parties is now taking place in Marrakesh (29 October-9 November). Our aim will be to complete the task of converting the Bonn agreement into detailed decisions. We should not underestimate the scale of this task, but I am optimistic agreement should be possible. It is vital that we maintain political momentum and the spirit of co-operation that was evident in Bonn. We hope that agreement in Marrakesh will pave the way for ratification and entry into force of the Kyoto protocol by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002.

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what new initiatives she plans to assist British compliance with commitments under the Kyoto protocol. [9301]

Mr. Meacher: The UK's climate change programme, published in November 2000, sets out details of the policies and measures that the Government are introducing to meet the UK's target under the Kyoto protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008–12 and to move towards our domestic goal to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. We estimate that these policies could reduce emissions by 23 per cent. by 2010. This is substantially beyond our Kyoto target.

The Government have been making progress with implementing the policies outlined in the programme. The UK's Third National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was published on 30 October, provides an update of this progress. Copies of the Communication will be placed in the Library of each House.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what improvements in the co-ordination of rural policy and departmental operation have been achieved since the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [9297]

Alun Michael: Major benefits are expected to flow from bringing together responsibilities for farming and food, environment and conservation and the rural affairs portfolio within one Department, although the benefits—both policy and operational—will be realised gradually. On foot and mouth disease, there was already close joint working between Departments, via the Cabinet Office co-ordination machinery and via the rural task force, which brought together both Departments involved and external stakeholders. The establishment of DEFRA has offered scope for further integration. Great efforts are being made to establish a new culture within the Department, with clear aims and objectives through a process in which stakeholders and staff at every level have been involved. We are also seeking to develop close partnerships as a way of working within the new Department, across Whitehall and with partners at a regional and local level throughout England as well as on the international stage. The new Department has created a post at Board level to bring together general weight of DEFRA field delivery as a whole.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what restrictions will apply to the provision of grants to rural businesses as part of the extension of the Business Recovery Fund announced on 18 October; [10101]

(2) what the deadline for grant applications is under the Business Recovery Fund announced on 18 October. [10100]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* Regional development agencies have played a crucial role in responding to the needs of businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. I am grateful to them for their positive response to the challenges and the high degree of co-operation we have received from them in recent months. As with earlier tranches of money, it will be for the individual regional development agency to decide on the best way to allocate the Business Recovery Fund (BRF) in its region and to set the deadline for applications according to local circumstances. Regional development agencies must ensure that grants are consistent with the European Commission's state aids rules as well as the guidance issued by this Department. A copy will be placed in the Libraries of the House when published.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what statistical information she has collated on the impact foot and mouth disease has had on *(a)* farm incomes and *(b)* output. [10471]

Mr. Morley: The Department is very much aware that the outbreak has had a considerable impact on farming and a range of industries throughout the UK. DEFRA is currently working with a number of other Government Departments to estimate the economic impact of the outbreak and the results of this work will be made publicly available.

In addition, an estimate of total income from farming (TIFF) for 2001 will be published on 29 November 2001. This will include the effects of foot and mouth disease and other factors that have affected income in 2001.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many contracts have been concluded between her Department and farms infected by foot and mouth near Thirsk for the cleansing of their premises. [10179]

Mr. Morley: The Department has now agreed 59 contracts, with 54 farmers and five contractors in the Thirsk area, for the cleansing and disinfection of premises affected by foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals were slaughtered as a result of foot and mouth disease, broken down by those from infected farms and those culled for protective purposes, weekly since March. [9911]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Animal Health Act 1981 provides the powers to require the slaughter of any animals affected with foot and mouth disease (FMD), suspected of being affected, which are or have been in contact with affected animals or have been exposed to the infection of FMD.

The following table sets out the breakdown of the number of animals slaughtered by Infected Premises (IPs), Dangerous Contacts (DCs), and Slaughtered on Suspicion (SOSs) by week.

Week ending	*IPs*	*DCs*	*SOSs*
2001			
25 February	2,094	817	653
4 March	31,851	7,525	0
11 March	65,846	11,946	0
18 March	104,513	41,093	0
25 March	165,748	124,876	0
1 April	234,986	244,347	11,242
8 April	234,986	244,347	11,242
15 April	107,204	466,970	20,390
22 April	65,359	339,171	17,241
29 April	56,029	166,125	17,966
6 May	31,059	73,882	8,112
13 May	15,025	36,743	9,985
20 May	18,655	43,590	940
27 May	25,572	67,021	4,712
3 June	23,738	48,482	171
10 June	12,552	46,270	2,283
17 June	25,855	42,333	954
24 June	13,291	39,888	2,098
1 July	11,030	17,107	471
8 July	19,546	30,539	1,072
15 July	11,310	26,693	666
22 July	11,303	24,354	44
29 July	12,995	15,494	1,612
5 August	21,215	24,102	496
12 August	9,928	16,700	689
19 August	8,996	14,355	829
26 August	7,020	4,005	0
2 September	11,152	27,887	0
9 September	14,696	23,295	1,145
16 September	3,584	9,772	380
23 September	1,840	8,905	117
30 September	2,122	3,890	1,250
7 October	0	183	80
14 October	166	1,914	0
21 October	0	387	324
Grand total	1,316,704	2,473,669	126,183

The grand total for dangerous contacts is believed to be a slight underestimate of the true figure. These figures may be subject to change as quality assurance of the data is carried out.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason blood tests requested by her Department in July on 22 farms in north Somerset were delayed until October. [7888]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* DEFRA Head Office gives permission for local Animal Health Offices (AHOs) to start blood testing (serosurveillance) around former infected premises but it is left to the local AHO to decide on its priorities for sampling based on a number of factors. In the case of north Somerset, the AHO is also responsible for Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

The blood tests are part of the extensive on-going programme of testing sheep flocks inside foot and mouth disease protection and surveillance zones and so far over 1.1 million samples have been taken across the country. The 22 farms in north Somerset fell within a surveillance zone straddling the borders of two testing regions. Those in the Somerset part of the zone were sampled in advance of those in north Somerset.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the reasons were for the change in Government policy on the criteria for classifying outbreaks of foot and mouth disease that came into effect in April. [7728]

Mr. Morley: Our policy for confirming an outbreak of foot and mouth has not changed. There are, however, a number of different scenarios which would lead to animals being slaughtered to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease;

Infected premises

Where foot and mouth disease has been confirmed on the basis of clinical findings by a veterinary surgeon or positive laboratory tests or both.

Dangerous contacts

Premises where it is believed that animals have been exposed to foot and mouth disease infection by virtue of a known contact with infected animals or by contact through movements of vehicles, persons or things believed to be contaminated with virus.

Contiguous premises

A category of dangerous contacts where animals are believed to have been exposed to infection because of their proximity to a neighbouring infected premises.

Slaughter on suspicion

Premises where on veterinary examination there are insufficient grounds to confirm disease but where there are clinical signs that cannot exclude the possibility of disease being present. Animals are culled and samples taken to confirm the presence/absence of disease. Cases giving positive results or those that are subsequently confirmed on clinical grounds, are classified as infected premises.

Live Animal Exports

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will propose changes to EU law to allow the banning of export of live animals; [10387]

(2) if she will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of the exporting of meat instead of live animals. [10388]

Mr. Morley: The June Agriculture Council unanimously adopted a resolution instructing the European Commission to bring forward early proposals for changes to the current rules on the welfare of animals during transport. This debate on the proposals will provide an opportunity to discuss the options for reducing the number and duration of long-distance journeys of farm animals to slaughter. Our preference is for a trade in meat rather than the long distance transport of animals for slaughter.

We recognise the need for the discussion to include economic and animal health implications.

Flood Defences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money has been allocated to the Greater London flood defences by her Department in each of the last three years. [10274]

Mr. Morley: This Department provides grants for flood defence capital works that satisfy essential criteria but responsibility for all expenditure on flood defences rests with operating authorities, such as the Environment Agency and local authorities. The Environment Agency estimates that its flood defence expenditure in Greater London in the last three years was as follows:

£ million

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Capital	7.0	8.0	8.0
Operational	26.6	32.0	29.4
Other	4.9	4.8	4.6
Total	38.5	44.8	42.0

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to undertake a review of responsibility for flood defence management and funding; and if she will make a statement; [11010]

(2) when she expects to publish the findings of her review of flood and coastal defence funding. [11011]

Mr. Morley: The purpose of the review of flood and coastal defence funding arrangements was to ensure that funds were appropriately sourced and targeted, and delivered effectively and efficiently. Funding and institutional arrangements are inextricably linked. In addition to researching funding options and prioritisation, the review has gone on to consider whether current institutional arrangements were fit for purpose. The conclusions of the review are expected to be published later this autumn. The Government are satisfied that the outcome of this review, and other on-going reviews relating to flood management, will contribute substantially to ensuring a focused, integrated, efficient and effective service.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate her Department has made of the additional annual investment that would be required to ensure all flood defences in England and Wales are classified by the National Audit Office as being at least in good condition. [11007]

Mr. Morley: The National Audit Office's March 2001 report on inland flood defences includes condition ratings for flood defences made by the Environment Agency. These data form part of the input for two recent research projects on the "National Appraisal of Assets at Risk from Flooding" which were commissioned by this Department; the most recent report of this research was published in September. It suggests that investment in capital and maintenance would need to be increased from current levels by between £110 million and £120 million a year to maintain current standards of defence, with a further £30 million a year to improve to indicative standards.

Hunting

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent studies of foot and mouth disease risks surrounding fox hunting she has commissioned. [10004]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* A veterinary risk assessment regarding the possible relaxation of the foot and mouth disease controls over hunting with dogs in England and Wales has been carried out by the State Veterinary Service and is currently being considered by Ministers. Hunting with dogs takes a variety of forms all of which pose different levels of risk, and therefore require different levels of risk management measures. The assessment will shortly be published on the DEFRA website http:/www.defra.gov.uk/ and copies will be made available in the Library of each House.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish the results of the risk assessment in relation to hunting with dogs in areas free of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [8595]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The veterinary risk assessment regarding the possible resumption of hunting with dogs is currently being considered by Ministers. It takes account of the varying degrees of risk in different parts of the country. Hunting with dogs takes a variety of forms all of which pose different levels of risk and therefore require different levels of risk management measures. In the context of the Government's clear commitment to do everything possible to prevent future outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, this needs careful consideration. We hope to be able to reach a decision and will publish the veterinary risk assessment on which our decisions will be based.

Milk Task Force

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the work of the Milk Task Force; and when she expects it to publish its report. [11419]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1219W.

Local Food Production

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reports on local food production and sale she has received; and if she will make a statement. [10831]

Alun Michael: There have been a number of recent reports which have made reference to production and/or marketing of local foods including the report of the rural task force, which I chair, and the report by Lord Haskins on rural recovery after foot and mouth disease. We are currently considering our response to the recommendations of the rural task force report and the Haskins report and we will respond shortly.

Environment Agency (Somerset)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will increase the budget of the Environment Agency in Somerset. [10776]

Mr. Morley: Allocations for the environmental protection work performed by the Environment Agency are made on a national basis, and not by county. On flood defence, I have recently announced the allocations to flood and coastal defence operating authorities for 2002–03. The capital allocation, on which we are prepared to pay grant, for the Environment Agency in Somerset is £4.4 million (compared with £2.5 million in 2001–02). The rate of grant has been increased by 10 per cent. to 75 per cent.

Coffee Prices

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with *(a)* other UK Government Departments and *(b)* her EU counterparts regarding the effect of coffee prices on developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [10591]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The UK recognises that the coffee market is experiencing record low prices and remains committed to poverty reduction in developing countries.

The UK, like other EU member states and the European Commission, is a member of the International Coffee Organisation. At the 85th meeting of its governing body, the International Coffee Council, on 25–28 September 2001, the Council resolved to establish a Quality Committee to facilitate measures for the withdrawal from the market of defective beans and those with a moisture content above a certain level. This will provide practical advice and support to a resolution by producers aimed at reducing the total amount of low-grade coffee beans on the world market. The beans would not be stockpiled but either destroyed or diverted to other purposes such as cosmetics, animal feed or fuel.

Forests

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total acreage of forest in the UK is. [10270]

Mr. Morley: There are 2.8 million hectares of woodland in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much land was planted into forest in the UK during 2000. [10943]

Mr. Morley: 18,800 hectares of new forests were planted in the United Kingdom in the year ended 31 March 2001.

Livestock

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* cows, *(b)* sheep and *(c)* pigs there were in the UK on 1 October. [10275]

Mr. Morley: Figures are collected in June in the Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census by the relevant UK Departments.

As at June 2001 *Thousand*

	Total cattle and calves	*Total sheep and lamb*	*Total pigs*
England	5,749	16,140	4,823
Wales	1,271	9,976	41
Scotland	1,903	8,090	596
Northern Ireland	1,677	2,574	398
UK	10,600	36,780	5,858

Note:
Wales and Northern Ireland figures are provisional
Source:
June 2001 agricultural and horticultural census

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she intends to apply to pay optional agrimonetary compensation to the arable sector. [12221]

Mr. Morley: We have considered the case for payment of optional agrimonetary compensation to the arable sector. While we acknowledge the difficulties that the sector is facing, we have decided not to draw down these funds given the many competing demands on the Exchequer at present, not least the cost of eradicating foot and mouth disease. The arable sector will, however, receive £28 million in compulsory agrimonetary compensation this autumn.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Summer Recess

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9227]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's Press Office issued 48 press notices including one with a consultation document.

HEALTH

Sexual Offences

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce new legislation on sexual offences further to protect mentally handicapped victims. [10072]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health.

Responsibility for the current review of legislation relating to sex offences rests with the Home Department. When the Government set up the Sex Offences Review in January 1999, its terms of reference included

> "to provide coherent clear sex offences which protect individuals, especially children and the more vulnerable, from abuse and exploitation."

The recommendations of the Sex Offences Review to Government on reforming the law on sex offences were published in 'Setting the Boundaries' in July 2000. We are considering how to change all existing sex offences in the light of over 700 responses to that consultation document, including how to deal with sex offences against those with learning disabilities, and will be bringing forward legislation in due course.

Cardiac Surgery (Jarrow)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cardiac surgical operations have been carried out on people in the Jarrow constituency in each of the last five years. [8827]

Jacqui Smith: As data are not available at constituency level, the information in the table has been supplied for health authority area of residence.

The figures show the number of finished consultant episodes for heart operations which took place in national health service hospitals in England in the years 1995–96 to 1999–2000.

Heart operations
Finished consultant episodes for patients treated in NHS hospitals in England and resident in Gateshead and South Tyneside HA or Newcastle and North Tyneside HA 1995–96 to 1999–2000

	Gateshead and South Tyneside	*Newcastle and North Tyneside*
1995–96		
CABG	174	262
PTCA	67	174
Other heart ops	805	1,245
Total	1,046	1,681
1996–97		
CABG	194	284
PTCA	119	134
Other heart ops	879	1,287
Total	1,192	1,705
1997–98		
CABG	231	281
PTCA	83	123
Other heart ops	1,164	1,480
Total	1,478	1,884
1998–99		
CABG	242	297
PTCA	99	138
Other heart ops	1,031	1,530
Total	1,372	1,965
1999–2000		
CABG	199	263
PTCA	120	197
Other heart ops	1,124	1,576
Total	1,443	2,036

Notes:

An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

Operation codes (OPCS4R) used are as follows:

Coronary Artery Bypass Graft (CABG)-K40–46.

Percutaneous Transluminal Coronary Angioplasty (PTCA)-KA49–50.

Other heart ops-K01–39, K47–48, K51–71.

Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES). Department of Health

NHS Costs

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of the NHS to the average family was in 2000–01; and what it is forecast to be in 2001–02. [10512]

Mr. Hutton: The Department produces figures on national health service expenditure per head of population. Public expenditure on the NHS in England is expected to be around £890 per head of population in 2000–01, rising to £970 in 2001–02.

Occupancy Rates

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the occupancy rates for each NHS hospital trust in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01. [11119]

Mr. Hutton: Bed data, including occupancy rates, are available in the annual publication 'Bed availability and occupancy—England: Each Financial Year to 1999–2000', copies of which are available in the Library. Alternatively, information can be downloaded from the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Whittington Hospital

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what details of the PFI proposals for the Whittington hospital will be published; and if he will publish his assessment of *(a)* its cost and *(b)* the cost of direct departmental funding. [11447]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Details of the private finance initiative proposals for the Whittington hospital project will be published by the Whittington Hospital National Health Service Trust one month after final approval has been given and the funding route for the project agreed. Under our code of openness, the trust's full business case will be made publicly available and will include full details of the cost of the PFI proposals and the publicly funded alternative.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new graduate primary care mental health workers *(a)* have been employed and *(b)* will be employed in (i) the current financial year, (ii) 2002–03 and (iii) 2003–04. [11522]

Jacqui Smith: The proposal to develop 1,000 new mental health workers in primary care outlined in the NHS Plan forms part of a package of measures designed to strengthen primary mental health care. The new graduate primary care workers will be employed in the financial year 2003–04.

TREASURY

Debt Write-off (Government Companies)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the granting of requests for debt write-offs by national and local government and wholly-owned companies of the Government; how many such debt write-offs have been agreed since 1996–97; and which Minister gave approval to such write-offs in each case. [10926]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury expects all public bodies to have appropriate systems to manage their finances within the funds available and to take a prudent approach to the raising and financing of debt. While Treasury approval is generally required for write-offs, the final decision in individual cases rests with the relevant Secretary of State. The decision to remit lending will of course depend on the particular circumstances of the case.

Departments are responsible for accounting for all loans, including write-offs. In the case of loans from the National Loans Fund, primary legislation is required before any loan can be written off. In the case of lending financed by Departments, all other write-offs must be recorded in the accounts of the leading department and any remission of voted lending above £20 million is reported to Parliament by way of a Treasury Minute.

Pensioners

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer further to the answer to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1034W, if he will publish his estimate of the proportion of people of pension age in each local authority area. [10700]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. David Laws, dated October 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning the proportion of people of pension age in each local authority area. I am replying in his absence. (10700)

The requested information for local authority areas in England and Wales for the latest available year is provided in the attached table.[1]

[1] The relevant table has been deposited in the Library.

Special Advisers

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the record kept under clause 9 of the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers of contacts between his special advisers and the news media since July. [8221]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* All civil servants, including special advisers, are expected to keep departmental Heads of Information informed of contacts with the media. Details of such contacts are for internal purposes only.

National Insurance and Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the annual revenue which would be raised by *(a)* raising the employee national insurance rate by 1 per cent., *(b)* raising the upper earnings limit of employee national insurance contributions to the starting level for paying the upper rate of income tax and *(c)* restricting the value of the personal income tax allowance to the basic rate of tax; [9957]

(2) what his estimate is of the yield to the Exchequer from *(a)* the 10 per cent. rate of income tax, *(b)* the 20 per cent. rate of income tax, *(c)* the 22 per cent. rate of income tax, and *(d)* the 40 per cent. rate of income tax in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [9958]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* The full-year effect of raising the upper earnings limit to the higher rate threshold is estimated to yield £750 million. This estimate was provided by the Government Actuary's Department.

The full-year effect of restricting the personal allowance to the basic rate of income tax is estimated to yield around £3 billion in 2002–03. This estimate is based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

For the other questions, I refer the hon. Member to "Inland Revenue Statistics", tables 1.6 and 2.5, available in the Library of the House. The latest data on Inland Revenue Statistics can also be accessed on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats.

Hypothecated Health Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy to introduce a hypothecated health tax to finance the national health service; and if he will make a statement. [10745]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have made their commitment to increasing resources over the next three years for the NHS, funded from general taxation and linked to reform. Decisions on taxation and spending will be taken in the Budget and Spending Review, respectively, next year.

Alcohol and Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the revenue value of detected alcohol and tobacco fraud and smuggling was for the financial year 2000–01. [9202]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The revenue value of detected alcohol and tobacco smuggling will be published in the Customs and Excise Annual Report for 2000–01.

Income and Corporation Taxes Act

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the schemes under section 590 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 the Inland Revenue has approved which relate to retirement ages. [11389]

Dawn Primarolo: Approximately 200 schemes have received Inland Revenue approval under section 590 of

the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988. The identity of individual schemes is protected by obligations of taxpayer confidentiality.

Children's Tax Credit

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in Northampton have received the Children's Tax Credit since its introduction on 6 April. [11274]

Dawn Primarolo: Information about the Children's Tax Credit is not available by constituency. However, the number of families who are eligible for CTC in the east midlands is estimated to be 400,000.

Consolidated EU Tax

Mr. Spring: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the proposal by the European Commission for a single consolidated tax base; and what plans he has to discuss these proposals with his EU counterparts. [10758]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax harmonisation, including proposals for a consolidated company tax base, is not the way forward for Europe. The Government will not support any action at European level that will threaten jobs or the competitive position of British business.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 854W-56W, if he will distinguish between total managed expenditure for 1999–2000 in United Kingdom Department programmes comparable with programmes covered by the Barnett formula in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and total managed expenditure in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in programmes not compared for the purposes of the Barnett formula. [11012]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Separate figures are not published for the English equivalent of devolved programmes. Furthermore, it is for the devolved administrators to allocate funding to programmes within their block allocations. However, the Statement of Funding Policy published by the Treasury in July 2000 set out the Barnett formula including the comparability factors used in the formula and information on which elements of the devolved administrations' budgets are determined by the Barnett formula. Data for 1999–2000 relating to DEL expenditure are given in table 1.17 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses published in April 2001.

Other elements of UK Departmental spending programmes are treated as Annually Managed Expenditure. Details of AME spend are shown in Table 1.16 of PESA.

Delivered Administrations

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 838W, what is the degree of convergence already achieved between expenditure by the devolved Administrations and their predecessor Departments, covered by the Barnett formula comparable to UK Department programmes since 1996–97; and what changes there have been in the composition of those comparable programmes since 1996–97. [11050]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Separate figures are not published for the English equivalents of devolved programmes. However information on identifiable total managed expenditure per head by country including years since 1996–97 was published in Chapter 8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses in April 2001. Details of the Barnett formula were published in the Statement of Funding Policy published in March 1999.

Taxation (Fines)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was raised for HM Treasury through fines imposed by *(a)* HM Customs and Excise and *(b)* the Inland Revenue for (i) late completion of tax forms and (ii) late payment of tax owed in the last 10 financial years. [9762]

Dawn Primarolo: The tables show the revenue raised by Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise from late filing penalties on tax forms and late payment surcharges over the last ten years. The Inland Revenue accounts for its receipts in accounts years running from November to October.

The penalty figures are for Income Tax (including Pay-As-You-Earn), Self Assessment (from 1998), Company Tax (from 1991), Company Tax Pay and File (from 1995), Company Tax Self Assessment (from 2000) and Capital Gains Tax. The main impacts on penalty receipts were the introduction of:

CTPF penalties, increasing receipts from Accounts 95 and 96 onwards

PAYE end of year penalties, increasing receipts from Accounts 95 and 96 onwards

SA penalties, increasing receipts from Accounts 98 onwards.

Self Assessment is the only Revenue tax that has a surcharge, so receipts began after its introduction in 1996–97.

Inland Revenue

£

Accounts year	*(i) Penalties paid*	*(ii) Surcharge paid*
1991	1,032,000	—
1992	1,362,000	—
1993	1,488,000	—
1994	1,936,000	—
1995	5,511,000	—
1996	15,288,000	—
1997	20,840,000	—
1998	42,193,000	9,480,000
1999	56,338,000	36,527,000
2000	63,438,000	50,943,000
Total	209,426,000	96,950,000

Customs and Excise

£

Financial year ending March	*Value added tax*	*Excise*	*Insurance premium tax*	*Air passenger duty*	*Landfill tax*
1992	93,000,000	not available	From the outset of each tax		
1993	96,000,000				
1994	83,000,000				
1995	70,000,000				
1996	73,000,000				
1997	73,000,000				
1998	77,000,000	40,769			
1999	80,000,000	14,554			
2000	82,000,000	15,426			
2001	87,000,000	39,510			
Total	814,000,000	110,259	330,491	563,390	1,621,684

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the forecast is for *(a)* the total charges made under the climate change levy and *(b)* the amount within this total which is attributable to sales of (i) electricity and (ii) electricity from nuclear sources. [8873]

Mr. Boateng: Climate change levy is forecast to raise £1 billion in its first year, 68 per cent. of which is expected to come from supplies of electricity. 23 per cent. of electricity production is nuclear.

All CCL revenue will be recycled to business. The levy is designed to be revenue neutral for the private sector as a whole, and is expected to be broadly neutral between the manufacturing and service sectors. CCL revenue is funding a 0.3 per cent. cut in the employers' rate of National Insurance contributions, and £150 million of additional support for energy efficient measures.

Market-sensitive Information

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the guidelines on the timing of release of market-sensitive information contained in decisions by Government Departments. [8392]

Ruth Kelly: Guidelines on the release of market-sensitive information contained in decisions by Government Departments are contained in the Government Information and Communication Service (GICS) Handbook published by the GICS Development Centre in the Cabinet Office.

Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library details of meetings between Ministers in his Department and outside groups since 7 June in the form specified in paragraph 63 of the July 2001 Code of Conduct and Guidance on Procedures for Ministers. [8132]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers meet a wide range of individuals and organisations in carrying out their official duties. The arrangements for all such meetings are fully in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

Compliance Costs Research Programme

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on *(a)* the progress and *(b)* expected timescale of the Inland Revenue and Customs Joint Compliance Costs Research Programme. [9738]

Dawn Primarolo: Last year, the Inland Revenue and Customs embarked on a research programme to measure the compliance cost of tax. The programme is expected to run for four years and will cover all direct and indirect taxes. Two contracts were awarded in September 2000 to undertake the first studies in the research programme. I have not seen the report so I cannot comment on the progress as yet.

Office for National Statistics

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Office for National Statistics performed against its key targets in 2000–01. [12145]

Ruth Kelly: The Office for National Statistics' performance is set out in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts which is being laid before Parliament today.

WORK AND PENSIONS

War Pensions

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what clarification was given on 24 November 2000 by DSS officials to representatives of the Association of British Civilian Internees Far East Region on the interpretation of which category of claimant could count as British in order to qualify for the ex gratia claims announced on 7 November 2000, following a meeting on 15 November between the DSS, the War Pensions Agency and other interested organisations. [11304]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

Through the latter part of November 2000, DSS officials were talking to representatives of ex-service organisations on a daily basis.

While there is no specific record of contact with the Association of British Civilian Internees Far East Region on 24 November 2000, the advice being given at that time

was that to be eligible for the ex-gratia payment civilian claimants must have been British at the time of internment.

Benefit Fraud (Highland District Council)

Mr. Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Highland district council. [12220]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report was published today in respect of Highland district council and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Inspectors found that despite covering the largest geographical area of any council in the UK, the council was effective at promoting the take-up of benefit and provided access to advice on HB and CTB through a number of local outlets.

Although benefit claims were processed on time, inspectors consider the council's claim form was poor and its approach to verification was inconsistent, resulting in serious implications for the security of the benefits gateway. The report notes the council intended to phase in the Verification Framework from April 2001 and also agreed to revise its claim form.

Inspectors consider one of the underlying problems was the council's failure to manage benefits, particularly the lack of a senior manager with direct responsibility for HB and CTB. The report notes that addressing this failure is fundamental to facilitating improvements and successfully implementing BFI's recommendations.

Inspectors found limited counter-fraud activity, with no procedures in place with the procurator fiscal to effectively pursue prosecutions nor to offer administrative penalties. Insufficient staff were allocated to the counter-fraud team. Investigation work was in arrears and some investigations had not been fully completed. BFI considers one third of the council's Weekly Benefit Savings claims were incorrect.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as its counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Department of Social Security

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to phase out references to the Department of Social Security *(a)* on printed materials and *(b)* on the internet. [11309]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: References to the former Department of Social Security are being replaced on printer materials when a reprint becomes due, to avoid unnecessary wastage and costs.

All the Department's internet sites are in the process of being updated with the new corporate identity. Former DSS sites will be maintained for a period of time in order to redirect users to the new site.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to advise small businesses of their present and future obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended. [11320]

Maria Eagle: Our "See the Person" national disability advertising campaign in 1999 and "What have you got to offer?" in autumn 2000 encouraged small businesses to consider reasonable adjustments to improve access for disabled people. A further campaign is planned for early next year.

We continue to work with partners such as the Small Business Service, the DRC and Equality Direct to identify advice and information that meets business needs.

There are also Codes of Practice available giving practical advice to employers, service providers and trade organisations about how to meet their duties under the DDA and a range of free, explanatory leaflets.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his most recent estimate is of the number of *(a)* bogus and *(b)* surplus national insurance numbers. [7469]

Malcolm Wicks: To date, 2,009 applications made for NINOs have been made using false identity documentation.

Duplicate NINOs are removed from the DCI as and when they are identified. Where it is discovered that a customer has two NINOs, one is deleted and this is noted on the remaining account. These cases are generally spotted by field officers and rarely involve fraudulent activity. Of the 205,000 surplus duplicate records removed from the DCI between November 1995 and March 2001, only 10 cases were potentially fraudulent.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of companies under the regulations introduced on 8 October that *(a)* are obliged to provide and *(b)* have so far failed to offer access to a stakeholder scheme. [7576]

Mr. McCartney: The latest estimate of the number of employers obliged to provide employees with access to a stakeholder pension scheme is between 350,000 and 400,000. By the end of August 2001, pensions industry figures showed 146,950 employers had designated a scheme. Figures showing designations since then are not yet available.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what arrangements he is making to monitor employers' compliance with their obligation to designate stakeholder pension schemes. [11316]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 180W.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what avenues of redress are available to individual employees where their employer has failed to meet the deadline for designation of a stakeholder pension scheme. [11315]

Mr. McCartney: An employee who considers that their employer should have provided staff access to a stakeholder pension scheme but has not done so may raise the matter directly with their employer or through their trade union official or other recognised staff representative. Should this not resolve the issue the matter may then be reported to the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) who will investigate.

Child Support Maintenance

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment framework is employed by the Child Support Agency to decide the level of a working non-resident parent's child maintenance contributions. [7586]

Malcolm Wicks: Currently, the amount of child maintenance a non-resident parent is required to pay is calculated in accordance with a formula set out in the Child Support Act 1991 and the Maintenance Assessment and Special Cases Regulations. The formula takes account of both parents' ability to maintain their children. Both parents' incomes and essential living expenses are considered and it can take up to 100 pieces of information to assess maintenance.

From April 2002, a much simpler maintenance calculation will be used, based on percentage rates of the non-resident parent's net income (15 per cent. for one child, 20 per cent. for two children and 25 per cent. for three or more children). The rates will be reduced for non-resident parents on low incomes, for those who share the care of qualifying children and for those with children (including stepchildren) in a second family.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if existing cases will be given priority in the implementation of the Child Support Agency reforms. [11573]

Malcolm Wicks: Changes to the child support scheme will take effect for new cases from April 2002. Existing cases will be transferred to the new scheme as soon as we are confident that it is working well for new cases.

Fraud Buster Computer System

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the Fraud Buster computer system. [8971]

Malcolm Wicks: Over the three years 2001 to 2004, we are investing £2 billion in transforming the delivery of services to make better use of technology and reduce the amount of fraud and error in the system. We are tightening up the benefit system and making sure that from the very first claim, the right benefits are going to the right people. However, the Department does not have a system known as "the Fraud Buster computer system".

Pension Provision Group

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Government will publish the revised reports from the Pension Provision Group on *(a)* pension provision for self-employed people and *(b)* the impact on pensions of changes in the labour market. [9811]

Mr. McCartney: The reports will be ready for publication later in the year.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his most recent estimate is of the level of housing benefit fraud. [10460]

Malcolm Wicks: The latest estimate for the monetary value of fraud and error in housing benefit was published in the report "National Housing Benefit Accuracy Review 97/98" which is in the Library. In April this year we set up the housing benefit review which will deliver an on-going measurement of fraud and error in housing benefit.

Preserved Rights (Residential Homes)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 834W, on preserved rights, what estimate he has made of the number of residents ordinarily resident in each local authority *(a)* in nursing homes aged (i) under 65 and (ii) over 65 and *(b)* in residential care homes aged (1) under 65 and (2) over 65 as at (A) 1 April 2001, (B) 2002 and (C) 2003. [11471]

Mr. McCartney: We have recently surveyed local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales and have estimated the number of preserved rights residents for which each local authority will become responsible on 8 April 2002. The estimates cross-classify residents by age and type of home. The information has been placed in the Library and is also available on the Department of Health website.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates (Leeds)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates in the Leeds district currently serve on the present petty sessional area benches; and for each of those PSA benches how many reside in the areas served by those benches. [10292]

Mr. Wills: The Advisory Committee has provided the figures requested on the numbers of magistrates on the four benches covered by the Leeds Advisory Committee. They are set out in the table. By statute, magistrates must live in the commission area in which they serve or within

15 miles of its boundaries. There is no requirement for them to live in the petty sessional area to which they are assigned.

Number of magistrates in the Leeds area

Petty sessional area	*Number of magistrates*	*Number living within the petty sessional area*
Leeds	309	204
Morley	22	20
Pudsey and Otley	33	31
Skyrack and Wetherby	48	41
Total	412	296

Jury Rooms (Smoking Ban)

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will *(a)* introduce and *(b)* enforce a smoking ban in jury rooms within the Courts Service. [11139]

Mr. Wills: Court managers currently have the discretion to introduce a non-smoking policy in communal jury areas wherever the accommodation allows for a separate, well-ventilated smoking area to be provided nearby.

Jury retiring rooms are used whenever a jury is considering a verdict. During this time jurors are not allowed to come into contact with anyone outside the retiring room and resource constraints mean it is not always possible to provide a separate dedicated smoking facility for each retiring room, although smokers are asked to consider the comfort of their fellow jurors while in the retiring rooms. The often stressful nature of deliberation means that it is neither feasible to introduce nor possible to enforce a ban in these rooms.

There are currently no proposals to change existing arrangements or policy in respect of jury rooms.

Libra Project

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of magistrates courts are operating the office automation element of the Libra project in parallel with legacy systems. [10253]

Mr. Wills: There are currently 16 magistrates courts committees (MCC) out of a total of 42 that are the operating the office automation (OA) element of the Libra project. In addition, about half of Greater London is operating the service. All of these MCCs operate legacy systems in parallel, as legacy systems will not be replaced until the new Libra software is available to run over the OA infrastructure. Deployment of the service is currently under way in a further two MCCs.

Extradition Costs

Mr. Maples: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the total cost to public funds to date of *(a)* legal aid and *(b)* Government legal costs in the extradition cases of (i) Ibrahim Hussein Abdul Hadi Eidarous, (ii) Khalid A. Fawwaz and Adil Muhammad, (iii) Abdul al-Majid Bari and (iv) Rachid Rausda. [10482]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In the case of *(a)* the legal aid costs recorded to date by the Legal Services Commission relating to criminal and civil proceedings connected with extradition have been:

(i) Ibrahim Eiderous—£107,416

(ii) Khalid Al Fawwaz—£157,077

(iii) Abdel Muhammad Abdul Al Magid Abdelbary—£164,432

(iv) Rachid Ramda—£20,456

Not all work has yet been billed and assessed.

In the case of *(b)* the costs of the cases for Messrs. Eidarous, Bari and Fawwaz have been a total of £16,500 in counsel fees and for Mr. Ramda £15,000 in counsel fees. Further bills are expected.

Judicial Appointments Report

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will publish the Third Judicial Appointments annual report. [11721]

Mr. Wills: The Judicial Appointments annual report, covering the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, was published yesterday. The report includes comprehensive narrative descriptions together with statistics on appointments to the judiciary, Queen's Counsel, Lay Magistrates and General Commissioners of Income Tax. It also includes information on the Lord Chancellor's appointments policies and procedures; on the progress in implementing Sir Leonard Peach's recommendations, such as the appointment of the First Commissioner for Judicial Appointments. Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The report is also available on the following website address: http://www.lcd.gov.uk.

Court Service Review

Helen Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will begin the quinquennial review of the Court Service. [11750]

Mr. Wills: I yesterday formally launched the first review of the Court Service which was established as an executive agency in April 1995. The terms of reference have been agreed and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Lord Chancellor's Department would like to hear from those who wish to contribute to the review. It is intended that the review should be completed by spring 2002.

Medical Records

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to keep under review the fee for individuals to gain access to their medical records under the Data Protection Act 1998. [11749]

Mr. Wills: The maximum fee for subject access to medical records held in computerised form is £10. For the time being, the Data Protection (Subject Access) (Fees and Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations 2001 maintain at £50 the maximum fee for subject access to medical records held in other forms. The Government believe that, in the light of current technology and record-keeping practice, the £50 maximum strikes the proper balance between ensuring that cost is not a barrier

to subject access and avoiding the diversion of resources from patient care. The Government are committed to working with the Information Commissioner, in consultation with other key interests, with the aim of finding a long-term solution.

Trials (Magistrates Courts)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates court trials scheduled to be heard on a particular day in England and Wales between January and July had to be rescheduled because the prosecution police witness failed to attend. [10956]

Mr. Wills: Information is not collected nationally on adjournments and rescheduling, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, in a pilot study run in nine of the 42 magistrates courts committee areas between 2 April and 29 June 2001, 6,267 trials were listed. Of those, 1,176 trials were ineffective for a variety of reasons, 81 of which were as a result of a prosecution police witness failing to attend. An ineffective trial is defined as:

"On the trial date expected progress is not made due to action or inaction by one or more of the prosecution, the defence or the court, and a further listing for trial is required".

Mr. Watson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many trials in magistrates courts in England and Wales were rescheduled from the original date between January and July. [10955]

Mr. Wills: Information is not collected on adjournments and rescheduling, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many trials were heard by magistrates courts in England and Wales between January and July. [10957]

Mr. Wills: In the period between January 2001 and June 2001 a total of 27,444 cases brought by the Crown Prosecution Service were contested in the magistrates courts, compared to 29,030 in the same period in 2000 and 31,857 in 1999. A contest is defined as

'a case that has proceeded to trial against a defendant on at least one either-way or summary charge'.

The figure includes both cases in which a defendant has entered some guilty pleas to charges before the court and no guilty pleas.[1]

No figure is available for cases prosecuted by other agencies.

[1] *Source:*

CPS Caseload Statistics

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department has recorded in 2000 and 2001; and on how many occasions in 2000 and 2001 computer systems in his Department have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [11003]

Mr. Wills: The number of cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft recorded by the Lord Chancellor's Department is as follows:

	2000	*2001*
Computer		
(a) Hacking	2	2
(b) Fraud	0	0
(c) Theft	11	12
Illegal access by computer hackers		
(a) Within	0	1
(b) Outside	2	1

No protectively marked information was lost in the incidents of theft and the hacking incidents caused no damage to the departmental computer systems.

Magistrates Courts Service Annual Report

Geraint Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will publish the annual report of the chief inspector of the magistrates courts service; and if he will make a statement. [12013]

Mr. Wills: Copies of the chief inspector's annual report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The chief inspector's report describes the work of the Inspectorate over the past year and reports some of its principal findings. Magistrates courts committees (MCCs) are seen to have made improvements in many areas. In particular, the co-operation between the courts, police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) at an operational level, has strengthened further. The progress made on the operation of the 'Narey' reforms aimed at reducing delay in the magistrates courts and the Government's pledge to reduce the time taken to deal with persistent young offenders are examples of the benefits of close working.

There have been advances made in the collection of performance information, and in the way it is represented to the MCC, but effective analysis of this information remains a weakness for a number of MCCs. This is in spite of the situation being highlighted in last year's report. MCCs are, however, demonstrating a better awareness of the need to provide the strategic direction and of leaving operational matters to their officers.

WALES

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his Department; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current comprehensive spending review; and if he will make a statement. [10842]

Mr. Paul Murphy: A summary of my Department's asset holdings is given in the National Asset Register (Cm 5221, July 2001). Since it was established on 1 July 1999, the Wales Office has made no significant disposal of assets and has no plans to do so.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action his Department took in recognition of energy efficiency week. [11518]

Mr. Touhig: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 592W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Hooliganism

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what further measures are to be initiated to help prevent violence and hooliganism at sporting events. [9986]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

Apart from the Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill, which is undergoing parliamentary scrutiny, no relevant legislation is currently proposed. An extensive range of specific legislative measures is in place for tackling violence and disorder at football matches while general public order and other provisions are available for dealing with the much lower levels of disorder experienced at other sporting events. Legislation alone will not eradicate violence and hooliganism. That is why the Government are committed to monitoring implementation of the 55 recommendations contained in the Working Group on Football Disorder report, published in March, and to helping the relevant authorities take forward the recommendations on crowd management contained in the Cricket Disorder Review Group report, published in September.

Manchester Commonwealth Games

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the work of the Ministerial Group on the Manchester Commonwealth Games. [9307]

Mr. Caborn: Following the election the ad hoc Ministerial Group on the Commonwealth Games was reconstituted as a formal Cabinet Committee, MISC 15, under the joint chairmanship of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Minister for the Cabinet Office. Its terms of reference are

"to consider option and policies for the Government's approach towards the Manchester Commonwealth Games 2002".

MISC 15 will meet as business arises.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much public money has been spent in each of the last five years to construct the necessary facilities, transport networks and accommodation in connection with the Manchester Commonwealth Games. [9463]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* The information is as follows.

£ million

Capital expenditure	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*Total*
City of Manchester Stadium	0.5	0.4	3.3	12.9	41.9	59.0
English Institute of Sport	—	—	0.1	0.2	1.3	1.6
Manchester Acquatics Centre	0.6	3.3	11.4	11.8	5.2	32.3
Heaton Park Bowling Greens	—	—	—	—	0.4	0.4
Bisley	—	—	—	—	5.6	5.6
Bolton Arena	—	—	1.25	1.5	7.1	9.85

The table shows public expenditure over the last five financial years on venues primarily constructed for the Commonwealth Games. The expenditure is made up of funds from Manchester City Council and/or Sport England. To date no public money has been incurred on Games accommodation or on transport networks.

Picketts Lock

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if Her Majesty's Government will recompense the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority for the costs it incurred in respect of the athletics stadium at Picketts Lock; and if she will make a statement. [10151]

Mr. Caborn: Ann Roberts, the Chair of the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 12 October about this. We will give very careful consideration to her letter.

Athletics Facilities

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will discuss with Scottish Ministers the locating of national athletics facilities for the United Kingdom in Scotland. [10149]

Mr. Caborn: The question of whether there should be national athletics facilities needs to be determined by UK Athletics' own long-term strategic objectives. A long term development plan for athletics in this country is being developed by UK Athletics in discussion with Sport England and my Department.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what stadiums there are in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* London capable of holding international athletics events under the auspices of the IAAF. [11018]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The IAAF have a variety of different international track, road, indoor and cross country events with different technical requirements. Four stadiums have hosted the IAAF Grand Prix and the AAA National Championships in recent years: London—Crystal Palace; Birmingham—Alexander Stadium; Sheffield—Don Valley; and Gateshead—the

Gateshead Stadium. None of the venues is currently able to host the IAAF World Athletics Championships, however the Don Valley Stadium is fully capable of being converted to World Championships standard.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of United Kingdom sports medicine provision for international athletics; and if she will make a statement. [11021]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The UK Sports Institute (UKSI) is currently setting up a network of world class facilities and services to elite athletes. There will be centres in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and a network of regional centres in England. Each centre will provide state of the art sports science and medicine facilities.

The Government, through UK Sport and Sport England, continue to fund the work of the National Sports Medicine Institute (NSMI). The Institute promotes good medical practice in the treatment of athletes at all levels, including adequate preparation for events and the importance of a sound diet for optimum health and performance.

In addition, the UKSI and NSMI work closely with the British Olympic Medical Centre (BOMC), based at Northwick Park Hospital in Harrow, on co-ordination and delivery of sports medicine and science services for elite athletes in the UK.

Following a monitoring report on their World Class Performance Plan, published at the start of 2001, and subsequent joint work between UK Athletics and UK Sport, UK Athletics commissioned an independent review of its sports medicine provision. Dr. Ken Fitch, who has undertaken significant reviews across the world, including the Australian Institute of Sport, was responsible for the review. The Minister for Sport recently met with UK Athletics and Dr. Fitch to discuss sports medicine provision for international athletics.

UK Athletics have just received Dr. Fitch's report and they will be putting together an action plan for the short, medium and long term to enhance their provision of sports medicine to athletes. The UKSI also contributed to the review and UK Sport will work in partnership with UK Athletics on the implementation of the review's recommendations.

Golden Jubilee

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received about plans for the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [9973]

Mr. Caborn: A number of representations have been received in support of widening the distribution of the Golden Jubilee commemorative medal to include other groups, particularly the police.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans her Department has made for the celebration of the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [9972]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the announcements made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 23 November 2000, and 22 June 2001. Also relevant is the joint Home Office and Ministry of Defence press notice of 15 February 2001, in which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the Golden Jubilee commemorative medal.

After taking on responsibility for the Golden Jubilee celebrations, I announced on 3 August 2001 details of the extended bank holiday 'Jubilee Weekend' over the period 1–4 June 2002. A copy of the press notice is in the Library of the House. The events include:

Saturday 1 June

Classical concert in Buckingham Palace Gardens.

Sunday 2 June

Jubilee church services and bell-ringing across the UK.

Monday 3 June

Pop concert in Buckingham Palace Gardens followed by beacon-lighting and firework display.

Tuesday 4 June

Ceremonial procession to St. Paul's and the National Service of Thanksgiving at St. Paul's (morning).

Lord Mayor of London hosts lunch at the Guildhall.

Golden Jubilee carnival pageant in the Mall (afternoon).

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to allow school children free tickets to the Commonwealth games to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [9998]

Mr. Caborn: The Commonwealth games are a commercial event, and the organisers have an imperative to sell all the available tickets. However, tickets for the games have been set at a level to ensure that people can afford them. Ticket prices start at £5 and over half of all tickets will be priced at £10 or less. Five events, the marathon, triathlon, walking, and mountain and road cycling will also be free.

Local school children will be taking part in the opening and closing ceremonies. Alongside the Commonwealth games the organisers, Manchester 2002 Ltd., are also organising the Sprit of Friendship Festival and Queen's Jubilee Baton Relay. These will offer a range of opportunities for school children to participate in the broader games programme and celebrate the Golden Jubilee.

Museum Attendance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the level of museum attendance was *(a)* last year, *(b)* this year and *(c)* projected for next year. [10186]

Dr. Howells: Total visitor attendance at those museums and galleries sponsored by my Department are as follows:

2000–01: 29.8 million actual outturn

2001–02: 27.6 million estimated outturn

2002–03: 29.7 million projected.

Attendances at museums throughout the UK are estimated to be over 77 million annually.

Olympic Games

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made

of the impact of the loss of the venue for hosting the World Athletics Championships on the future of an Olympic bid from the United Kingdom. [10180]

Mr. Caborn: The British Olympic Association has yet to decide whether to bid for the Olympic games in 2012, 2016 or later. My officials are currently discussing the prospects for such a bid based on London with the British Olympic Association, Greater London Authority, UK Sport and Sport England. Those discussions include the drafting of a consultancy proposal for a cost-benefit analysis of bidding for and, if successful, staging an Olympic games in London which would include an assessment of the chances of success of such a bid.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the cost to public funds of supporting a bid to host the 2012 Olympic games. [11023]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The British Olympic Association has yet to decide whether to bid for the 2012 Olympic games. My officials are currently discussing the prospects for such a bid based on London with the British Olympic Association, Greater London Authority, UK Sport and Sport England. Those discussions include the drafting of a consultancy proposal for a cost-benefit analysis of bidding for and, if successful, staging an Olympic games in London which would include an assessment of the costs to public as well as private funds.

Community Fund

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have to ensure equality among London boroughs for future distributions of awards by the Community Fund. [10228]

Mr. Caborn: The Government's commitment to ensuring that Lottery funding is fairly distributed is reflected in the changes made to Lottery distribution through the National Lottery Act 1998 and revised Policy Directions issued to distributors in the summer of 1998. Decisions concerning distribution of awards are a matter for the Community Fund.

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to recoup Government money invested in the Wembley National Stadium project. [10247]

Mr. Caborn: No exchequer funds have been committed to the National Stadium project. Sport England have provided a grant of £120 million to Wembley National Stadium Ltd. to secure the acquisition of the Wembley site and to take forward development work. Discussions are continuing between Patrick Carter, the Football Association and Sport England to determine the future direction of the project.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on Wembley stadium. [10539]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friends the Members for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) and Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) and the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1380W.

European Football Championships

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support she plans to give to Scotland's bid to host the 2008 European Football Championships. [10751]

Mr. Caborn: The possibility of a bid for Euro 2008 by Scotland is a matter for the SFA and the Scottish Executive. I will receive an update on bids to stage major sports events in Scotland at the next meeting of the Sports Cabinet on 31 October.

Football (Funding)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what financial support is provided through *(a)* Sport England, *(b)* UK Sport and *(c)* other Government funding sources to develop football at the grassroots. [10987]

Mr. Caborn: Football is the nation's most popular participation sport by far, and it is a priority for both the Government and Sport England to develop the sport at the grass roots. Sport England's funding for football has been channelled through the Football Foundation since July 2000. The Foundation received Lottery funding totalling £7 million from Sport England in 2000–01, and the majority of this went to funding the sport at the grass roots level. Children's and recreational football also benefits from substantial Sport England Lottery funding for multi-use capital projects, and the financial benefits to grass roots football cannot be quantified.

In addition, exchequer-funded grants from Sport England to the Football Association to fund work on grass roots development totalled £165,000 in 1998–99 and £144,000 in 1999–2000.

The primary role of UK Sport is to support elite sportsmen and women by funding the development of training and competition facilities, and the provision of high quality coaching. UK Sport does not fund grass roots development initiatives in any sport.

Sports Review

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what are the *(a)* terms, *(b)* timescale and *(c)* membership of the Performance and Innovation Unit review of how major sporting events are staged. [11022]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Details of the Performance and Innovation Unit review will be announced shortly.

BBC

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* black and *(b)* Asian governors there are on the BBC Board of Governors. [11433]

Dr. Howells: The BBC Board of Governors currently includes one black and one Asian member.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last discussed the ethnic breakdown of staff with the Director General of the BBC. [11432]

Dr. Howells: Decisions about recruitment of staff and equal opportunities are the responsibility of the BBC. I understand that the BBC has launched a number of managerial development schemes and training initiatives aimed at ensuring that 10 per cent. of BBC staff are from ethnic minorities by 2003.

Independent Commission on Gaming

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received from non-profit making private clubs on the proposals of the Independent Commission on Gaming; and how many of these expressed concern regarding the impact on their clubs if the Commission's proposals were implemented. [10817]

Mr. Caborn: We have received over 1,500 representations from such clubs, all expressing concern about the proposal by the Gambling Review Body that they should no longer be allowed to install jackpot gaming machines.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact on the financial viability of non-profit making private clubs of the proposals of the Independent Commission on Gaming. [10807]

Mr. Caborn: We shall make such an assessment, following the closure today of the consultation period on the report of the Gambling Review Body.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 1 November 2001

DEFENCE

Devolved Administrations

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is with regard to *(a)* Ministers And *(b)* officials in his Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly committees; and to what categories of document he gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (1) Scottish parliament, (2) Welsh Assembly, (3) Northern Ireland Assembly and (4) House of Commons Select committees. [7030]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1003–05W.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on bringing forward the programme for the new aircraft carriers. [8425]

Dr. Moonie: It would be imprudent to bring forward significantly the programme to build the two new aircraft carriers, especially given their size and complexity. Time spent now in assessing the developing designs, in step with decisions on the aircraft to be operated from the ships (including the Future Joint Combat Aircraft and the Future Organic Airborne Early Warning Aircraft) will allow us to optimise the design of the ship so that it best meets our future operational requirements. This assessment phase is due to complete in 2003, and the planned In Service Dates of the two carriers remain 2012 and 2015.

Shipbuilding

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what action his Department is taking to ensure sub-contracting work for the alternative ships logistics to be built on the Rivers Tyne and Clyde is awarded to United Kingdom companies; [R] [8131]

(2) what proportion of the contract value of the alternative landing ships logistics to be built by Swan Hunters on Tyneside will be placed with north-east companies; and if he will list all United Kingdom and overseas subcontractors scheduled to receive orders of £500,000 and above. [R] [8130]

Dr. Moonie: The Department's contract with Swan Hunter requires the company to maximise the use of competition when awarding sub-contracts for the build of the Alternative Landing Ships Logistic. However, the final choice of supplier must rest with Swan Hunter as the prime contractor. It is up to prospective UK suppliers to submit competitively priced bids to the prime contractor for equipment that meets the Ministry of Defence's requirements.

Swan Hunter has so far placed only a small number of sub-contracts. While Swan Hunter has indicated that most sub-contract work is likely to be placed with UK companies, it is too early to say how much work will be placed with companies in the north-east.

Negotiations are under way for the contract with BAE Systems Marine, Govan. The same conditions will apply to the sub-contract for the BAE Systems' vessel once a contract is agreed.

Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the development of the Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme; and if he will place a copy of an unclassified version in the Library. [10969]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 661W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Type 45 Frigates

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions the Government have undertaken with the United States regarding the possible use of type 45 frigates as part of the USA's plan to develop a missile defence to protect the US and its allies. [10966]

Mr. Hoon: None.

Light Armoured Vehicle

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the need for a light armoured vehicle for the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [11500]

Dr. Moonie: The lessons we have learned from recent operations have shown that the procurement priorities we set out in the Strategic Defence Review, and its overall focus, were broadly correct. We keep these priorities under review. As part of this we have considered the capability which can be offered by light armoured vehicles, and we assess that they will contribute importantly to our forces' ability to react rapidly to global events. I set out how we currently intend to deliver this capability in my answer to the hon. Member on 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 406W.

Swift Sword II

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if units have adequate fresh rations for the purposes of Swift Sword II; and if he will make a statement. [11504]

Mr. Hoon: All forces deployed on Saif Sareea II had adequate fresh rations. Rations were scaled to provide five days fresh and two days Operational Ration Packs (ORP) in each seven day period with the ORP being consumed during training phases. The provision of rations on the exercise has proved extremely efficient and feedback from the forces and unit commanders has been positive.

Future Carrier Programme

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make a down select decision on the Future Carrier Programme; and if he will make a statement. [11452]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* We are currently in discussions about the CVF procurement strategy with both candidate prime contractors, BAE Systems and Thales Naval Ltd. We hope to be in a position to make an announcement about the way forward in the next few weeks.

Afghanistan

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effects of the use of cluster bombs in Afghanistan; and how many of these have been used in the conflict. [11435]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Cluster bombs are the most effective weapon against certain targets and, while that remains the case, they will continue to be used in Afghanistan. As at 29 October, coalition forces had used cluster bombs against five targets: one terrorist camp and four Taliban military installations.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his most recent estimate is of the cost to the United Kingdom of the military action in Afghanistan; what estimate he has made of the weekly cost to the UK of *(a)* current and *(b)* planned deployment; and if he will make a statement. [11646]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 114W.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what modifications are required to be made to British helicopters in order to enable them to undertake operations in Afghan air space. [11039]

Mr. Hoon: Equipment deployed by UK armed forces on operations is modified as necessary to perform in the environment in which it is used.

Hawk Aircraft

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the sale of Hawk aircraft to India; when he expects contracts to be signed; what other medium to long-term prospects he has identified for overseas sales of Hawk aircraft; and what discussions he has had with BAE Systems at Brough on the implications for employment at the plant of sales of Hawk aircraft. [11570]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 29 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 626, to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). Progress with commercial negotiations is a matter for the company and the Indian Government. The Ministry of Defence maintains contact with BAE Systems on employment at Brough relating to sales of Hawk. The Government will continue to support BAE Systems in whatever way we can with the promotion of this first class aircraft in appropriate markets.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to advancing an order for Hawk 127s as part of the RAF's Military Flying Training System. [11571]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* We are closely examining our future flying training needs with a view to putting in place a system that will meet the needs of all three Services. We will give full consideration to purchasing Hawk 127 but this will be part of an analysis of all available options.

Body Armour

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much Kevlar is stocked by British manufacturers of body armour; where Kevlar is manufactured; and if he will make a statement. [11569]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Kevlar is a Dupont Commercial brand name for one product line associated with the Aramid family of materials. Information on the total quantity of Aramid materials held commercially is not available to the Ministry of Defence as the companies concerned consider it Commercial in Confidence. Recent inquiries of these firms have however, indicated that they have sufficient stocks available to meet the MOD's requirements.

Kevlar supplied to British manufacturers of body armour is manufactured by Dupont at their facility in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the tendering companies for body armour are British-based. [11567]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* On the last tender exercise for body armour, all of the five companies invited to tender were British-based.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if body armour can be constructed of materials other than Kevlar. [11568]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Yes. Kevlar is a Dupont commercial brand name for one product line of the Aramid family of materials. Other manufacturing companies make their own Aramid fibres, for instance Twaron. Materials other than Aramids can be used for ballistic protection but have cost, weight and/or bulk limitations, which could affect individual performance.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many suits of body armour are on order by his Department; and what estimate he has made of the need for body armour in view of land operations in Afghanistan. [11565]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* There are no orders currently outstanding for body armour within the Department. There are currently sufficient stocks of body armour available to meet current planned deployments.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tenders are open for the supply of body armour; when they will be concluded; and how many companies he expects to tender. [11566]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* One tender exercise is currently on-going for the supply of a sample quantity of body armour fillers and plates. Once these samples have been evaluated, Invitations to Tender will be issued to up to five UK-based companies within the next month.

Eurofighter Typhoon

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how he will provide the cockpit training environment needed to train pilots for the Eurofighter Typhoon. [11572]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* We intend that pilots should undertake both simulated training, provided as part of the Eurofighter Aircrew Synthetic Training Aids (ASTA) project, and live airborne training in two-seat and single-seat Eurofighter aircraft. A single source collaborative development, production and in-service support contract for ASTA was placed in April this year with Eurofighter GmbH, who will also provide the aircraft to be used for training.

FADEC System

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was *(a)* the mean time between failure rate of the FADEC system on the Chinook Mk2 in its first year of operational service and *(b)* the target figure agreed with the manufacturer; if his Department's contract with Textron Lycoming included a reliability warranty for the FADEC system; if this was met; and if he will make a statement. [11779]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ministry of Defence Police

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* the reasons for and *(b)* the circumstances relating to the departure of the deputy head of the Ministry of Defence Police. [11766]

Dr. Moonie: The contract of Mr. Tony Comben as Deputy Chief Constable of the Ministry of Defence Police was terminated on Wednesday 24 October 2001. I am withholding the reasons for his departure under Exemption 8 (Public Employment) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Mr. Comben's departure was completely unrelated to complaints against him from members of the public, currently being investigated.

Combat Effectiveness Gender Study

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Combat Effectiveness Gender Study will be published. [11746]

Mr. Hoon: I am currently considering the conclusions of a review on the employment of women in the armed forces and will make a further statement in due course.

Departmental Staff

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the number of staff employed by his Department by region and nation of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [6828]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 15 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 1009–12W to the Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart).

Porton Down

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what biological or biologically derived samples have been supplied by the Defence and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down to *(a)* USA, *(b)* France, *(c)* Belgium, *(d)* Sweden, *(e)* Australia, *(f)* Germany, *(g)* Austria, *(h)* Spain, *(i)* Netherlands, *(j)* Norway, *(k)* Italy, *(l)* Japan and *(m)* Canada since 1990. [11502]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1990 the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down has supplied in excess of one hundred biological or biologically derived materials to these countries for medical and veterinary research purposes.

The majority of this material has been supplied under International Collaboration Research agreements relating to biological detection capability and potential medical countermeasures. However, it would not be appropriate to publish a list of the biological material supplied to these countries as this could reveal operational capabilities and deficiencies. I am therefore withholding this information in the interests of National Security under category 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Batch Two Frigates

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the costings are for the Romanian acquisition of the two ex-Royal Navy 22 Batch Two frigates; how much the reactivation, refits training and long-term support package will cost; and if he will make a statement. [11782]

Dr. Moonie: Negotiations concerning the disposal of ex-Ministry of Defence equipment involve matters of commercial and customer confidentiality. I am therefore withholding the information under Exemption 1 and 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Cluster Bombs

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to recommend a ban on the manufacture of cluster bombs by UK companies. [11884]

Mr. Hoon: There are no plans to recommend a ban on the manufacture of cluster bombs by UK companies.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Yeovil on 20 July [ref. 422]. [9960]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development replied to the hon. Member in her letter dated 1 October; a copy was placed in the Library of the House.

Cheap Medicines

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations *(a)* her Department made to the Department of Trade and Industry and *(b)* she will make to the WTO Summit on providing developing countries with access to cheap medicines. [11465]

Clare Short: We work closely with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) among others on access to medicines. The UK Government are working with the European Union and others to ensure that the WTO's existing rules on intellectual property help developing countries gain access to medicine. This means making sure that new medicines are developed while at the same time allowing developing countries to take appropriate measures to protect public health in national emergencies.

Intellectual property rights need to be part of wider action to address the problems facing developing countries in developing effective healthcare to all their citizens. That is why the UK strongly supports the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria and why the Prime Minister asked me to form a high level working group to report back by May 2002 on what else needs to be done. On 8 October, I chaired the first meeting of the high level working group on access to medicines, at which Government Ministers and officials—including representatives from DTI—met with a range of key stakeholders to look at ways of increasing research and development into the diseases of the poor.

The UK supports the development of a meaningful declaration on this issue at the Doha ministerial conference, which should affirm and clarify flexibilities within the TRIPS Agreement to allow developing countries to protect their public health needs.

Devolved Administrations

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is with regard to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly committees; and to what categories of document she gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (1) Scottish parliament, (2) Welsh Assembly, (3) Northern Ireland Assembly and (4) House of Commons Select committees. [7033]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, *Official Report,* 15 October 2001, column 1003W.

World Trade Organisation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will urge the WTO to commit itself to achieving the international development targets at the next round of WTO negotiations. [11150]

Clare Short: The UK Government believe that the WTO should commit itself to achieving the international development targets. This would send a strong message that the WTO is part of the fight against poverty and that its promotion of trade liberalisation is a means for development, rather than an end in itself.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proposal the United Kingdom Government plans to make at the next multilateral round of WTO negotiations to ensure that it is a development round. [11479]

Clare Short: The UK Government are committed to pushing for a development round of trade negotiations at the WTO, to be launched at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, 9 to 13 November. This should bring substantial benefits to developing countries, particularly by increasing their access to markets for products of interest to them, such as agriculture and textiles. We are pushing for an agenda for the negotiations that will satisfy the varying needs of developing countries. Once such a round is launched we will continue to work hard for an outcome that will benefit the poor in developing countries.

Sudan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on food security in southern Sudan for the next six months. [11159]

Clare Short: It is harvest time now in southern Sudan. Present indications for the next six months throughout most of the area look better than in some previous years. We will continue to monitor needs and respond accordingly.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to visit southern Sudan. [11158]

Clare Short: I am considering a visit to Sudan if it will help encourage progress towards peace.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many companies have registered to be learning providers under the Individual Learning Account scheme. [9685]

John Healey: In England, 8,504 learning providers are currently registered with the Individual Learning Account Centre.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the proportion of state secondary schools which will be specialist schools by the end of 2003; and if she will make a statement. [11475]

Mr. Timms: By September 2003 we expect there to be at least 1,000 operational specialist schools. This will take the proportion of maintained secondary schools which have specialist designation to 32 per cent. By 2005 we plan for at least 46 per cent. of secondary schools to have specialist status. Over time we want to ensure that all

maintained secondary schools which want to and are ready have the opportunity to become a specialist school as part of their strategy for school improvement.

Post-16 Students

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements have been made to ensure that schools with post-16 students do not lose income as a result of the Learning and Skills Council taking control of funding in 2002. [8846]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action her Department took in recognition of Energy Efficiency Week. [11511]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 592W. As Energy Efficiency Week was aimed primarily at domestic energy use, and its environmental impact, no additional action was taken in recognition of the week. The Department does, of course, have a well-established and on-going commitment to energy efficiency across all its activities.

Communities Projects

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps her Department plans to take to ensure community access is maximised in respect of wired up communities projects. [11207]

John Healey: We are piloting the wired up communities initiative in 14,000 households in seven areas across England, including inner city, rural and coalfield communities. An evaluation report on this pilot phase is due to be published in spring 2002. Findings will be carefully considered before any decisions are made on how best to maximise community access to ICT. However, our existing policies also mean that by the end of 2002 there will be 6,000 UK online centres—including 3,000 public libraries—operating across England to provide widespread community access to ICT facilities.

School Performance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what percentage of students achieved five A to C grades at GCSE in each local education authority in England in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and what the percentage change in performance was in each case; [10936]

(2) if she will list the schools in England where the percentage of students achieving fewer than five grades A to C was less than 25 per cent. in 2001; and for each school, *(a)* the percentage change in performance compared with 2000 and *(b)* the local education authority in which the school was situated. [10937]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department will publish 2001 GCSE (and GNVQ equivalent) results for each local education authority in England in a statistical first release on 20 November and data for schools in England in the secondary school performance tables on 22 November. I will then write to my hon. Friend with the information he seeks and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Credits Guarantee Department

12. **Mr. McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the changes which have taken place within the export credit guarantee arrangements in the last four years. [9560]

Nigel Griffiths: The role of the Export Credits Guarantee Department, the UK's official export credit agency, was recently reviewed. Work on implementing the findings of the Mission and Status Review Report, presented to Parliament in July 2000, is currently well under way.

The Review strongly reaffirmed ECGD's primary role in bringing economic benefit to the UK by helping UK exporters and investors to win valuable business abroad.

It also set out an important agenda for change to ensure that ECGD works to help Government meet their international objectives, including those of sustainable development, human rights and good governance.

Energy Needs

14. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's submission to the performance and innovation unit's review of future energy needs. [9563]

Mr. Wilson: My Department submitted an initial contribution to the PIU's Energy Policy Review on 1 August. The submission represented officials' preliminary analysis of some of the key issues that PIU will need to consider during their review. Its purpose was to stimulate debate about energy policy issues.

Fixed Term Contracts Directive

15. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy on implementation of the EU fixed term contracts directive. [9564]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government held a public consultation early this year on the implementation of the fixed term directive and the responses received are currently being considered. The directive is due to be implemented by 10 July 2002.

Equal Pay

16. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action her Department is taking to reduce the pay gap between men and women. [9565]

Ms Hewitt: Denise Kingsmill's review of Women's Employment and Pay will be reporting very shortly, and we look forward to discussing her findings at a December conference. Government Departments are reviewing their

pay systems and we are promoting action in local government. The Equal Opportunity Commission's model for voluntary pay reviews will also soon be available.

Universities and Business

17. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage co-operation between universities and the business community. [9566]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's "Excellence and Opportunity" White Paper, published last July, set out a comprehensive range of actions to strengthen links between business and universities. Over £100 million has recently been awarded to Higher Education Institutions under these measures.

Sole Trader Businesses

18. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what help she makes available for a person who wishes to start a business as a sole trader. [9568]

Nigel Griffiths: This Government are committed to promoting enterprise across society by increasing the number and quality of business start-ups.

This is focused at a local level through the Small Business Service's Business Link network, which provides a comprehensive package of tailored high quality business support to meet the needs of all small businesses in their areas, including to those starting a business as a sole trader.

Anti-discrimination Legislation

19. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will introduce anti-discrimination legislation required by the EU directives. [9569]

Ms Hewitt: We shall introduce new anti-discrimination legislation in time to meet the deadlines which we agreed in the Employment Directive: namely, 2003 for sexual orientation and religion; and 2006 for age.

I am considering with colleagues across Government how best to introduce legislation on these issues while fulfilling our commitments on existing legislation on race, disability and sex discrimination. We shall publish a consultation document about our plans for new legislation within the next three months.

Miners' Compensation

20. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the miners' compensation scheme. [9570]

Mr. Wilson: In total, more than £600 million has now been paid out. Progress on Vibration White Finger has been maintained, and there are clear signs of progress on respiratory disease. Well over 1,000 medical assessments are now being carried out each week. We expect to see the number of full and final offers increasing sharply over the next few weeks. I recognise the need for constant vigilance to ensure that improvements are sustained.

22. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of miners' compensation claimants have received interim payments. [9572]

Mr. Wilson: As at 14 October the Department has made 40,000 interim payments to respiratory disease claimants, and 40,000 to Vibration White Finger claimants. However, the Department is not able to quote these as a percentage of claimants as some claimants may have received more than one payment.

27. **Mr. Kevan Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress being made in processing miners' compensation claims. [9577]

35. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress of the miners' health compensation scheme. [9586]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 997.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many retired coal miners in each of the last five years died before industrial illness compensation was paid to them. [8508]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The number of coal miners whose date of death is after their date of claim, and who have not received any compensation, including interim payments, for respiratory disease is broken down as follows:

	Number of claimants who have not received any compensation for respiratory disease
1997	209
1998	805
1999	1,377
2000	1,486
2001	1,255

Renewable Energy

21. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further action she is taking to promote renewable energy. [9571]

Mr. Wilson: We are about to introduce the Renewables Obligation which will provide a substantial long-term incentive to the renewable energy sector as a whole with the potential to create a market worth over £1 billion per annum by 2010. We are backing up our commitment to the Obligation with additional initiatives worth over £260 million over this and the next two financial years.

Competitiveness

23. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to ensure the future competitiveness of British manufacturing industry. [9573]

Ms Hewitt: The favourable macroeconomic framework the Government have established, together with our policies to foster productivity and help firms innovate and grow, are the best way to ensure the future competitiveness of the UK manufacturing sector.

Glas Cymru

24. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the potential of Glas Cymru to be a model for social enterprise. [9574]

Ms Hewitt: My Department's Social Enterprise Unit, launched last month, will be examining a wide range of potential models for successful social enterprises.

Textile Industry

25. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance her Department is giving the textile sector. [9575]

Ms Hewitt: My Department provides considerable financial and other assistance to the Textile and Clothing Industry. The focus for much of this assistance is the priorities identified by the industry itself in the report of the Textile and Clothing Strategy Group, "A National Strategy for the UK Textile and Clothing Industry", which was published in June 2000. Current priorities include support for the development of innovative technical textiles, the supply chain, the fashion industry, training and skills, e-commerce, and public procurement.

Competitiveness (North-West)

29. **Helen Southworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action her Department has taken to support the regional economic competitiveness of the north-west after 11 September. [9579]

Ms Hewitt: The North West Development Agency is preparing a report assessing the impact of the events of 11 September and its aftermath on the economy of the region and identifying what needs to be done. The events underline the importance of existing programmes of advice and assistance, and the urgency of the review of the Department of Trade and Industry's business support activities that I initiated earlier this year.

Post Office Closures

30. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices have closed since April. [9580]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 15 October 2001, *Official report*, column 986W.

Small Business

31. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support she gives to small businesses. [9581]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government provide a wide range of help for small businesses, including support from the Small Business Service, which, through its national network of Business Link Operators provides information, advice, or access to experts on just about everything needed to start and run a business.

Services include business planning, finance, regulation, marketing, exporting, employment issues, training and development, innovation, design and ICT and E-commerce.

Broadband

32. **Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures the Government have taken to expand broadband cabling at competitive rates in Wales. [9583]

Mr. Alexander: The Government are working to ensure that broadband services are available in all parts of the country. To this end we are developing a strategy together with all interested parties. The £30 million fund for regional development agencies and the devolved Administrations is focused on extending broadband networks to those who are not offered access by the market, including in rural areas. In Wales, the National Assembly is carrying forward its own work on broadband in rural areas with our support and assistance. The Assembly First Minister made an announcement on 24 October regarding, investment to speed roll-out in the public sector.

In addition, we are examining the scope for aggregating public sector demand in order to speed up the roll-out of broadband services.

Rural Post Offices

33. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for improving the rural post office network. [9584]

Mr. Alexander: The Government are committed to providing transitional financial assistance to rural post offices and decisions on this will be taken following advice from the Postal Services Commission which is expected later in the autumn. In addition, implementation of the Performance and Innovation Unit recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Government, will help to modernise and sustain the whole post office network. We have made available a £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where traditional services would otherwise close.

Manufacturing

34. **Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what additional measures she plans to take to assist manufacturing industry. [9585]

Ms Hewitt: My Department's support for manufacturing is wide-ranging; from schemes to encourage innovation and collaboration with the science base, to work with specific sectors on targeted programmes to enhance their competitiveness, to exporting services and regional and local support. I am strengthening assistance to manufacturing industry through our increased support for the regional development agencies to raise innovation, enterprise and skills. We are taking forward our announced initiative to provide a manufacturing advisory service, based on provision of services on a regional basis. We are also introducing measures to help workers develop their skills and increase their prospects of finding new employment if they lose their jobs.

Embedded Generation Working Group

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the function of the Embedded Generation Working Group is. [9562]

Mr. Wilson: The Embedded Generation Working Group provided advice about access for small generators to distribution networks. It made its final report in June.

Ofgem is presently consulting on regulatory issues arising from the report. A Co-ordination Group is being established to ensure that the wider recommendations are addressed.

Biological Weapon Production

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to ensure that pharmaceutical companies in the United Kingdom are not engaged in the production of biological weapons. [9576]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 923, the legislative measures that he intends to introduce in the very near future to counter international terrorism threats. The legislation will include clauses to cover the intention to use, produce, possess or participate in unauthorised transfers of chemical and biological as well as nuclear and radiological materials.

Newspaper Distribution Industry

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what recent representations she has received on restrictive agreements in the newspaper distribution industry; and if she will make a statement; [11767]

(2) if she will ask the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate possible restrictive agreements in the newspaper distribution industry; and if she will make a statement. [11885]

Ms Hewitt: Under UK competition legislation, the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for monitoring markets and considering allegations of anti-competitive behaviour. The Director General has considered complaints about anti-competitive behaviour in the newspaper distribution industry but has so far taken the view that the industry is highly competitive overall. Representations received about restrictive agreements in the newspaper distribution industry have been passed to the Director General.

Multinational Companies

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with her EU counterparts regarding the mandatory use of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development guidelines for multinational companies. [11151]

Nigel Griffiths: None. The Government support the voluntary nature of the OECD guidelines and are not aware of any plans by EU partners to make them mandatory.

Trade Trends

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the trends are in the export and import of goods in the current year; and if she will make a statement. [9556]

Nigel Griffiths: The latest estimates of trend produced by the Office for National Statistics (based on data to August), show both the value of exports and imports falling in recent months. This follows record levels of trade in 2001 quarter 1.

Energy Efficiency

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action her Department took in recognition of Energy Efficiency Week. [11516]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 592W. My Department is fully committed to supporting energy efficiency, achieving an improvement of some 50 per cent. in energy efficiency at standard prices in 1997–98 compared with 1990–91. An energy audit is currently under way with a view to making further improvements.

Registered Designs Regulations

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will propose an amendment to the law to provide a definition of "Royal Family" for the purposes of Section 1(1)(c) of Schedule A1 of the Registered Designs Regulations 2001; [11883]

(2) for what reason the Registered Design Regulations 2001 provide that registration of any representation or colourable imitation of any member of the Royal Family shall be refused registration under the Registered Designs Act 1949. [11936]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Registered Designs Regulations accord with the views taken by Parliament when concluding the Trade Marks Act 1994, which implemented equivalent provisions of another directive. In particular, this provision is exactly equivalent to section 4(1)(c) of that Act, which specifies a public interest exception to trade mark protection.

There is no statutory definition of "Royal Family" provided by the 1994 Act or these Regulations. It is a matter for the courts to decide how far this public interest exception to protection extends.

Electricity Trading

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make an announcement on the Government's response to Ofgem's reports, 'The New Electricity Trading Arrangements-Review of the First Three Months' and 'Report to the DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators' of 31 August. [12614]

Mr. Wilson: The Government believe that NETA has been a success in its own terms. The introduction of a more efficient regime into a more transparent, inclusive and efficient pricing system has meant that wholesale electricity prices are up to 25 per cent. lower than the artificially high prices that existed under the Pool arrangements. In addition, Ofgem's findings show rapid emergence of a strong and liquid forward curve—this will contribute to UK's longer-term security of energy supply by providing reliable longer-term price signals for investors to use in planning new generation.

The Government recognise the issues faced by smaller generators under NETA. The Government remain strongly committed to renewable and combined heat and power generation. At the same time, we are committed to the regulatory framework set out in the Utilities Act 2000, the principles and structure of NETA, which has already delivered a good deal of real benefit to consumers, and promises to do so in future as well.

The Government have reviewed and considered Ofgem's reports, as well as views put forward by industry, both in the course of Ofgem's review, and to DTI. In light of these, I have issued a consultation document today, seeking views on the issues raised by Ofgem's reports and specific proposals. The Government's key proposals are, broadly:

ensuring imbalance prices are genuinely cost reflective—this will reduce the risk for everyone, but for smaller and unpredictable generators in particular; and

ensuring that effective consolidation services emerge—this will reduce the risks for smaller generators further. The Government have proposed setting up a working group that will look urgently at obstacles to market driven consolidation, including the possibility of encouraging consolidation.

The Government are also seeking views on other proposals put forward by industry.

I have placed copies of the consultation document in the Libraries of the House.

Employment Tribunals

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of cases dismissed by employment tribunals on the grounds that they were scandalous, frivolous or vexatious in each of the past 10 years. [9728]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* It would not be possible to measure the number of cases dismissed by employment tribunals on the grounds that they were scandalous, frivolous or vexatious in each of the past 10 years.

Such information is not available from the employment tribunals service database, which only records the outcome of each case and not the reasons for the outcome.

However, survey evidence suggests that in 2000–01 there were between 2,600 and 5,200 tribunal cases where the applicant was advised against taking their case forward.

Icelandic Trawlermen (Compensation)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims under the Icelandic Trawlerman's Compensation Scheme have not been processed due to claimants sailing on Icelandic water vessels after 1979; and if she will make a statement. [10458]

Ms Hewitt: There were 1,115 claims on hold from trawlermen who continued fishing after 1979 on vessels that formerly fished in Icelandic waters. I have decided to amend the rules of the scheme so that such fishing no longer disqualifies men from receiving compensation.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* benefits and *(b)* costs to the construction industry are of the aggregates tax. [10645]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The environmental benefits of the aggregates levy will be more efficient use of virgin aggregate and a greater use of recycled alternative. This will reduce the environmental impacts of virgin aggregate extraction—such as damage to biodiversity and visual intrusion. In addition, all revenues raised will be recycled to business through a 0.1 percentage point cut in employers' national insurance contributions and a new £35 million sustainability fund aimed at delivering local environmental benefits to areas subject to the environmental costs of aggregates extraction.

The levy will be charged at £1.60 per tonne on the commercial exploitation of virgin aggregates in the UK, including those imported from abroad. Aggregates exported from the UK will be exempt.

A full regulatory impact assessment was published at the time of Budget 2000. The impact on the actual costs to the end user will be dependent on the commercial decisions of those in the supply chain.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the occasions on which guidance has been given to Railtrack by Ministers or statutory bodies at national level since May 1997, indicating in each case the body concerned. [8949]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the Strategic Rail Authority and the Rail Regulator have not given formal guidance specifically to Railtrack.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he had meetings with the Chairman of Railtrack between 25 July and 5 October. [9834]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met John Robinson, the Chairman of Railtrack, on 25 July, on 27 July at the Rail Delivery Group and on 5 October. As agreed by the Secretary of State and Mr. Robinson, officials held a number of meetings with Railtrack and their advisers during this period.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the level of reserves the successor to Railtrack will require to support a BBB credit rating. [10437]

Mr. Jamieson: The appropriate level of reserves would be determined once the railway administrator has been able to assess Railtrack Plc's true financial position on the basis of a better understanding of its assets, liabilities and cost base.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total amounts paid by Railtrack to *(a)* directors and *(b)* shareholders were in each year since privatisation. [10399]

Mr. Jamieson: *(a)* The Directors of Railtrack Group Plc received total remuneration of over £10.4 million for the period 1996–97 to 2000–01 inclusive. The annual breakdown is shown in the table.

Directors' remuneration

Year	*£000*
1996–97	1,386
1997–98	2,167
1998–99	2,046
1999–2000	2,153
2000–01	2,669

(b) Since its flotation on 20 May 1996, Railtrack Group Plc have paid over £700 million to shareholders in cash, or equivalent, dividends. The annual breakdown is shown in the table.

Shareholder dividends

Year	*£ million*
1996–97[1]	180
1997–98	121
1998–99	133
1999–2000	137
2000–01	138

[1] The 1996–97 payment includes £69 million of dividends relating to performance in 1995–96, when Railtrack was in the public sector, but not paid until after privatisation.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with *(a)* Moodys, *(b)* S & P, and *(c)* other credit rating agencies concerning Railtrack and its successor; and if he will make a statement. [11128]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials have met with credit rating agencies as part of their overall objective of ensuring that the rail network continues to receive sufficient funding to operate on a normal basis during the administration of Railtrack Plc and, separately, to develop further the Government's proposals for a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to seek parliamentary approval for a voted loan to Railtrack plc in administration. [11219]

Mr. Spellar: Parliamentary approval will be sought during the forthcoming Winter Supplementary estimates.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ensure the separation of the safety regulation from the ownership of the rail network following the creation of the successor to Railtrack. [10474]

Mr. Spellar: The regulator for railway safety is the Health and Safety Executive. There are no plans to change this.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings his Department has held with financial institutions since the Railtrack administration announcement. [10764]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have had meetings with their financial advisers, bondholders and with credit rating agencies to ensure that the rail network continues to receive sufficient funding to operate on a normal basis during the administration of Railtrack plc and, to discuss the Government's proposals for a Company Limited by a Guarantee.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions with which institutions holding Railtrack bonds his Department has held discussions since the administration order; and if he will make a statement. [10761]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials of my Department were present at meetings organised by representatives of bondholders. A number of institutions would have been present at these meetings.

Rail Freight

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the most recent guidance he has given to the Strategic Rail Authority on the 10 year plan target for rail freight; and what the original target was. [10441]

Mr. Jamieson: A key target of the Government's 10-Year Plan is for rail to achieve a significant increase in its share of the freight market by 2010.

In pursuance of this and other targets for the railway, the Secretary of State published on 13 July this year draft directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority. This requires the authority, among other things, to secure increases in capacity to accommodate the expected growth in freight traffic.

Rail Infrastructure

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he informed the Strategic Rail Authority of his Department's discussions with *(a)* passenger rail franchisees and *(b)* train operating companies to take over responsibility for operating and maintaining railway infrastructure in the areas where they run train services. [9831]

Mr. Spellar: Officials have had meetings on such matters with train operators' representatives or their advisers at their request. These have not resulted in any changes in policy about which the Strategic Rail Authority needed to be informed.

Rail Investment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the first special purpose vehicle for investment in the rail infrastructure will be in operation. [10438]

Mr. Jamieson: Plans exist for special purpose vehicles to be created to undertake works in connection with the replacement of the South West and South Central passenger franchises and the development of the East London Line. Other opportunities also exist but are generally less well advanced at present. It is not possible at this stage to be specific about timing which is a matter for commercial negotiation among the parties involved.

Rail Safety (Vehicle Access)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what safety improvements have been suggested by Railtrack and the Highways Agency following the incidences of vehicles on the track at *(a)* Selby on 28 February, *(b)* Bletchley in Buckinghamshire on 24 August and *(c)* Wilsford in Lincolnshire on 30 August; what action has been taken as a result; and if he will make a statement on the funding of the improvements; [10904]

(2) what arrangements exist between Railtrack and the Highways Agency to co-ordinate provisions to prevent road vehicles getting on to railway tracks; [10910]

(3) if the vulnerability of the sites of the incidences of vehicles on the track at *(a)* Selby on 28 February, *(b)* Bletchley in Buckinghamshire on 24 August and *(c)* Wilsford in Lincolnshire on 30 August (i) had been identified by Railtrack prior to the accident and (ii) had been subjected to a risk assessment; [10905]

(4) how *(a)* the Highways Agency and *(b)* Railtrack establish the vulnerability of locations from which vehicles might accidentally gain access to railway tracks; [10903]

(5) if the vulnerability of the sites of the incidences of vehicles on the track at *(a)* Selby on 28 February, *(b)* Bletchley in Buckinghamshire on 24 August and *(c)* Wilsford in Lincolnshire on 30 August (i) had been identified by the Highways Agency prior to the accident and (ii) had been subjected to a risk assessment; [10906]

Mr. Jamieson: The assessment of roads is an operational matter for the relevant highway authority, in consultation with the relevant rail authorities if a road crosses a railway.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is the highway authority for the site at Great Heck, near Selby, where a vehicle left the road on 28 February 2001. I can confirm that the barrier provision at this site met all the relevant standards. On Monday 12 March this year the then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), announced in a PQ that the Deputy Prime Minister had asked the Highways Agency to review its standards for nearside safety barriers. He also announced that the DPM has asked the Health and Safety Commission to convene a working group that will look at the circumstances of incidents where vehicles have blocked rail lines and whether there are features in common that might have been prevented. When I have the reports from the Highways Agency and from the Health and Safety Commission, I will be able to consider what action needs to be taken by those responsible for the road and the rail infrastructure.

M5 (Junction 10)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to announce a decision on implementing two-way access to the M5 at junction 10; and if he will make a statement. [10982]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency is proposing to carry out a route management strategy study on this part of the trunk road network, which will examine the role and performance of the M5 and include consideration of Junction 10 near Uckington in Gloucestershire.

The study is expected to be commissioned around the turn of the year and will take approximately 12 months to complete.

If the study concludes that alterations to the Junction are merited, the scheme would have to be adopted into the Highways Agency's programme, following consultation with, and a recommendation from the Regional Assembly. This is in line with procedures outlined in the Planning Policy Guidance Note 11 (PPG 11).

Accordingly, it is not possible at this time to give a reliable prediction of when I may be able to make an announcement.

Heathrow

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on Heathrow Terminal 5. [10402]

Ms Keeble: No decision has yet been taken on the proposed fifth terminal at Heathrow. The applicants for planning permission and other interested parties will all be told of the decision in the usual way, and an oral statement will be made to inform Parliament.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce the Government's decision on Terminal 5. [11428]

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce his decision on the proposed building of Terminal 5 at Heathrow. [11473]

Ms Keeble: No decision has yet been taken on the proposed fifth Terminal at Heathrow. The Secretary of State will announce his decision once he has completed his full and careful consideration of all the issues. The applicants for planning permission and other interested parties will all be told of the decision in the usual way, and an oral statement will be made to inform Parliament.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the aviation industry regarding the safety of residents living under flight paths into Heathrow Airport. [11147]

Mr. Jamieson: The safety of residents living under flight paths into Heathrow Airport is best assured by the safety regulation of aircraft, operators and air traffic movements. The safety regulation of UK registered aircraft and operators and of air traffic control in UK airspace is the day-to-day responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The Authority has regular contacts with the aviation industry.

In addition, following the attacks in New York and Washington, aviation security has been heightened at all UK airports. An urgent and thorough review of aviation security has also been undertaken, involving Government,

the CAA and industry. This has looked at a wide range of measures aimed at enhancing aviation security and safety still further, for the benefit of both passengers and people on the ground.

Pollution (Aircraft)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reduce environmental pollution from aeroplanes and aircraft fuels. [10559]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is continuing to work with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and other interested organisations, both national and international, on a range of measures to further improve the environmental performance of aircraft. This includes developing and introducing better technologies, adopting more optimal operating practices, and devising economic incentives to encourage the use of cleaner aircraft. The Department is also supporting national and international research aimed at reaching a better understanding of the environmental impact of aviation and of the effects of possible action to mitigate it.

Stingray

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what targets have been set by the Government for cutting evasion of vehicle excise duty from the introduction of the Stingray system in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the UK. [11234]

Mr. Jamieson: We have set a target of 700,000 successful cases against evasion of vehicle excise duty for Great Britain in 2001–02. The mobile camera system will help to achieve this demanding target.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Stingray system is to be used throughout the country. [11236]

Mr. Jamieson: The national launch of the new mobile camera system took place in London on 11 October. The systems are now in use across the country.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated cost is of implementing the Stingray system in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the UK. [11232]

Mr. Jamieson: The full cost of implementing the mobile camera system which will be used across the UK was around £2 million including the purchase of the equipment, staff and other costs. The units are mobile and will be displayed flexibly across the UK.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what savings he estimates will arise from the introduction of the Stingray system. [11230]

Mr. Jamieson: We estimate that the new mobile camera system will generate around £9 million per annum in additional revenue from enforcement action against evaders and from increased voluntary relicensing.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated cost is of the advertising campaign for the introduction of the Stingray system. [11229]

Mr. Jamieson: The cost of publicising the VED enforcement campaign, including the new mobile number plate readers, was £640,000 for the national launch in London on 11 October and £240,000 in Scotland on 23 October. A further £1 million will be spent on additional campaigns involving the new system for the remainder of the UK over the rest of the year.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to monitor the effectiveness of the Stingray system; and if he will make a statement. [11235]

Mr. Jamieson: The effectiveness of the new mobile camera system will be monitored by: the number of unlicensed vehicles captured by the system; the number of successful cases pursued against VED evaders captured by the system; the penalties, fines and revenue recovered from those evaders, and the deterrent effect measured by the additional revenue received from induced relicensing as a result of the publicity campaigns.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated running costs are for the Stingray system. [11231]

Mr. Jamieson: The estimated running costs for the 11 units of the mobile camera system is £1.2 million per annum.

Airport Security

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of the £1.67 million allocated for research into methods for improving transport security has been specifically aimed at improving airport security in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the UK. [11424]

Mr. Jamieson: The benefits accruing from my Department's Research and Development programme for aviation security are equally available to all airports in the United Kingdom.

Vehicles (Pedestrian Protection)

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what expert advice he has received on the conclusions of the German Federal Research Organisation BaST on the compatibility of the Phase One and EEVC tests on vehicles designed for greater pedestrian protection. [11108]

Mr. Jamieson: We have had no specific advice. BaST recently highlighted the difficulty of designing for different headform sizes, particularly the 4.8kg and 3.5kg headforms. This is not a new issue, and it is one which industry would have been aware of when the negotiated agreement was originally prepared.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what

expert advice he has received on the conclusions by the Dutch Ministry of Transport on the option by the EU for the draft negotiated agreement on vehicles designed for greater pedestrian protection. [11106]

Mr. Jamieson: We have not received any specific expert advice on this, but we understand that the Dutch favour going to a Directive.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the draft negotiated agreement on vehicles designed for greater pedestrian protection will permit manufacturers to pass the EEVC tests instead of the Phase One industry tests. [11107]

Mr. Jamieson: The negotiated agreement, as drafted, does not specifically cater for this. However, it would be illogical if, in practice, vehicles which met the full EEVC Phase Two requirements were not permitted under Phase One.

Departmental Policies (Northampton, South)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Northampton, South constituency, the effects on Northampton of his Department's policies and action since May 1997. [11283]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is as follows:

Nature of funding	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Northampton borough council[1]					
Revenue Support Grant (£ million)	7.322	8.080	7.550	7.249	7.772
Income from National Non-Domestic Rates (£ million)	6.021	6.171	6.674	7.548	7.359
South Northamptonshire					
Housing Investment Programme (£000)	625	471	538	1,483	[2]2,135
Capital Receipts Initiative	—	—	—	n/a	n/a
Northampton					
Housing Investment Programme (£000)	2,520	1,959	2,131	6,720	9,100
Capital Receipts Initiative (£000)	529	1,590	1,653	n/a	n/a
South Northamptonshire					
Housing Revenue Account Subsidy[3] (£000)	806.27	—	—	—	817.05
Northampton					
Housing Revenue Account Subsidy[4] (£000)	765.55	—	—	—	797.38
Northamptonshire county council allocations					
Transport Supplementary Grant (£ million)	1.078	0.886	0.935	—	—
Transport Annual Capital Guideline (£ million)	1.078	0.886	0.935	—	—
Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval (£ million)	1.300	1.369	2.236	5.089	11.866
Rural Bus Challenge Grant from 1999–2000 (£ million)	--	—	0.488	0.051	—
Rural Bus Subsidy Grant from 1998–99 (£ million)	—	0.697	0.697	0.697	0.890

[1] *Northampton borough council 2001–02 settlement key figures*
Standard Spending Assessment (SSA)
Total SSA—£20.6 million
Increase over 2000–01—£0.615 million or 3.1 per cent. (average for class authority 4.6 per cent.)
EPCS SSA—£20.108 million
Increase over 2000–01—£0.503 million or 2.6 per cent (average for class of authority 4.5 per cent.)
General grant
Total grant—£15.131 million
Increase over 2000–01—£0.313 million or 2.1 per cent. (average for class of authority 3.9 per cent.)
Council tax 2000–01
Budget increase 3.4 per cent.—Band D council tax £145—Band D increase 5.9 per cent.
[2] Includes MRA
[3] Combined Management and Maintenance Allowance per dwelling 1.2 per cent. increase in cash terms but 8 per cent. in real terms.
[4] Combined Management and Maintenance Allowance per dwelling 4.2 per cent. increase in cash terms but 5.4 per cent. in real terms.

SRB Funding in Northamptonshire

Year	*SRB Rd 1*	*SRB Rd 5*	*SRB Rd 6*	*Total*
1997–98	1,548,796	—	—	1,549,045.63
1998–99	1,024,501	—	—	1,549,045.63
1999–2000	1,783,938	11,954	—	3,098,091.26
2000–01	1,485,000	70,678	14,925	1,572,603.00
2001–02	942,812	96,678	134,700	1,175,190.50

SRB Round 1—Northampton Partnership—Target area—Northampton wards of Dallington and Kings Heath, Delapre, Southbridge, Castle and St. Crispin
SRB Round 5—Northamptonshire Connecting Communities—Target Area—whole county
SRB Round 6—Target Area—Northampton wards of Dallington and Kings Heath, Castle and St. Crispin

Rural Farm Building Grant
2001–02: £82,431—Towcester

The SRB funding represents the total SRB allocated during the financial year to a number of projects in the wards listed. The SRB Partnerships appraised and approved the vast majority of these projects. Therefore, East Midlands Development Agency does not have this information readily available. Moreover, as some of these projects operate in all wards and some in specific wards it is not practical to calculate how much funding has been allocated to individual wards.

Planning Applications

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the planning applications for housing development in Northampton on greenfield sites *(a)* which he has called in and *(b)* for which he has issued a holding direction since 7 March 2000, indicating (i) the location, (ii) number of houses and (iii) area of land involved. [11285]

Ms Keeble: The planning applications listed are those submitted for housing development in Northampton on greenfield sites which the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has called in or issued a holding direction, since 7 March 2000. Also indicated is the location of the development, the number of houses to be provided and the area of land involved.

Location	*Number of houses*	*Hectares* *Area of land*
(a) Cases called in since 7 March 2000		
Banbury Lane Phase IV, Northampton	Approximately 175 dwellings	6.8
Land at Pineham North, Northampton	400 dwellings (as part of mixed use development incorporating B1 business, B2 industrial, B8 storage and distribution open space, landscaping)	68
(b) Cases on which a Holding Direction was issued since 7 March 2000		
Banbury Lane Phase IV, Northampton	Approximately 175 dwellings	6.8
Land at Pineham North, Northampton	400 dwellings (as part of mixed use development incorporating B1 business, B2 industrial, B8 storage and distribution open space, landscaping)	68
St. Crispins Hospital, Northampton	186 dwellings (plus some limited retail facilities)	7.4
St. Crispins Hospital, Northampton	900 dwellings (plus 150 bedroom hotel, local retain and community facilities)	72

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many planning decisions he has called in since 7 June; and when he will determine them. [11427]

Ms Keeble: Since 7 June 2001, 64 planning applications have been called in, of which four have subsequently been withdrawn by the applicants.

Called-in planning applications are normally considered at a planning inquiry, following which a planning inspector reports to the Secretary of State. We have set targets for Government Offices for the Regions to issue 80 per cent. of decisions on called-in planning applications in 13 weeks and 100 per cent. in 20 weeks following receipt of the inspector's report.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the contracts awarded to *(a)* AEA Technology and *(b)* Amey Vectra Ltd. by his Department and its predecessor agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1999. [11017]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The following contracts have been awarded by my Department and its predecessor agencies since May 1999 to;

(a) AEA Technology by:

(i) Central Department:

Management Support for the Safety & Health Business Plan;

Beacon Council Round 2 Theme Research: Sustainable Development/Local; Environmental Quality—Maintaining a High Quality Local Environment;

Contaminated Land Research Audit;

National Cycling Strategy—For the Provision of Marketing and Promotional Activities;

National Cycling Strategy—For services to promote the national Cycling Strategy;

Promotion of National Cycling Strategy;

School Travel Seminars 2000—Organisation of Workshops and regional seminars;

Are you doing your bit—travel awareness campaign research;

Provision of services to DETR/DEFRA;

DETR/DEFRA contribution towards cost of EU SAVE project (55 per cent.);

DETR/DEFRA contribution towards cost of EU SAVE project (20 per cent.);

DETR/DEFRA contribution towards cost of EU SAVE project (9 per cent.);

Provision of feasibility studies into environmental and marketing conditions (four contracts);

Air Quality at UK Regional Airports;

Local Air quality modelling for the South East and East of England Regional Air Service Study;

Regional Air Services Part 3: Air Quality Modelling for Midlands & Scotland

Professional Advice on Energy Matters;

Cost Effectiveness of noise reduction measures: Phase 1;

Ethanol emission testing;

Greener fleet certification scheme;

An in-service emissions test for spark ignition petrol;

Evaluation of traffic modelling & appraisal research programme;

In-Car particulate exposure;

Greener fleet certification scheme (company car fleets);

European particle measurement programme: Phase 1;

Rail research strategy co-ordinator;

Study of Air Quality at Airports (two contracts);

Comparative Study of the environmental effects of rail & short haul air travel;

Developed Countries Commitments to reduced/limit emissions of Greenhouse Gases during the period 2008 to 2012;

Development & Implementation of a methodology to verify projected UK emissions of HydrofluoroCarbons, Perfluorocarbons & Sulphur Hexafluoride;

Assess atmospheric Ozone Measurement at Lerwick and Camborne;

Develop, maintain and archive the annual UK inventory of GHG emissions by sources and removals by sink;

Organise & provide technical support for IPCC expert workshop on good practice for reporting GHG Inventory guideline;

Carry out cost effectiveness analysis reduction Options for UK emissions of Methane and Nitrous Oxide;

Preliminary study to assess the likely effects of the EU Landfill Directive and the Government's draft waste strategy on GHG emissions.

(ii) Vehicle Inspectorate:

Diesel Emission Research;

Research Work on the Influence of On-board Diagnostic Fault on Vehicle emission.

(iii) Maritime and Coastguard Agency:

Ensure EUROSPILL was millennium compliant, update tidal data, display marine hazards;

Chemical dispersal of oil—a route for rapid removal from the environment;

Research project 473—Safety First Project;

General Technical queries in areas where the Agency does not possess the expertise Testing whether oil dispersant is still usable;

Administrating scheme and paying grants for scheme which supports merchant navy training.

(b) Amey Vectra Ltd by

(i) Maritime and Coastguard Agency:

Undertake surveys of customers and staff when requested by MCA on a call off basis.

(ii) Highways Agency:

Engineering Services.

Information on contracts let by non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

New Homes

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to require all new homes to be built equipped with *(a)* fire alarms and *(b)* sprinkler systems. [11406]

Dr. Whitehead: When the fire safety aspects of the Building Regulations in Approved Document B were amended in 1992, provision was included for mains wired, interconnected smoke alarms to be provided in all new dwellings, resulting in new homes being provided with smoke alarms since 1992.

Although there are currently no plans to revise the Building Regulations to include provisions for domestic sprinkler systems, we are keeping this under review in the light of emerging standards, and improvements in sprinkler technology. We have recently let two research contracts to look at the whole issue of residential and domestic sprinklers, including an assessment of their actual effectiveness and the undertaking of a Regulatory Impact Assessment to consider their costs and benefits. The results and conclusions of this work should be available around the end of 2003.

We will need to await the findings of the research work referred to above, before we are in a position to consider more fully if the provision of residential sprinklers should be a requirement of the Building Regulations.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to require all new homes to be built as homes for life. [11405]

Ms Keeble: There is no intention currently to require all new homes to be built as homes for life in the sense of 'Lifetime Homes', as promoted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The need for more accessible homes is met by the general provisions of Building Regulations plus an assessment of specific local needs by each local authority.

Since October 1999, Building Regulations have required key provisions to be made in all new homes which will enable disabled people to visit family and friends in their homes and enable occupants to cope better with reducing mobility and to 'stay-put' longer in their own homes. These provisions do not necessarily facilitate fully independent living for all disabled people as individual needs will vary considerably from case to case.

In addition to the general provisions of Building Regulations, local authorities are required to collect information on their existing housing stock (both public and private sector) to inform their housing investment programme. Local house condition surveys are the best way of achieving this and the Department publishes good practice guidance 'Collecting, Managing and Using Housing Stock Information' DTLR 2000 to assist local authorities in undertaking such surveys. The content of surveys varies from survey to survey, depending upon the requirements for which it is being commissioned. Where information in relation to wheelchair access is required this can be specified as one of the aims of the survey.

Planning policy guidance for housing (PPG3) requires local planning authorities to plan to meet the housing requirements of the whole community, including those in need of special needs housing. PPG3 stresses that a community's need for a mix of housing types is a material planning consideration which should be taken into account in formulating development plan policies and in deciding planning applications involving housing. The Department supports this through good practice guidance. "Better Places to Live", published in conjunction with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, highlights the advantages of homes designed to adapt to the changing requirements of residents, particularly in terms of providing for reduced personal mobility.

The Housing Corporation's Scheme Development Standards for all new build homes funded with Social Housing Grant already adopt the 'Lifetime Homes' criteria for both the external and internal environment in respect of user groups and visitors with limited mobility.

Housing Development

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of housing development has been undertaken on brownfield land since the Government adopted the 60 per cent. target. [11403]

Ms Keeble: The national target is that by 2008, 60 per cent. of additional housing should be provided on previously developed land and through conversions of existing buildings. The latest information available from the Department's Land Use Change Statistics is that between 1998 and 2000, about 57 per cent. of new dwellings were built on previously developed land (including new dwellings provided from the conversion of existing buildings, which account for 3 percentage points). These statistics are unlikely to reflect yet the effect of our planning policy for housing set out in PPG3 because of the time lag between granting planning permissions, completing dwellings and recording changes in the field.

Leicester Mayor

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects a referendum to be held regarding the election of a Mayor for Leicester. [11426]

Dr. Whitehead: Leicester City Council have proposed a Leader and Cabinet constitution, and hence have no plans for a referendum on the election of a Mayor. As we have made clear to the Council, during the two-month period beginning on 13 September when they sent their proposals to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, we will be considering whether or not their circumstances include those where we may direct a referendum.

Overhead Powerlines

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce a moratorium on the erection of overhead powerlines *(a)* in general and *(b)* near houses in rural areas. [11184]

Ms Keeble: We have no plans to introduce a moratorium on the erection of overhead power lines.

Road Schemes (East Anglia)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has carried out of public opinion on *(a)* the building of a new motorway between the M25 and Chelmsford and *(b)* upgrading the A12 to a three lane route into East Anglia. [11772]

Mr. Jamieson: The London to Ipswich Multi-Modal Study is currently underway and is looking at the ways in which all modes of transport can help to solve the existing transport problems in the corridor between London and Ipswich. As part of the study, there will be public consultation on options in the spring of 2002 following which a preferred option will be recommended which will take into account the results of the public consultation as well as the results of other analyses.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the recommendation by its advisory body regarding proposals for a new motorway from the M25 to Chelmsford. [11771]

Mr. Jamieson: The London to Ipswich Multi-Modal Study is currently underway and is looking at the ways in which all modes of transport can help to solve the existing transport problems in the corridor between London and Ipswich. As the study is not programmed to finish until July 2002 no recommendations from the study have yet been received by the Secretary of State.

Domestic Sprinkler Systems

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent estimate he has made of the value of domestic sprinkler systems in preventing deaths and injuries arising from domestic fires. [11146]

Dr. Whitehead: None. The issue was last looked at by the Community Fire Safety Task Force in their 1997 report, "Safe as Houses." The Task Force concluded that sprinklers did not represent a solution in the medium term and considered the cost of nation wide installation in all existing domestic dwellings as being prohibitive. Similarly, the Task Force did not see any evidence to suggest the UK public is ready to accept the mandatory installation of sprinklers in their homes. They also felt that any mandatory installation would pose significant enforcement difficulties and could infringe upon the rights of private householders.

However, the Government recognise that domestic sprinklers have a role to play in promoting life safety, particularly for the most vulnerable; the Fire Safety Advisory Board will continue to assess their value in the light of emerging standards, and improvements in sprinkler technology. We have, therefore, recently commissioned research into the benefits of sprinklers in residential properties, including the preparation of a Regulatory Impact Assessment. The results and conclusions from this work should be available in a little over two years from now.

Additionally, the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, which we propose should replace the Housing Fitness Standard, includes guidance in respect of hazards from fire. Although not mandatory for houses of multiple occupation, sprinklers may well be recommended where the risk of fire is high.

Aviation Industry

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's action to support the aviation industry and communities dependent on airports. [9582]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have moved quickly to underwrite, on a temporary basis, third party war risk insurance for airlines and service providers to the airline industry, an initiative which has been widely copied elsewhere. The meeting of European Transport Ministers on 16 October endorsed guidelines issued by the Commission on emergency aid measures, and we will take these guidelines into account in considering whether further aid should be paid to the British airline industry. The Employment Service is working closely with the aviation industry and all the strategic partners (regional development agencies, local authorities and the Learning and Skills Council) to assess the impact of any redundancy announcements, and to introduce appropriate measures.

Community Transport Services (Fuel Duty Rebate)

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish plans for extending fuel duty rebate to a wider range of community transport services; and what plans he has to include school bus transport within the rebate scheme. [11624]

Ms Keeble: Following consultation with relevant organisations in the spring, we will be bringing forward regulations later in this financial year on the introduction of fuel duty rebate (FDR) for a wide range of community transport services.

As far as school transport is concerned, bus services specifically designed to convey only pupils to school are not eligible for rebate. However, services provided or secured by a local education authority are eligible providing that some seats on the vehicles concerned are normally available to the general public and are regularly used by them. There are a large number of school services that do receive FDR by virtue of the fact that they meet these eligibility criteria.

Cycle Carriage (Railways)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if the level of cycle carriage on trains of a minimum of six cycles is specified in railway franchise agreements; and if they will be in future; [10907]

(2) what measures are in place to ensure that the existing level of capacity for cycle carriage on trains is retained when rolling stock is refurbished or replaced; [10908]

(3) what *(a)* guidance the Strategic Rail Authority has issued and *(b)* standards it has set for the provision of facilities for bicycles (i) on board new rolling stock and (ii) at stations; and if he will make a statement. [10909]

Mr. Jamieson: No specific guidance has been issued nor standards set with regard to the number of bicycles that are carried on trains or for the provision of facilities at stations. There are many different types of rolling stock in use on the network and the design of each largely dictates whether bicycles can be carried, and if so how many. Franchise agreements require train operators to carry bicycles on their services where it is practicable for them to do so, and subject to the availability of appropriate space. These arrangements will be maintained in future franchise agreements. The Strategic Rail Authority are obliged by their Directions and Guidance to discuss with train operators the provisions they are making for cycle carriage when ordering new stock. The Authority meet regularly with representatives from cycling organisations and has established a "flexible space" working group to look at how the interiors of rolling stock can be designed to make best use of available space for wheelchairs, pushchairs, bicycles or other bulky luggage.

Affordable Housing (Key Workers)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to grant local authorities greater powers to specify quotas of affordable housing for key workers; and if he will make a statement. [10732]

Ms Keeble: Under the Starter Home Initiative we will be helping 10,000 key workers to buy their first homes over the three years 2001–02 to 2003–04, mainly through shared ownership or equity loans. A further 1,200 key workers will be able to buy or rent homes under the Housing Corporation's programme of new affordable housing. We are also looking afresh at planning guidance as a means of providing more opportunities for key worker housing.

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many children in local authority care were placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation alone in the last year, broken down by local authority. [9820]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not collected centrally. The Department does collect data about placements of looked-after children in a broader category consisting of lodgings, residential employment or living independently. This data category does not denote whether the young person is living alone or with other people.

On 31 March 2001, 1,100 looked-after young people in England were reported to be placed in this broader accommodation category. This represents 2 per cent. of all children who were looked after on that date.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Chief Crown Prosecutors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General how many and what percentage of chief Crown prosecutors are *(a)* black, *(b)* Asian and *(c)* women. [11390]

The Solicitor-General: The Chief Crown Prosecution cadre comprises of 42 Chief Crown Prosecutors and five London-based Assistant Chief Crown Prosecutors, of whom 44 have provided details of their ethnic origin.

The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Recording the Ethnicity of Staff, in its guidance on the use of ethnicity data, states that:

"It is Civil Service policy that where there are fewer than five people from any ethnic group identified in summaries, exact numbers will not be published".

The statistics are:

(a) fewer than five (less than 11.4 per cent.) have declared that they are black;

(b) fewer than five (less than 11.4 per cent.) have declared they are Asian; and

(c) Eight (17.0 per cent.) are female

2000–01—of 14 appointed, none was as a member of an ethnic minority.

C panel

There are 73 members, of whom 27 are women.

1999—of 48 appointed, one identified themselves as Asian; one as from some other group or class.

2000—of 11 appointed, one identified themselves as Asian.

2001—of 21 appointed, none was a member of an ethnic minority

Provincial Panel

There are 155 members, of whom 16 are women.

2000—of 56 appointed; one identified themselves as black; one as Asian.

The Law Officers are committed to promoting diversity and equal opportunity with respect to membership of the panels and actively encourage woman and ethnic minorities to apply. Advertisements for all recruitment exercises appear in the specialist legal journals "Bar News" and "The Law Society's Gazette" and state that women and members of ethnic minorities are particularly encouraged to apply.

Treasury Solicitors Panel

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General how many members of the Treasury Solicitors Panel are *(a)* black, *(b)* Asian and *(c)* women. [11391]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General maintains three London panels for civil work, subdivided by seniority: A, for those with over 10 years' experience at the time of appointment; B, for those with between five and 10 years' experience at the time of appointment; and C, for those with between two and five years' experience at the time of appointment. The Attorney-General also maintains a Provincial Panel.

No comprehensive data are held on the ethnic origin of all members of the panel. Since the introduction of a competitive appointments system in 1998 all applicants have been asked to complete an equal opportunities monitoring form which asks them to indicate their ethnic origin. Completion of the form is voluntary and in consequence the information given may not be entirely accurate. With regard to ethnic origin, I set out the results of the equal opportunity monitoring of the recruitment exercises since 1999.

A panel

There are currently 28 members, of whom four are women.

1999—of 10 appointed, one identified themselves as black; one as Asian.

2000—of 12 appointed, one identified themselves as Asian.

B panel

There are currently 77 members, of whom 18 are women.

1999—of 23 appointed, two identified themselves as Asian.

Bar Council Complaints Committee

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has made of the handling of complaints submitted to the Bar Council Complaints Committee; what redress she intends to put in place for those who believe their complaint has not been given fair consideration; and if she plans to introduce changes to the complaints framework in relation to the actions of *(a)* barristers and *(b)* solicitors. [11404]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The legal profession is self-regulating. The Bar Council's lay Complaints Commissioner deals with complaints about barristers. The Office for the Supervision of Solicitors (OSS) deals with complaints about solicitors. These complaints handling procedures are subject to independent scrutiny by the Legal Services Ombudsman. The ombudsman, who is a lay person, may consider complaints about the decision reached by the professional bodies, as well as concerns about the handling of a complaint and act accordingly. In the financial year 2000–01, the ombudsman was satisfied in 94 per cent. of referrals concerning complaints handling at the Bar, as opposed to a satisfaction rating of 57 per cent. for referrals concerning the OSS.

The Lord Chancellor has reserve powers to appoint a Legal Services Complaints Commissioner (LSCC) if it appears to him that complaints about members of any professional body are not being handled effectively and efficiently. The Lord Chancellor has no plans to appoint an LSCC to oversee the Bar Council and is currently considering the position in respect of the OSS. His decision will be announced in due course.

TREASURY

EC Prospectus Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the impact which the proposed EC Prospectus Directive will have on *(a)* the listing cost of small and medium size companies and *(b)* the availability of capital to growing businesses in the UK; [7734]

(2) what discussions he has had with representatives of the Alternative Investment Market and other representatives of the UK financial services industry regarding the EC Prospectus Directive; [7741]

(3) what measures he will take to reduce the impact of the EC Prospectus Directive on the Alternative Investment Market. [7740]

Ruth Kelly: An effective single passport for issuers was identified as a priority for completion of the single European market in financial services at the Lisbon Council in spring 2000. The UK Government are committed to ensuring that the Prospectus Directive meets this goal; and that it meets the aim of reducing the cost of raising capital for EU companies, including SMEs and growing businesses.

The Directive, as currently drafted, could lead to an increase in the disclosure costs of small and medium size companies (SMEs), and the cost of accessing capital by SMEs. However, negotiations are at an early stage, and there are a number of issues that are as yet unclear, such as its relationship with other existing directives, and the way that its provisions will be used.

HM Treasury has actively sought the views of interested parties, and is engaging with industry practitioners (including representatives of the Alternative Investment Market) through round-table consultation meetings. HM Treasury officials and Ministers are in close touch with the European Commission, the Belgian presidency, the European Parliament, and other member states of this and other directives which affect the financial services industry.

Company Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has held with the Secretary of State for

Trade and Industry regarding the European Commission's proposals for a single consolidated company tax base announced in Brussels on 23 October. [11203]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's position is that tax harmonisation, including proposals for a consolidated company tax base, is not the way forward for Europe.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he supports the European Commission's plans for a consolidated EU company tax base announced in Brussels on 23 October. [11200]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax harmonisation, including proposals for a consolidated company tax base, is not the way forward for Europe. The Government will not support any action at European level that will threaten jobs or the competitive position of British business.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the need for further EU-level reforms of company taxation to achieve the economic goals established at the Lisbon European Council of March 2000. [11210]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's view is that company tax issues need to be considered in the context of the economic goals established at the Lisbon European Council and the business agenda agreed at the Stockholm European Council, which means reducing unfair state aids, acting against unfair tax competition, promoting R and D and innovation, a better, simpler regulatory environment and boosting skills.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the European Commission's proposals for the introduction of a consolidated company tax base across the EU would be introduced by qualified majority voting. [11201]

Dawn Primarolo: Decisions in this area are subject to unanimity. Tax harmonisation, including proposals for a consolidated company tax base, is not the way forward for Europe.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects of the variation in effective company tax rates across the EU. [11208]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's view is that fair tax competition not tax harmonisation is the way forward for Europe. The Government are committed to ensuring that the UK remains an attractive location for business, with strong international links and high levels of both inward and outward investment.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a breakdown of the effective company tax burden in each EU state. [11209]

Dawn Primarolo: There are a number of approaches that can be used to calculate effective company tax burdens. Information is contained in a variety of sources, including the OECD's publication "Revenue Statistics 1965–2000" and the Commission's Communication "Towards an internal market without tax obstacles: a strategy for providing companies with a consolidated corporate tax base for their EU-wide activities" (COM(2001)582), both of which are available in the Library of the House.

Investment

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what forecasts he has made on the level of investment into the UK over the next three years. [10658]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Inward investment into the UK is a component of the balance of payments financial account, and only part of it contributes to UK gross domestic fixed capital formation. The Government do not produce forecasts for the components of the balance of payments financial account.

Double Taxation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has held with European finance ministers regarding proposals for changes to EU-wide double taxation. [11202]

Dawn Primarolo: Double taxation treaties are a matter for member states not for the EU.

Former Nationalised Industries

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement regarding shareholding for employees in former nationalised industries. [9552]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Shareholdings held by employees of former nationalised industries are a matter for each individual company.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much the climate change levy will cost British industry in the first year of its operation. [9567]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy will raise an estimated £1 billion a year, all of which will be recycled back to business through cuts in the employers' rate of national insurance contributions and support for energy efficiency. While the levy is broadly revenue neutral across manufacturing and service sectors, its exact effect on any specific sector or industry will depend on a number of factors including: the future energy consumption of firms in the sector and employment levels in those firms; the number of energy intensive firms in that sector that are eligible to receive a discount on the main rates of the levy by signing up to an energy efficiency agreement; and what use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt 'new' renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power.

Railtrack

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provision is made for Railtrack in the 2000–01 Government budget. [11089]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

No provision was made for any direct payments from the UK Government to Railtrack in the financial year 2000–01.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revision he has made to his public expenditure provision for Railtrack in 2000–01, following the decision to put the company into administration. [11088]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have made no revisions to their public expenditure provisions for Railtrack for the financial year 2000–01.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the planned £30 billion public investment in the railway industry in the 10-Year-Plan is in the budget for the next three years; and how much of that amount is earmarked for Railtrack. [11409]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The 10-Year-Plan for Transport set out £14.7 billion of public investment expenditure for rail over the next 10 years, with the remainder of the public support total constituting revenue support.

Of the public investment total, around £3.6 billion was for the first three years. The majority of this amount was earmarked for renewals network grants to Railtrack.

Registered Designs Regulations

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason it was necessary to include the provisions of section 1(i)(c) of schedule A1 of the Registered Designs Regulations 2001. [11846]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the question answered, on 1 November 2001, *Official Report* column 778W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

International Swimming Events

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what stadiums there are in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* London capable of holding international swimming events under the auspices of FINA; [11019]

(2) what assessment she has made of the level of investment needed to upgrade United Kingdom *(a)* international athletics and *(b)* international swimming stadiums to international competition standards; and if she will make a statement. [11020]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* There are a number of athletics and swimming facilities across the United Kingdom that are used regularly for international athletics and swimming events which meet IAAF and FINA standards. The main athletics stadiums are: Crystal Palace in London, the Alexander Stadium in Birmingham, the Gateshead Stadium, the Don Valley Stadium in Sheffield, the Meadowbank Stadium in Edinburgh and the Scotstoun Stadium in Glasgow. The main swimming centres used for international 50 metre competition are the Ponds Forge Centre in Sheffield and the new Manchester Aquatics Centre.

Sport England has set aside £21 million from the National Lottery to fund a regional high performance centre at Crystal Palace which will have improved facilities for athletics, boxing, swimming and tennis. The refurbishment will bring the existing 50 metre pool up to FINA standards.

World Cup 2002

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to introduce a deregulation order to allow more flexible liquor licensing during the football World Cup Finals in 2002. [11552]

Dr. Howells: None. The statutory consultation and the periods for parliamentary scrutiny and approval set out in the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 for making a regulatory reform order could not be completed by the time of the World Cup Finals next June. The hospitality and leisure industry has made no formal request to have licensing hours varied to allow them to serve alcohol during early morning games. As the games will be shown on BBC and ITV terrestrial television channels, the public demand to attend licensed premises to watch the games is now likely to be limited. However, licensed premises which do wish to open very early to sell alcohol during televised games can apply for special orders of exemption from the magistrates courts (and in London, from the Commissioners of Police for the City and the Metropolis) in respect of this special occasion, and under the terms of the Licensing Act 1964 it is for the magistrates, or the chief officers of police in London, to decide whether any additional hours should be permitted.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by her Department; if she will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans she has to sell further such assets over the period of the current comprehensive spending review; and if she will make a statement. [10843]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The Government Art Collection is the only collection of art for which the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has direct responsibility. The collection at present comprises approximately 12,000 works of art. None of these has been sold over the last three years, nor are there any plans to do so. The Department holds no stocks of antiques or fine wines.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Ms Buck: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those regulatory impact assessments published during the latest six-month period. [12435]

Mr. Leslie: The Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are necessary, give effective protection, balance cost and risk, are fair and command public confidence. In accordance with this, we require Departments to produce and publish regulatory impact assessments for all regulatory proposals likely to have an impact on business.

I have presented to Parliament today a Command Paper listing regulatory impact assessments published between 1 January and 30 June 2001. Copies of those listed have been placed in the House Libraries. This is the fifteenth such Command Paper.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foxhunting

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Masters of Foxhounds Association about the restarting of foxhunting. [10005]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* Officials from this Department have met a number of organisations including the Masters of Foxhound Association regarding the possible relaxation of foot and mouth disease controls over foxhunting.

Institute for Animal Health

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the places of origin of cattle tested in error during the recent work undertaken by the Institute for Animal Health; [10828]

(2) if she will publish the results of the recent work undertaken by the Institute for Animal Health on cattle brains which were tested in error. [10829]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA has commissioned two independent audits to investigate the provenance of the samples used by the Institute of Animal Health. The reports of these audits will be published. Any publication of results from experiments will depend upon the findings of the audit teams.

Arable Agrimoney

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from the First Minister for Scotland, about the payment of arable agrimoney; and if she will make a statement. [9710]

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from *(a)* the Scottish Executive and *(b)* the Scottish Rural Development Department on the matter of agrimonetary compensation; and what her response was. [9841]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been involved in discussion with Ministers from the devolved Administrations about the issue of agrimonetary compensation for the arable sector. In addition, Ross Finnie, the Scottish Executive Minister for Environment and Rural Development has written to my noble Friend the Under-Secretary, Lord Whitty, on this subject.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the Council for the Protection of Rural England's report on the handling of the foot and mouth crisis. [7767]

Alun Michael: The council for the Protection of Rural England's report "The Strategic Lessons of the foot-and-mouth outbreak" contains much which accords with the recommendations in the reports from the rural task force, which I chair, and from my noble Friend Lord Haskins on the impact of foot and mouth disease on the wider rural economy. Both reports were published on 18 October. We are currently considering their recommendations and will respond shortly, taking the views expressed in the CPRE report fully into account.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the independent inquiries into the foot and mouth outbreak will make recommendations. [9070]

Mr. Morley: The Royal Society Inquiry into Infectious Diseases in Livestock has been asked to make recommendations by summer 2002. Dr. Iain Anderson's "Lessons Learned" Inquiry had been asked to make recommendations six months after it has officially started.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the outcome of the Quinquennial and Better Quality Services Reviews of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. [12517]

Mr. Morley: After having undertaken both a consultation exercise and detailed reviews of the functions, form and performance of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate over the past five years, I have concluded that they should remain an Executive Agency for another term. The reviews established that the retention of agency status would be the most appropriate means of delivering high quality and cost-effective services over the next five years.

The Better Quality Services stage of the reviews has specifically identified measures to ensure continuous improvement in VMD's quality of service and cost effectiveness.

SCOTLAND

Prestwick Air Traffic Control Centre

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with representatives from the National Air Traffic Services about the effects of the downturn in air travel on the development of the Prestwick Air Traffic Control Centre; and if she will make a statement. [10243]

Mrs. Liddell: My officials are in regular contact with representatives from the National Air Traffic Services (NATS), and with officials from DTLR, about matters relating to the Prestwick Air Traffic Control Centre.

The Government and NATS both remain committed to the new centre in Prestwick.

Boundary Commission

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Boundary Commission for Scotland will release its initial report. [10664]

Mrs. Liddell: This is a matter for the Boundary Commission for Scotland.

PRIME MINISTER

Standards in Public Life

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [12434]

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to announce that I have appointed my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) as a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life with effect from 15 October. He is the member nominated by the Labour party and takes the place of Lord Shore of Stepney who sadly passed away over the summer.

Special Advisers

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister on what criteria salaries of particular special advisers are decided. [11618]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 467W.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prison Service

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the reasons for the decision of the prison service in Northern Ireland to withdraw the royal prefix from letter headings of H.M. Prison Maghaberry. [9872]

Jane Kennedy: There has been no change in policy in regard to the naming of prison establishments. Establishments can and have been referred to officially both as HMP and by name only.

The inclusion or exclusion of the royal prefix is at the discretion of the governing Governor of each establishment.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Congo

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the export of a water purification unit to Uruguay for ultimate end-use in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [12316]

Mr. Bradshaw: Following consultations with this Department and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry issued an export licence for a water purification unit to Uruguay for the Uruguayan armed forces. The equipment will be used by the Uruguayan army in the DRC where they are part of the United Nations operation. The equipment will provide the Uruguayans with sufficient clean water for their troops operating in the DRC. As part of the United Nations Mission in Congo, these troops, along with other UN agencies and NGOs, will play a role in facilitating humanitarian assistance to the Congolese people. This decision is consistent with and does not affect the Government's continued support for the EU declaration of 7 April 1993 on arms exports to the DRC.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to *(a)* the Rwandan Government and *(b)* the Ugandan Government concerning their involvement in the war in the Congo. [11148]

Mr. Bradshaw: In recent months my noble Friend Baroness Amos and the Secretary of State for International Development have spoken personally to the Presidents of both countries about their involvement in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They stressed the need for a peaceful end to the conflict in compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolutions. We will continue to do so at every opportunity.

EU Business

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for November and *(b)* major European Union events for the period 31 December to April 2002. [12433]

Peter Hain: The information is as follows:

November	*Venue*	*Event*
5	Brussels	Cultural and Audio-visual Council
6	Brussels	ECOFIN
8	Brussels	Development and Co-operation Council
12	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
15	Brussels	Health Council
16	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
19–20	Brussels	General Affairs Council
21–22	Brussels	Budget Council
26	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
27	Brussels	Fisheries Council
29	Brussels	Education and Youth Council

No agendas are available yet

The following are the principal events in the EU between 1 December and April 2002 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

Month	*Venue*	*Event*
December		
3	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
4	Bruges	Culture Council (Ministerial Informal)
4	Brussels	ECOFIN
4	Brussels	Energy Council
4	Brussels	Industry Council
7–8	Brussels	Transport and Telecommunications Council
7–8	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council

Month	Venue	Event
10–11	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10	Brussels	Research Council
12–13	Brussels	Environment Council
14–15	Laeken	European Council
17–18	Brussels	Fisheries Council
18–19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
January		
8	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
10	Brussels	Fisheries Council
11	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
17	Brussels	Budget Council (Evening)
18	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
21–22	Brussels	Agriculture Council
21	Brussels	Eurogroup (Evening)
21	Brussels	Political and Security Committee (Political Director) Spain
22	Brussels	ECOFIN
January		
25	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
25–26	Brussels	Meeting of Employment Ministers (Ministerial Informal)
28–29	Brussels	General Affairs Council
30	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
February		
1	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
7	Budapest	Political Directors Seminar
9–10	Brussels	Gymnich (Ministerial Informal)
11	Brussels	Eurogroup (Evening)
12	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
14	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
14–15	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Ministerial Informal)
18–19	Brussels	General Affairs Council
18–19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
20	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
22–23	Brussels	Telecoms and Information Society Council (Ministerial Informal)
26	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
28	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
March		
1	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Evening)
1	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
1	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
4	Brussels	Eurogroup (Evening)
5	Brussels	ECOFIN
5	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
7	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
8	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
11	Brussels	Research Council
11–12	Brussels	General Affairs Council
12	Brussels	Political and Social Affairs Committee
15–16	Barcelona	European Council
18–19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
19	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
21	Brussels	Environment
22	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
23–24	Brussels	Defence Meeting (Ministerial Informal)
25–26	Brussels	Transport and Telecom Council
26	Brussels	Political and Security Committee
April		
5–6	Luxembourg	Migrations Council (ASEM Ministerial Informal)
8	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
9	Luxembourg	Political and Security Committee
12	Luxembourg	Political and Security Committee
13–14	Luxembourg	ECOFIN (Ministerial Informal)
15–16	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
17	Luxembourg	Political and Security Committee (EV)
19	Luxembourg	Political and Security Committee
22–23	Valencia	Euromed Conference
22–23	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
25–26	Luxembourg	Justice and Home Affairs Council
26	Luxembourg	Political and Security Committee
27–30	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council (Ministerial Informal)
30	Luxembourg	Political and Security Committee

Pakistan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent killings of Christians in Pakistan. [11788]

Mr. Bradshaw: We condemn the attack on a church in Punjab on 28 October in which 18 people were killed. We welcome General Musharraf's assurances that the perpetrators of this heinous act will be brought to justice.

Our thoughts are with the victims and their families and with all those who have suffered at the hands of terrorists.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Pakistani Government with regard to human rights abuses against Christians. [11789]

Mr. Bradshaw: We take the issue of religious freedom in Pakistan very seriously. We continue to raise the position of religious minorities in general and a number of individual cases with the Pakistani authorities, both bilaterally and in concert with our EU partners.

We will continue to take every appropriate opportunity to ask the Pakistani authorities to ensure that the rights of all religious minorities in Pakistan, including Christians, are respected under the constitution.

Sudan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Sudan regarding the bombing of Bahr al Ghazal in southern Sudan. [11155]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are deeply concerned at these further reports of civilian casualties. In June the Government of Sudan made a public statement announcing that they had brought a halt to aerial bombings. Shortly afterwards, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) launched a major offensive in Bahr al Ghazal, and the Government of Sudan in turn resumed aerial bombings. We immediately prompted an EU statement expressing our concern at the renewed military activity by the SPLA, and at the Government of Sudan's resumption of aerial bombings. We urged both sides to immediately stop hostilities in order to create an environment conducive to negotiations and to engage in a continuous and sustained negotiation towards a just and lasting political settlement.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet John Garang, leader of the SPLA in Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [11157]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have invited Dr. John Garang to visit London. Until he is able to visit London, we shall continue to keep in contact with him and the SPLM/A through our Embassy in Khartoum and our High Commission in Nairobi. The pursuit of peace in Sudan

remains the focus of our activity and, in doing so, we believe that it is important to engage with all parties to the conflict.

Diamond Trade

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made with the establishment of a global certification scheme for rough diamonds. [11149]

Peter Hain: Government, industry and NGO representatives in the Kimberley Process are currently meeting in Angola to refine proposals for the establishment of an international certification scheme for rough diamonds. At the last meeting (Twickenham, 11 to 13 September) members agreed in principle on key elements for the scheme. We hope to build on this agreement in Angola, and forge a consensus in time for the ministerial meeting in Botswana scheduled for the end of November. The proposal will go forward to the UN General Assembly before the end of the year. The UK is continuing its key role in the Process and remains committed to the goal of curbing the flow of conflict diamonds.

North Africa

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made with the *(a)* Sudanese IGAD peace process and *(b)* Egypt-Libya initiative. [11156]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have been disappointed with progress made by the Inter-governmental Authority Development (IGAD) initiative. At the time of the last IGAD summit in Nairobi on 2 June, the Sudan People's Liberation Army launched a major offensive in southern Sudan. Accordingly, neither party was willing to show flexibility on a ceasefire or the negotiations. We were encouraged, however, with the agreement by both parties to appoint permanent negotiating teams. These teams have now been established and should allow for more sustained and accelerated negotiations to take place. We are currently looking at further ways to invigorate the peace process. The sponsors of the Egyptian-Libyan initiative have submitted to the parties a plan for negotiating a peace settlement. As far as we are aware there has not yet been a round table discussion attended by all sides to deliberate the plan.

UN World Conference Against Racism

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial contribution he made to the preparation and running of the UN World Conference against Racism; and if he will rank the UK contribution against that of other UN member states *(a)* according to size of contribution and *(b)* according to proportion of GNP. [10463]

Peter Hain: The total contribution made by the Government to the holding of the UN World Conference against Racism was £485,000. This contribution included financial and practical support to the Conference Secretariat (the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights); to the South African NGO SANGOCO co-ordinating the holding of the Conference NGO Forum; and to other relevant bodies to encourage the widest possible participation on the Conference and its preparatory meeting by civil society.

There are no data available on total contributions made by other UN member states to the World Conference process. Therefore it has not been possible to draw any direct comparisons. In terms of financial contributions to the Conference Secretariat (ie excluding practical support to the Secretariat and funding for non-Secretariat activities), the UK contribution of £100,000 was the 12th largest received from a UN member state. In addition, the European Union contributed US $2,613,859 to the Secretariat in support of the preparation and running of the conference.

Biological Weapons Protocol

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his US counterpart on the draft text of the biological weapons protocol; and if he will make a statement. [10779]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had a brief discussion on the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) with the US Secretary of State, in Washington, on 24 October. The United States has not changed its position since it announced its decision, on 25 July, in Geneva, that it could not support the draft protocol and that it could not be made acceptable by further amendment. The United States has, however, made it clear that it remains committed to strengthening the BWC. The United Kingdom is continuing to work with states parties to ensure that multilateral negotiations resume at an early stage, following the 5th Review Conference in Geneva (19 November to 7 December). The United Kingdom remains committed to strengthening the convention by means of effective investigation and enforcement.

Egypt

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice he is offering to schools who have arranged visits for pupils to Egypt and neighbouring countries. [10977]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) provides travel advice, which is broad based and applies to all travellers, on the basis of the information we receive from our staff on the ground. The advice is kept under constant review. The advice is practical and up to date. It presents the facts to allow travellers to make their own decisions about travel. We are not currently advising against travel to Egypt and neighbouring countries.

Following the terrorist attacks in the US and subsequent military action in Afghanistan, we have been alerting British nationals that there may be heightened tension overseas. We are consequently advising all travellers to

maintain a high level of vigilance and avoid situations where there might be tension. However, apart from the countries in our "don't go" list, we are not currently aware of specific threat to British nationals.

FCO travel advice is available on the FCO's website www.fco.gov.uk and by telephone on 020 7008 0232/ 0233, by fax on 020 7008 0155/0164 or on written request to our Travel Advice Unit.

European Single Sky Agreement

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of excluding Gibraltar from the European single sky agreement. [10976]

Peter Hain: We consider that the commission's proposed Single Sky package offers the best way of reducing delays and improving safety, and is essential for improving the use and management of EU airspace. Spain insisted that Gibraltar airport be suspended from the scope of application of the Single Sky legislative measures. Given the importance which the UK attaches to the initiative, we reluctantly agreed that clauses suspending the application of the measure to Gibraltar airport will be inserted when the proposal is considered by the Council.

Suspending Gibraltar airport in this way from the Commission's proposed measures will have no practical impact on the operation of Gibraltar airport, since the focus of the Commission's proposal is on the organisation and use of the upper airspace and on the management of Europe's air traffic service providers.

We made clear to both Spain and the Commission that our agreement on Single Sky was conditional upon the Commission itself bringing forward a proposal which did not contain the suspension clauses, and on a Council and Commission minutes statement, making clear that suspension does not in any way prejudice the application of the EC Treaty to Gibraltar. Our agreement was also without prejudice to Council discussion of future aviation proposals.

We have agreed a similar formula with regard to the Commission's proposal for a Regulation on aviation security. The Spanish Government made clear that they would not agree to the measure unless Gibraltar airport was suspended. Given the crucial importance of this measure for the EU's wider counter-terrorism agenda, we were not prepared to see progress delayed. Again, we are confident that suspension will have no practical impact on the operation of Gibraltar airport. The main purpose of the proposal is to require member states to enforce ECAC standards of security. We, and the Government of Gibraltar, can still ensure, through separate measures, that Gibraltar airport is subject to at least as high a degree of monitoring and control as other Community airports, without a requirement to do so in Community law.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Sierra Leone. [10750]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government's strategy towards Sierra Leone was set out in the Foreign Secretary's statement to the House on 6 June 2000. That strategy remains valid. Our objective is to ensure that the people of Sierra Leone are offered a realistic prospect of peace and stability.

Since the intervention of UK forces in May 2000 we have made good progress in helping the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations restore peace. There has been an effective ceasefire in place since May 2001. Some 20,000 combatants have now entered the disarmament process. The Revolutionary United Front has committed itself to a political agenda. Training by UK forces has transformed the Sierra Leone Army into a more effective and accountable force, but a significant challenge remains. We are now working hard with the United Nations and international partners to consolidate the peace, prepare the ground for free and fair elections in May 2002, and mobilise resources to rehabilitate Sierra Leone's shattered communities, institutions and economy.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans have been made by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* institutions involved in the preparations for Holocaust Memorial Day 2002. [11277]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, 1 November 2001, *Official Report, column 851W.*

HEALTH

Care Home Standards

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will *(a)* list the groups consulted on the drafting of care home standards; *(b)* publish the representations he received from those consulted, *(c)* indicate where these documents will be published; and if he will make a statement. [7992]

Jacqui Smith: The Department received 1,250 responses on "Fit for the future". A summary of these was placed on the website when the National Minimum Standards for Older People was published in March 2001. The Department has received 500 responses to the younger adult and adult placement standards and a summary of these findings will be made available in due course.

Winter Pressures

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional resources he plans to provide to *(a)* Worcestershire county council and *(b)* Worcestershire health authority to relieve winter pressures and to enable patients to be transferred from hospitals to more appropriate care; and if he will make a statement. [8039]

Jacqui Smith: On 9 October we announced a £300 million 'cash for change' initiative to tackle delayed transfers. This programme of investment and reform will

help to free up beds in hospitals, reduce waiting times for treatment and ensure patients, particularly older people, are cared for in the most appropriate place. The resources will be used to purchase residential and nursing care, intensive home care and intermediate care from local providers.

Worcestershire county council is due to receive an allocation of £713,000 from the £100 million being allocated this year and Worcestershire health authority received an extra £382,000 in April to help it prepare for winter pressures.

Hospital Beds (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the number of beds inappropriately occupied in *(a)* acute hospitals and *(b)* community hospitals in Worcestershire; and if he will make a statement. [8038]

Jacqui Smith: As at week ending 7 October 2001 it has been reported that the number of delayed transfers of care patients occupying national health service beds in the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust was 74, and 19 in the Worcestershire Community and Mental Health NHS Trust.

Worcestershire social services and the local health economy are working collaboratively to address existing needs. Worcestershire county council is due to receive an allocation of £713,000 from our 'cash for change' initiative. Worcestershire health authority also received an extra £382,000 in April to help it prepare for winter pressures.

Pharmacies (NHSnet)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to connect pharmacies to NHSnet. [8525]

Jacqui Smith: Our information strategy for the modern national health service 1998–2005—"Information for Health", published September 1998 stated that by the end of 2001 a project will be established to explore ways of using the NHSnet to link all computerised general practitioner practices to local community pharmacies. Both of these groups would link to the Prescription Pricing Authority. "Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan", published in September 2000 pledged that electronic transfer of prescriptions would be introduced in the community by 2004.

The Department is working with the commercial sector to establish pilots to test the feasibility, benefits and costs of e-prescribing across the NHSnet. Good progress has been made since my noble Friend the Lord Hunt of Kings Health announced on 29 March 2001 the approval of three pilots to test the benefits, costs and risks of electronic transmission of prescriptions.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff vacancies there are in the mental health sector of the NHS *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in each region. [10527]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the tables. Staff working in the Mental Health Sector are collected for the following disciplines:

Table 1: Department of Health vacancies survey, March 2001: Vacancies in NHS trusts by region—three month vacancy rates[1,2]

Percentage

	England[3]	*Northern & Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Eastern*	*London*	*South East*	*South West*
Specific consultant specialties[4]									
Forensic psychiatry	5.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	18.2	0.0	8.5	7.7	[5]—
General psychiatry	7.8	8.2	4.0	11.0	12.2	5.8	7.5	10.2	1.3
Learning disabilities	13.3	13.5	26.3	8.3	21.7	10.3	12.2	11.1	6.7
Old age psychiatry	9.3	10.0	11.4	7.9	14.6	16.1	2.3	8.5	0.0
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff									
Community learning disabilities	1.7	0.2	0.0	2.5	0.2	0.0	3.2	4.6	1.4
Other learning disabilities	3.4	4.7	1.3	4.2	0.8	1.0	6.2	5.0	5.1
Community psychiatry	2.6	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.7	0.2	7.9	3.6	0.3
Other psychiatry	3.9	3.8	1.6	2.1	2.0	1.9	7.3	6.1	2.3
Qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff									
Clinical psychology	4.3	5.5	1.6	3.2	2.3	3.9	6.5	4.1	2.5
Psychotherapy	2.0	5.6	3.4	5.0	1.8	0.0	1.7	2.7	0.0

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole-time equivalents)

[2] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental and non-medical work force censuses (whole-time equivalent)

[3] England percentages include staff from Special health authorities.

[4] There are two other specialties (Child and adolescent psychiatry and psychotherapy) that were not separately identified in the vacancy survey and are therefore not included here, but are in the total consultant figures.

[5] Figures based on less than 10 staff in post.

Note:

Percentages rounded to one decimal place

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001

Table 2: Vacancies in NHS trusts by region: three month vacancy rates[1]

Whole-time equivalents

	England[2]	*Northern & Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Eastern*	*London*	*South East*	*South West*
Specific consultant specialties[3]									
Forensic psychiatry	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	[4]—
General psychiatry	130	20	10	20	30	10	30	30	0
Learning disabilities	30	10	10	0	10	0	0	0	0
Old age psychiatry	30	10	0	0	10	10	0	10	0
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff									
Community learning disabilities	60	0	0	110	0	0	10	30	0
Other learning disabilities	180	40	10	20	10	10	10	50	20
Community psychiatry	280	20	10	10	20	0	150	60	0
Other psychiatry	1,040	130	40	60	80	50	380	220	50
Qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff									
Clinical psychology	190	30	10	20	10	10	70	30	10
Psychotherapy	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole-time equivalents)
[2] England totals include staff from Special health authorities
[3] There are two other specialties (Child and adolescent psychiatry and psychotherapy) that were not separately identified in the vacancy survey and are therefore not included here, but are in the total consultant figures
[4] Figures based on less than 10 staff in post
Notes:
Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10
Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding
Source:
Departmental of Health Vacancies Survey 2001

Table 3: Department of Health workforce census: staff in post in NHS trusts by region

Whole-time equivalents

	England[1]	*Northern & Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Eastern*	*London*	*South East*	*South West*
Specific consultant specialties[2]									
Forensic psychiatry	150	10	10	10	10	10	40	10	0
General psychiatry	1,490	170	140	130	180	110	380	230	150
Learning disabilities	170	30	10	20	20	30	20	20	10
Old age psychiatry	300	60	30	30	40	30	40	50	20
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff									
Community learning disabilities	3,340	430	250	590	490	510	310	630	140
Other learning disabilities	5,060	810	660	510	760	610	220	1,010	470
Community psychiatry	10,190	1,320	1,000	1,180	1,230	980	1,730	1,720	1,030
Other psychiatry	25,610	3,280	2,520	2,510	3,690	2,220	4,490	3,360	2,240
Qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff									
Clinical psychology	4,050	510	310	500	490	270	920	600	390
Psychotherapy	410	20	30	20	30	30	200	50	30

[1] England totals include staff from special health authorities
[2] There are two other specialities (Child and adolescent psychiatry and psychotherapy) that were not separately identified
Notes:
1. Whole-time equivalents are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding
3. Rates percentages can not be calculated from these figures
Sources:
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census 2000
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census 2000

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women-only mental health day centres *(a)* have been established and *(b)* are planned to be established (i) in the current financial year, (ii) in 2002–03 and (iii) in 2003–04. [11529]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* A target has been set to ensure that women-only mental health day centres are in place in every health authority by 2004. Currently the Department knows of 88 women-only community day centres and services being run by the voluntary sector and supported, in part, by statutory sector funding. A considerable amount of development work is under way to further strengthen the delivery of high quality mental health services for women including the production of a national women's mental health strategy in 2002. The strategy document will describe the service specification for the provision of women-only mental health day centres and services, against which we will measure progress to ensure that this target is achieved by 2004.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the work of the Anam Cara mental health crisis house in Birmingham; and if he will make a statement on the efficacy of such alternatives to hospital care. [11532]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The full report on the evaluation of services at the Anam Cara mental health crisis house is not due to be published until the new year. However, I understand that initial reports are very favourable.

For many people crisis houses such as Anam Cara can provide an appropriate alternative to hospital and help to meet the particular needs of women and of ethnic minority communities, especially where additional support can be provided. They can complement the 335 crisis resolution teams that we will be developing across the country over the next three years as we deliver the mental health commitments we set out in the NHS plan.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many out of area crisis mental health admissions which are not clinically indicated have taken place in each month of 2001 to date. [11528]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what local reviews of mental health services *(a)* have so far taken place and *(b)* are proposed in the current financial year. [11526]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The Department has co-ordinated two reviews of mental health services since the publication of the mental health National Service Framework in 1999. They have been co-ordinated through the local implementation teams (LITs).

In this financial year, the Department announced via the "Mental Health Policy Implementation Guide" that LITs should co-ordinate a comprehensive review of mental health services as part of the planning process required for implementation of the NHS Plan targets and mental health NSF targets. This process was aligned with the local modernisation reviews, which health authorities were required to co-ordinate as part of the implementation of all NHS Plan targets.

Continuing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 28W, on continuing care, if he will set out for each of the last five years *(a)* the total number of people in each yeer newly meeting the eligibility criteria for continuing NHS health care and *(b)* the total number of people meeting the eligibility criteria. [11051]

Jacqui Smith: The available information has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if health authorities are required to comply with the judgment of Coughlan *v.* North Devon health authority before coming to a decision on eligibility criteria for continuing care. [10739]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* We issued interim guidance on 11 August 1999 (Health Service Circular 1999/180: Local Authority Circular (99)30). This requires health and local authorities, in consultation with each other and, where appropriate, involving primary care groups, to satisfy themselves that their continuing and community care policies and eligibility criteria and other relevant procedures are in line with the Court of Appeal judgment on the Coughlan case and to take further legal advice where necessary.

Revised continuing care guidance was issued on 28 June 2001 (HSC 2001/015:LAC (2001)18) which consolidated guidance on continuing national health service health care in light of the judgment.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements health authorities are required to put in place for the provision of independent advice for patients in NHS beds when they are asked to sign forms about continuing care. [10738]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* We have already begun to establish patient advocacy and liaison services—to be operating in every national health service trust from April 2002—to provide information to patients, their families and carers when they use health services, to provide support when services do not meet user's needs and where possible to sort out problems efficiently and quickly.

In-patient Lists

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in *(a)* rank and *(b)* alphabetical order of health authority, the proportion of patients waiting a year or more for in-patient treatment (i) at the latest available date and (ii) in April 1997. [11095]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Percentage of patients on in-patient waiting list over 12 months

Health authorities ranked alphabetically:	*Percentage of patients waiting over 12 months*		
	August 2001	*March 1997*	*June 1997*
Avon	6.5	3.9	7.1
Barking and Havering	6.1	3.3	4.0
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	6.9	n/a	n/a
Barnsley	0.4	2.3	2.1
Bedfordshire	7.0	1.3	2.6
Berkshire	3.7	2.6	3.7
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	5.8	n/a	n/a
Birmingham	2.0	0.1	0.3
Bradford	0.8	0.3	5.0
Brent and Harrow	6.0	4.5	6.3
Buckinghamshire	5.6	4.0	4.9

Percentage of patients on in-patient waiting list over 12 months

Health authorities ranked alphabetically:	*Percentage of patients waiting over 12 months*		
	August 2001	*March 1997*	*June 1997*
Bury and Rochdale	3.2	1.8	1.6
Calderdale and Kirklees	0.8	0.3	1.2
Cambridgeshire	4.2	n/a	n/a
Camden and Islington	4.4	1.3	2.5
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	5.1	0.8	1.6
County Durham and Darlington	0.9	0.0	0.5
Coventry	2.7	0.0	0.2
Croydon	9.6	4.1	3.4
Doncaster	0.3	1.0	0.8
Dorset	0.1	0.0	0.0
Dudley	2.2	0.2	0.3
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	5.2	8.1	9.9
East Kent	6.9	0.5	0.3
East Lancashire	1.6	0.4	0.8
East London and City	4.7	4.3	4.9
East Riding and Hull	3.5	0.7	3.7
East Surrey	8.7	2.3	4.1
East Sussex, Bright and Hove	6.4	2.3	3.2
Gateshead and South Tyneside	0.5	0.4	1.5
Gloucestershire	1.6	0.1	0.5
Herefordshire	3.7	1.4	2.7
Hertfordshire	6.1	n/a	n/a
Hillingdon	5.8	4.6	5.9
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	6.3	n/a	n/a
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	1.8	1.4	2.6
Kingston and Richmond	6.1	4.1	5.4
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	8.5	7.6	11.4
Leeds	3.0	0.5	1.7
Leicestershire	2.6	0.4	2.2
Lincolnshire	4.3	8.3	8.7
Liverpool	4.0	4.2	5.3
Manchester	6.3	4.8	7.2
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	5.4	3.1	4.1
Morecambe Bay	2.6	2.0	1.4
Newcastle and North Tyneside	1.1	0.5	2.2
Norfolk	5.3	n/a	n/a
North and East Devon	5.5	1.9	3.5
North and Mid Hampshire	4.9	3.2	3.7
North Cheshire	7.9	0.9	2.9
North Cumbria	1.8	0.1	3.5
North Derbyshire	0.7	9.5	11.0
North Essex	6.1	2.5	4.1
North Nottinghamshire	1.0	2.5	2.9
North Staffordshire	2.9	1.5	2.9
North West Lancashire	1.5	1.1	2.0
North Yorkshire	1.2	0.2	1.1
Northamptonshire	4.8	2.2	3.1
Northumberland	0.9	0.2	1.1
Nottingham	2.3	10.0	8.1
Oxfordshire	4.6	5.0	7.3
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	8.3	8.3	9.1
Rotherham	0.4	2.0	2.4
Salford and Trafford	6.4	2.9	5.6
Sandwell	0.8	0.1	0.1
Sefton	3.3	2.7	5.7
Sheffield	1.2	5.2	6.1
Shropshire	3.5	0.2	0.3
Solihull	1.2	0.2	0.3
Somerset	3.4	0.2	0.8
South and West Devon	6.6	0.1	0.7
South Cheshire	4.7	2.0	5.6
South Essex	3.9	0.3	1.1
South Humber	0.8	7.3	9.1
South Lancashire	2.4	1.7	4.4
South Staffordshire	5.2	0.2	0.5
Southampton and South West Hampshire	6.4	6.0	7.7
Southern Derbyshire	2.6	6.1	5.3
St. Helens and Knowsley	3.4	2.0	3.5
Stockport	3.8	3.6	3.6
Suffolk	4.6	3.3	3.7
Sunderland	0.5	0.0	0.4

Percentage of patients on in-patient waiting list over 12 months

Health authorities ranked alphabetically:	*Percentage of patients waiting over 12 months*		
	August 2001	*March 1997*	*June 1997*
Tees	0.4	0.0	0.1
Wakefield	2.3	1.6	2.7
Walsall	0.8	0.1	0.2
Warwickshire	1.1	0.1	0.2
West Kent	5.3	1.4	3.1
West Pennine	2.4	1.1	1.7
West Surrey	10.9	5.5	8.9
West Sussex	9.3	4.7	7.8
Wigan and Bolton	3.7	0.6	2.3
Wiltshire	5.9	5.7	5.5
Wirral	2.8	1.8	1.5
Wolverhampton	1.4	0.7	1.8
Worcestershire	5.0	1.8	1.2
England	4.4	2.7	3.9

Source:
Department of Health quarterly return (QF01)

Health authorities ranked by percentage waiting over 12 months (highest first)

Name	*Percentage of patients waiting over 12 months in:*		
	August 2001	*March 1997*	*June 1997*
West Surrey	10.9	5.5	8.9
Croydon	9.6	4.1	3.4
West Sussex	9.3	4.7	7.8
East Surrey	8.7	2.3	4.1
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	8.5	7.6	11.4
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	8.3	8.3	9.1
North Cheshire	7.9	0.9	2.9
Bedfordshire	7.0	1.3	2.6
East Kent	6.9	0.5	0.3
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	6.9	n/a	n/a
South and West Devon	6.6	0.1	0.7
Avon	6.5	3.9	7.1
Southampton and South West Hampshire	6.4	6.0	7.7
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	6.4	2.3	3.2
Salford and Telford	6.4	2.9	5.6
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	6.3	n/a	n/a
Manchester	6.3	4.8	7.2
Kingston and Richmond	6.1	4.1	5.4
Hertfordshire	6.1	n/a	n/a
Barking and Havering	6.1	3.3	4.0
North Essex	6.1	2.5	4.1
Brent and Harrow	6.0	4.5	6.3
Wiltshire	5.9	5.7	5.5
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	5.8	n/a	n/a
Hillingdon	5.8	4.6	5.9
Buckinghamshire	5.6	4.0	4.9
North and East Devon	5.5	1.9	3.5
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	5.4	3.1	4.1
West Kent	5.3	1.4	3.1
Norfolk	5.3	n/a	n/a
South Staffordshire	5.2	0.2	0.5
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	5.2	8.1	9.9
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	5.1	0.8	1.6
Worcestershire	5.0	1.8	1.2
North and Mid Hampshire	4.9	3.2	3.7
Northamptonshire	4.8	2.2	3.1
South Cheshire	4.7	2.0	5.6
East London and City	4.7	4.3	4.9
Suffolk	4.6	3.3	3.7
Oxfordshire	4.6	5.0	7.3
Camden and Islington	4.4	1.3	2.5
Lincolnshire	4.3	8.3	8.7
Cambridgeshire	4.2	n/a	n/a
Liverpool	4.0	4.2	5.3
South Essex	3.9	0.3	1.1
Stockport	3.8	3.6	3.6
Herefordshire	3.7	1.4	2.7
Wigan and Bolton	3.7	0.6	2.3
Berkshire	3.7	2.6	3.7

Health authorities ranked by percentage waiting over 12 months (highest first)

Name	Percentage of patients waiting over 12 months in: August 2001	March 1997	June 1997
East Riding and Hull	3.5	0.7	3.7
Shropshire	3.5	0.2	0.3
Somerset	3.4	0.2	0.8
St. Helens and Knowsley	3.4	2.0	3.5
Sefton	3.3	2.7	5.7
Bury and Rochdale	3.2	1.8	1.6
Leeds	3.0	0.5	1.7
North Staffordshire	2.9	1.5	2.9
Wirral	2.8	1.8	1.5
Coventry	2.7	0.0	0.2
Morecambe Bay	2.6	2.0	1.4
Southern Derbyshire	2.6	6.1	5.3
Leicestershire	2.6	0.4	2.2
South Lancashire	2.4	1.7	4.4
West Pennine	2.4	1.1	1.7
Wakefield	2.3	1.6	2.7
Nottingham	2.3	10.0	8.1
Dudley	2.2	0.2	0.3
Birmingham	2.0	0.1	0.3
North Cumbria	1.8	0.1	3.5
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	1.8	1.4	2.6
East Lancashire	1.6	0.4	0.8
Gloucestershire	1.6	0.1	0.5
North West Lancashire	1.5	1.1	2.0
Wolverhampton	1.4	0.7	1.8
North Yorkshire	1.2	0.2	1.1
Solihull	1.2	0.2	0.3
Sheffield	1.2	5.2	6.1
Newcastle and North Tyneside	1.1	0.5	2.2
Warwickshire	1.1	0.1	0.2
North Nottinghamshire	1.0	2.5	2.9
County Durham and Darlington	0.9	0.0	0.5
Northumberland	0.9	0.2	1.1
Calderdale and Kirklees	0.8	0.3	1.2
South Humber	0.8	7.3	9.1
Sandwell	0.8	0.1	0.1
Walsall	0.8	0.1	0.2
Bradford	0.8	0.3	5.0
North Derbyshire	0.7	9.5	11.0
Sunderland	0.5	0.0	0.4
Gateshead and South Tyneside	0.5	0.4	1.5
Tees	0.4	0.0	0.1
Barnsley	0.4	2.3	2.1
Rotherham	0.4	2.0	2.4
Doncaster	0.3	1.0	0.8
Dorset	0.1	0.0	0.0
England	4.4	2.7	3.9

Note:
Data were collected on a quarterly basis until June 1998. Therefore, data have been given from March 1997; the nearest quarter to April 1997.
Source:
Department of Health quarterly return (QF01)

Suicides (Mentally Ill People)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in reducing the suicide rate among severely mentally ill people since 1997. [10012]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* We take the issue of suicide very seriously. This is why strategies to reduce suicide form a major part of the Government's programme outlined in "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation, (OHN)" and why the Department funds the "National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness". It is too early to assess progress on the overall "OHN" target to reduce the death rate from suicide and undetermined injury by at least a fifth by the year 2010. This is because the most recent three-year pooled data overlap the start of OHN, which was published in 1999. However, the Department is taking steps to implement recommendations concerning those with a severe mental illness outlined in the most recent report of the national confidential inquiry called "Safety First", published in March 2001.

Maternity Units

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the average cost to the NHS of deliveries in *(a)* midwife-led maternity units and *(b)* acute units. [10015]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The information is not available in the format requested. The Reference Costs 2001 Collection, due to be published in

late November 2001, separately identifies those deliveries that are hospital based from those that are based in the community or at home. This information will not, however, differentiate between who leads the professional group, for example, midwives or obstetricians.

The table shows the average costs for all hospital based deliveries.

1999–2000

£ mean average

HRG code/label	*NELIP*	*ELIP*
N06—Normal delivery with complications/comorbidities	1,176	1,102
N07—Normal delivery without complications/comorbidities	738	785
N08—Assisted delivery with complications/comorbidities	1,420	1,189
N09—Assisted delivery without complications/comorbidities	1,035	1,106
N10—Caesarean section with complications/comorbidities	2,126	2,406
N11—Caesarean section without complications/comorbidities	1,738	1,761

Breast Cancer

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in achieving maximum target wait times of one month from diagnosis to treatment for breast cancer by 2001; and to what stage of treatment this refers. [11064]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Full implementation of the maximum target wait of one month from diagnosis to their first definitive treatment for breast cancer will be rolled out by 31 December 2001. National health service trusts have submitted action plans setting out their plans to achieve the 2001 targets and have established shadow monitoring arrangements to monitor their progress. Central monitoring will commence on 1 January 2002.

Private Sector Concordat

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients treated under the concordat with the private sector are at state retirement age. [10489]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The Department does not collect information on National Health Service funded cases in the private sector in the form requested. In 1999–2000 36 per cent. of finished consultant episodes in NHS trusts in England involved people over the state pension age (65 for men, 60 for women); however it is not necessarily the case that the same proportion will apply to patients treated under the concordat.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments he has made of future activity levels under the concordat with the private sector. [10491]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Latest figures show there have been in the region of 60,000 National Health Service funded cases in the private sector since the concordat between the NHS and the independent sector was signed in October last year. Officials are in discussion with private sector providers with a view to developing a national framework agreement to build longer-term relationships between the NHS and the private sector. The aim of this agreement would be to double the number of elective procedures carried out in the private sector on the NHS's behalf. On that basis we believe that next year NHS-funded elective activity in the private sector should exceed 100,000 cases.

Nottingham Health Authority

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the additional resources required to bring the Nottingham health authority up to 100 per cent. of its weighted capitation in *(a)* cash and *(b)* percentage terms. [11306]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Nottingham health authority's distance from weighted capitation target for 2001–02 is £7 million in cash terms or 1.55 per cent. below target. For 2001–02, Nottingham health authority received an allocation of £465 million, which is an increase of £39 million in cash terms or 9.15 per cent. The weighted capitation formula is used to set targets that inform allocations, but the formula does not determine allocations.

Community Mental Health Staff

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many additional community mental health staff *(a)* have been employed and *(b)* will be employed in the current financial year [11523]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Community mental health staff are employed by the national health service, local authorities and voluntary and independent sector organisations. Data currently collected by the Department identify community psychiatry nurses. However, medical, therapy and social care staff working in mental health services in the community are not identified separately. Between 1997 and 2000 the number of qualified community psychiatry nurses employed in the NHS increased from 9,740 to 11,080.

It is not possible to say how many community mental health staff will be employed in the current financial year. The work force census is carried out on 30 September each year. Data for 2001 will be published in January 2002.

Mental Health (Prisoners)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prisoners with serious mental illness *(a)* have left prison and *(b)* will leave prison in the current financial year without (i) a care plan and (ii) a care co-ordinator. [11531]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* At present prisons do not keep records in a form that would readily provide the statistics requested. The NHS Plan, published in July 2000, gave a commitment that by 2004 no prisoner with serious mental illness will leave prison without a care plan and a designated care co-ordinator. Work is under way to develop mental health in-reach services in prisons in order to meet this and other NHS Plan commitments relating to mental health services for prisoners. A start is being made in 12 prisons in England in this financial year and it is expected that in-reach will be in operation in about 70 prisons with the greatest

mental health need by 2004. We are working with Her Majesty's Prison Service to ensure that information is collected to enable us to track progress with this initiative.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of prisoners with severe mental illness are in receipt of treatment. [11530]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* It is estimated that at any one time around 5,000 prisoners have severe mental illness and, depending on the capacity of the prison health care team, will receive some support and treatment. The NHS Plan, published in July 2000, gave a commitment that by 2004, 5,000 prisoners at any time will be receiving more comprehensive mental health services in prison. Work is under way to develop mental health in-reach services in prisons in order to meet this and other NHS Plan commitments relating to mental health services for prisoners. A start is being made in 12 prisons in England in this financial year and it is expected that in-reach will be in operation in around 70 or so prisons with the greatest mental health need by 2004.

In 1999, the latest year for which statistics have been published, 742 prisoners were transferred to hospital as restricted patients for treatment for mental disorder under sections 47 and 48 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

NHS Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the change in the NHS deflator measure of cost increases for each of the last 10 years; what the annual increase in the retail price index was for each year; and if he will make a statement. [10809]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The table shows the national health service inflation index and the retail price index from 1991–92 to 2000–01.

Percentage

Year	*NHS inflation index*	*Retail prices index*
1991–92	[1]—	4.0
1992–93	5.8	1.9
1993–94	2.7	2.2
1994–95	2.6	3.5
1995–96	3.7	2.7
1996–97	2.9	2.6
1997–98	2.1	3.6
1998–99	3.9	2.0
1999–2000	4.5	2.6
2000–01	[1]—	2.3

[1] Not available

The table shows that the NHS deflator has risen by approximately 7 per cent. above the retail prices index, over the last decade. This is primarily because NHS pay has increased faster the RPI. This shows that NHS staff are receiving real terms pay increases.

Health Services (Somerset and Dorset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to establish a new, unified health authority for Somerset and Dorset; what plans he has to site the headquarters of the new health authority in Yeovil; and if he will make a statement. [11036]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Public consultation on the boundaries of a proposed new health authority for Somerset and Dorset is under way and will finish on 30 November 2001. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will decide the boundaries for the new health authority in the light of the comments received during the consultation.

Decisions on the management arrangements, including the location of the headquarters, for the proposed Somerset and Dorset health authority have not been taken yet. It will be the responsibility of the new health authority, when established, to make these decisions.

NHS Funding Mechanisms

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into alternative funding mechanisms for the national health service; if he will publish this research; and if he will make a statement. [10744]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* In March 2001 my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that Derek Wanless, former group chief executive of Nat West bank, would be leading a review to provide a long-term assessment of the technological, demographic and medical trends over the next two decades that will affect the health service.

In the light of these trends, the review will identify the key factors which will determine the financial and other resources required to ensure that the national health service can provide a publicly funded, comprehensive, high quality service available on the basis of clinical need and not ability to pay. The review will report to my right hon. Friend by April 2002.

Surgical Procedures (Cost)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has undertaken into the relative cost differences between surgical procedures carried out in the public and private sectors; and if he will make a statement. [11035]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The Department has recently conducted a survey of health authorities, primary care trusts and acute trusts on the levels of activity being commissioned in the private sector and the accompanying costs. Analysis is not yet complete.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many asylum-seeking children were supported under *(a)* section 17 and *(b)* section 20 of the Children's Act 1989 in the year to June 2001; [10810]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in local authority care receiving full board at the latest available date. [10811]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The information is not collected centrally in the form requested.

The Department is currently conducting a children in need census with local authorities which covers the activity in a "typical" week in September or October 2001

selected by the authority. This census, for the first time, includes a question on asylum-seeking children. These data will not be available until some time in 2002.

The Home Office administers the grant to local authorities for those unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are supported under the Children Act. Such children receive a needs assessment from their social services department. This should look at children's cases on an individual basis but it is likely that those children under 16 will be assessed as needing to be taken into care under section 20 of the Children Act. Older children may be assessed as needing the less intensive support available under section 17. As at 26 January 2001, local authorities were claiming grant for

under 16 year-olds: 1,376

16 and 17 year-olds: 4,702.

For the financial year 2000–01, local authorities claimed grant for the following number of support weeks:

under 16 year-olds: 67,491 weeks

16 and 17 year-olds: 239,598 weeks.

These figures cannot be simply converted into numbers of young people.

Beta Interferon

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1240W, on beta interferon (No. 7427), what assessment he has made of the cost of beta interferon *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in other countries; and if he will make a statement. [9795]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) Appraisal Committee further considered the evidence on the use of beta interferon and glatiramer acetate for multiple sclerosis sufferers on 25 September 2001. NICE has subsequently issued a provisional appraisal determination (PAD) to interested parties for comment.

The institute has stated that, to allow sufficient time to take proper account of the extensive comments received on the PAD, it issued the final appraisal determination to consultees on 30 October.

Knee Replacement Operations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the average waiting times in each English hospital trust for knee replacement operations in each of the last three years. [11811]

Mr. Hutton: The average median waiting times in each English hospital trust for knee replacement in each of the last three years 1997–98,1998–99 and 1999–2000 have been placed in the Library.

As part of the NHS Plan, the maximum waiting time for in-patient treatment will be cut from 18 months now to six months by the end of 2005. As a first step towards this reduction, the maximum wait for a national health service operation will be cut to 15 months by the end of March 2002.

Operation Waiting Lists

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been waiting for *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* out-patient operations for each reporting period over the last 20 years; what proportion of these people have been waiting for (i) more than two years, (ii) more than 18 months, (iii) more than one year, (iv) more than nine months and (v) more than six months; and if he will make a statement. [10808]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The information requested is in the tables.

As part of the NHS Plan, the national health service is working towards reducing the current maximum in-patient wait of 18 months to 15 months by March 2002, 12 months by March 2003, nine months by March 2004 and finally six months by the end of 2005. The maximum out-patient waiting time will fall from over six months today to six months by March 2002 and three months by 2005. No specific targets have been set within the NHS Plan for further reducing waiting lists but modelling suggests that as waiting times fall so waiting lists will shorten.

In January 2001, the British Association of Otorhinolaryngologists released guidance on the use of single-use instruments for tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy operations due to the theoretical risk of contracting vCJD. This had an effect on in-patient waiting lists due to the number of patients waiting for these types of operations.

		Of those on in-patient waiting list, percentage who have waited:				
Quarter	*Size of in-patient waiting list*	*More than 6 months*	*More than 9 months*	*More than 12 months*	*More than 18 months*	*More than 24 months*
March 1981	628,333	n/a	n/a	28.8	n/a	n/a
June 1981	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1981	619,393	n/a	n/a	29.2	n/a	n/a
December 1981	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1982	622,480	n/a	n/a	28.2	n/a	n/a
June 1982	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1982	725,865	n/a	n/a	26.6	n/a	n/a
December 1982	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1983	726,186	n/a	n/a	27.3	n/a	n/a
June 1983	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1983	703,755	n/a	n/a	29.3	n/a	n/a
December 1983	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1984	692,945	n/a	n/a	28.1	n/a	n/a
June 1984	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1984	682,599	n/a	n/a	27.8	n/a	n/a
December 1984	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Quarter	Size of in-patient waiting list	Of those on in-patient waiting list, percentage who have waited: More than 6 months	More than 9 months	More than 12 months	More than 18 months	More than 24 months
March 1985	674,453	n/a	n/a	25.4	n/a	n/a
June 1985	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1985	661,249	n/a	n/a	24.2	n/a	n/a
December 1985	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1986	673,107	n/a	n/a	24.0	n/a	n/a
June 1986	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1986	681,901	n/a	n/a	24.2	n/a	n/a
December 1986	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1987	687,945	n/a	n/a	23.6	n/a	n/a
June 1987	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1987	848,022	45.0	32.8	24.7	n/a	10.7
December 1987	873,130	44.1	32.2	24.1	n/a	10.5
March 1988	876,246	43.5	32.4	23.7	n/a	10.0
June 1988	878,306	44.1	33.2	24.2	n/a	10.1
September 1988	900,051	44.7	33.5	24.4	n/a	10.2
December 1988	931,495	44.3	32.0	24.0	n/a	9.9
March 1989	922,676	44.3	31.7	24.2	n/a	10.0
June 1989	922,877	43.5	31.7	23.6	n/a	9.6
September 1989	929,056	43.4	31.8	23.5	n/a	9.5
December 1989	971,845	42.5	29.4	22.5	n/a	8.9
March 1990	958,976	41.8	29.7	21.7	n/a	8.4
June 1990	955,786	41.7	29.3	21.6	n/a	7.9
September 1990	957,533	41.7	28.0	21.2	n/a	7.4
December 1990	965,520	39.9	25.8	19.5	n/a	6.4
March 1991	948,243	39.0	26.8	17.9	n/a	5.4
June 1991	964,050	39.0	24.6	17.8	n/a	5.3
September 1991	947,842	37.5	21.7	16.7	n/a	4.6
December 1991	950,098	34.1	16.1	13.7	n/a	3.2
March 1992	917,717	29.5	26.	8.8	n/a	0.2
June 1992	937,054	29.9	17.0	9.1	2.2	0.1
September 1992	939,740	30.5	16.6	8.6	1.8	0.1
December 1992	977,189	28.9	15.8	7.5	1.3	0.1
March 1993	994,974	27.4	13.6	5.7	0.5	0.0
June 1993	1,019,341	29.1	14.9	6.5	0.5	0.0
September 1993	1,032,038	30.5	15.5	6.9	0.6	0.0
December 1993	1,065,782	30.0	16.3	7.0	0.6	0.0
March 1994	1,065,369	28.5	14.5	6.1	0.4	0.0
June 1994	1,077,497	28.3	14.5	6.1	0.4	0.0
September 1994	1,071,101	28.5	13.9	5.8	0.4	0.0
December 1994	1,070,492	26.7	13.1	5.1	0.3	0.0
March 1995	1,044,051	23.1	9.9	3.1	0.0	0.0
June 1995	1,052,958	23.2	9.9	3.1	0.0	0.0
September 1995	1,040,152	23.5	9.1	2.7	0.0	0.0
December 1995	1,054,948	21.8	8.6	1.9	0.0	0.0
March 1996	1,048,029	19.9	6.8	0.4	0.0	0.0
June 1996	1,056,122	21.2	7.7	1.0	0.0	0.0
September 1996	1,061,557	22.6	8.4	1.4	0.0	0.0
December 1996	1,104,983	23.1	9.6	2.0	0.0	0.0
March 1997	1,158,004	25.0	10.5	2.7	0.0	0.0
June 1997	1,189,962	26.7	12.2	3.9	0.0	0.0
September 1997	1,207,515	28.0	13.4	4.8	0.1	0.0
December 1997	1,261,915	29.1	14.3	5.4	0.1	0.0
March 1998	1,297,662	29.5	14.5	5.2	0.0	0.0
June 1998	1,287,543	29.7	14.8	5.6	0.0	0.0
September 1998	1,213,839	28.6	13.8	5.2	0.0	0.0
December 1998	1,173,598	26.9	13.3	4.8	0.0	0.0
March 1999	1,072,860	26.1	12.4	4.4	0.0	0.0
June 1999	1,094,251	25.5	12.3	4.5	0.0	0.0
September 1999	1,084,157	25.9	12.3	4.7	0.0	0.0
December 1999	1,108,006	25.8	12.6	4.7	0.0	0.0
March 2000	1,037,066	25.9	12.4	4.7	0.0	0.0
June 2000	1,047,890	26.1	12.7	4.9	0.0	0.0
September 2000	1,031,824	26.7	12.6	5.0	0.0	0.0
December 2000	1,034,381	25.8	12.8	4.8	0.0	0.0
March 2001	1,006,727	24.4	11.4	4.2	0.0	0.0
June 2001	1,037,875	25.7	12.1	4.5	0.0	0.0

Note:

Before September 1987 figures relate to ordinary (overnight) admissions. Number of people waiting for day cases were not collected before this date.

Source:

KH07 quarterly return

Quarter	Size of out-patient waiting list	Of those on out-patient waiting list, number who have waited: 3 to 6 months	more than 6 months	more than 9 months	more than 12 months	more than 18 months	more than 24 months
June 1955	n/a	214,165	87,436	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1995	n/a	218,339	72,688	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1995	n/a	185,887	60,906	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1996	n/a	157,633	58,501	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1996	n/a	168,792	52,385	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1996	n/a	201,586	61,952	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1996	n/a	188,644	68,512	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1997	n/a	176,799	70,689	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1997	n/a	210,075	84,997	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1997	n/a	253,051	90,123	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1997	n/a	249,039	106,961	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1998	n/a	221,732	112,250	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1998	n/a	269,013	108,684	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1998	n/a	310,863	126,312	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1998	n/a	323,218	144,404	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 1999	n/a	303,246	152,787	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1999	n/a	338,752	145,896	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 1999	n/a	362,754	149,247	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 1999	n/a	336,457	159,211	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 2000	n/a	269,385	132,223	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 2000	n/a	314,157	130,335	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 2000	n/a	309,928	125,840	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 2000	n/a	285,519	113,618	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
March 2001	n/a	201,981	81,847	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 2001	n/a	274,421	85,099	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:
Out-patient data not available prior to June 1995.
Data on the total number of patients on out-patient waiting list is not collected.
Data on the number of out-patients waiting over nine, over 12, over 18 and over 24 months is not collected.
Source:
QM08 quarterly return

WORK AND PENSIONS

Interview (Travelling Expenses)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards recompensing interviewees for their travelling expenses. [11792]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We recognise that it can be difficult for unemployed people to meet the cost of getting to interviews and for this reason we have been running the travel to interview scheme since June 1986. The travel to interview scheme is available to jobseekers from their first day of unemployment.

The scheme encourages people to widen their job search by helping with travelling costs to attend interviews outside their usual travel to work area. To qualify for the scheme the job applied for must be permanent and full time. People can make applications for assistance in advance and will either receive a travel warrant or be reimbursed after the interview has taken place.

Social Security Expenditure (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money was paid in benefits, pensions and other associated services in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK during the (i) 2001–02 financial year to date and (ii) the previous five financial years; and what the breakdown is by benefits for each of those years. [9006]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The Northern Ireland Assembly is responsible for social security within Northern Ireland. Information on benefit expenditure by country is not available for 2000–01. Expenditure for Great Britain is published on the DWP website at http://www.dss.gov.uk/asd/online.html. The relevant information is contained in Other Statistics, Benefit Expenditure Tables 2001, Table1. Estimated expenditure amounts for Scotland are given in the table.

Benefit Expenditure—Scotland

£ million

Terms	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000
Retirement Pension—basic	2,408	2,557	2,663	2,798	2,966
Retirement Pension—earnings-related	193	241	277	321	391
Christmas Bonus—contribution-based	11	11	11	11	11
Widows'/Bereavement benefits	118	114	113	112	112
Unemployment Benefit	125	72	—	—	—
Jobseeker's Allowance—contribution-based	—	43	62	59	56
Jobseeker's Allowance—income-based	—	158	321	303	281

Benefit Expenditure—Scotland

£ million

Terms	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Sickness Benefit	2	—	—	—	—
Statutory Sick Pay	5	13	3	4	4
Invalidity Benefit—basic	29	—	—	—	—
Invalidity Benefit—earnings-related	7	—	—	—	—
Incapacity Benefit—short-term	71	81	84	77	69
Incapacity Benefit—long-term	759	767	755	750	691
Incapacity Benefit—earnings-related	183	167	140	120	95
Industrial disablement benefits	62	64	65	67	66
Industrial Death Benefit	5	5	5	5	5
Other industrial injuries benefits	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Maternity Allowance	3	3	3	3	3
Statutory Maternity Pay	45	29	42	46	48
Guardian's and Child's Special Allowance	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Non-contributory Retirement Pension	3	2	2	2	3
Non-contributory Christmas Bonus	1	1	1	1	1
War pensions	111	120	114	112	111
Attendance Allowance	212	235	256	274	290
Invalid Care Allowance	66	80	82	86	91
Severe Disablement Allowance	99	108	119	117	116
Disability Living Allowance	440	521	570	610	644
Disability Working Allowance	2	3	4	4	4
Income Support (under 60 years of age)	1,195	1,012	798	802	817
IS for the elderly—Minimum Income Guarantee	348	344	345	335	353
Child Benefit	572	589	601	611	695
Family Credit	184	210	225	237	185
Earnings Top-Up	—	[1]—	2	3	3
Independent Living Funds	12	13	12	13	14
Mobility Equipment Fund	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1
Social Fund	24	22	18	19	18
Winter Fuel Payments	—	—	19	19	90
Other small benefits	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Consolidated Fund Extra Receipts	−1	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	—
Housing Benefit Rent Allowance	276	302	322	335	352
Housing Benefit Rent Rebate	630	665	692	701	700
Council Tax Benefit	213	246	287	303	306
Total benefit expenditure	8,413	8,798	9,014	9,262	9,588

[1] Less than one million

Notes

1. Figures are consistent with the Departmental Report 2001.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest million.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
4. These figures include all LA spending on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit in addition to the money funded directly by Central Government.
5. The Scotland expenditure figures have been calculated from the average weekly amounts and caseload figures that have been derived from sample administrative data.
6. Figures for 1999–2000 are on a Resource Accounting and Budgeting basis.

Departmental Properties

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the total running costs for buildings used, owned or rented by his Department for each nation and region of the UK, and estimate the average cost per square metre for properties used by his Department as a whole, and by region and nation of the UK. [6849]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The vast majority of buildings on the former DSS part of the estate are rented to the Department by our private sector partner, Land Securities Trillium. Under the PRIME PFI agreement, the Department pays Land Securities Trillium a unitary charge (the "Facilities Price") for each building and receives serviced office accommodation in return. The Facilities Price covers not only the space we occupy but also a large number of building related services. These are:

building management and maintenance (including Customer Service Centre)

internal and external cleaning security (including facilities and equipment)

catering (including facilities and equipment)

provision and maintenance of furniture and equipment

energy and utilities management

landscape maintenance

porterage

waste management.

The first table shows the information requested in respect of the Facilities Price, utility charges and business rates for all PRIME buildings where the former DSS are the major occupier. The information is broken down geographically according to nation and former DSS regional boundaries. Details of the corresponding charges paid for the former DSS minor occupancies and non-PRIME buildings are not currently held centrally. These charges are paid for and monitored locally.

The second table gives details of the running costs of buildings on the former Employment Service part of the estate. This includes both major and minor occupancies but excludes sub-lets. Information is again provided geographically both on a national and regional basis but is dictated this time by former ES regional boundaries. Running costs on the former ES part of the Estate include all maintenance work (i.e. scheduled, reactive and planned) and minor new works, rents, rates and service charges, cleaning and utilities. These costs are lower than the charges paid by the former DSS as the ES part of the estate was not subject to a PFI agreement and does not therefore benefit from the full range of services provided as under the PRIME agreement. Nor has the risk inherent in the buildings and its associated cost been transferred to a PFI provider.

Details of services, such as post opening and despatch, reprographics and switchboard etc., which are traditionally regarded as business rather than building-related services, (and the cost of furniture and security for the former ES) have been excluded from both tables as we are unable to present the information in the same format.

Former DSS part of the estate

Region	*Total (£)*	*Total business square metre (BSM)*	*Average charge £ per BSM*
AD1 East London and Anglia	15,330,376.48	68,774.93	222.91
AD2 Chilterns	20,280,484.46	82,990.12	244.37
AD3 London South	40,736,959.46	157,615.80	258.46
AD4 West Country	15,998,514.95	97,521.38	164.05
AD5 Mercia	13,298,357.23	67,939.49	195.74
AD6 West Midlands	20,321,903.99	96,948.44	209.62
AD8 North West Coast	40,967,353.38	227,128.26	180.37
AD9 Greater Manchester	16,979,155.53	102,333.26	165.92
AD10 Yorkshire	22,340,174.39	106,328.42	210.11
AD11 Tyne Tees	10,942,784.64	57,915.70	188.94
England total	217,196,064.51	1,065,495.79	203.85
AD7 Wales	12,999,568.66	71,045.14	182.98
Wales total	12,999,568.66	71,045.14	182.98
AD12 West of Scotland	17,507,560.03	70,120.37	249.68
AD13 East of Scotland	18,785,521.46	82,764.49	226.98
Scotland total	36,293,081.49	152,884.87	237.39
Grand total	266,488,714.66	1,289,425.79	206.67

All charges are exact for the last financial year. The total business square metres is based on the properties that were occupied as at March 2001.

Former ES part of the estate

Region	*Total running costs (£)*	*Total business square metre (BSM)*	*Average charge £ per BSM*
Head Office (Sheffield)	6,334,095	2,9055.10	218.00
Northern	7,772,273	56,815.62	136.80
North West	15,194,904	114,036.09	133.25
Yorkshire and Humber	9,944,152	74,326.63	133.79
East Midlands	9,582,156	70,122.84	136.65
West Midlands	14,027,018	90,138.49	155.62
London and South East	55,911,412	263,813.39	211.94
South West	12,431,947	78,718.82	157.93
England total	131,197,957	777,026.98	168.85
Wales	7,046,413	60,990.66	115.53
Wales total	7,046,413	60,990.66	115.53
Scotland	16,694,086	98,797.07	168.97
Scotland total	16,694,086	98,797.07	168.97
Grand total	154,938,456	936,815	165.39

All charges are exact for the last financial year. The total business square metres is based on the properties that were occupied as at March 2001.

Departmental Staff

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the number of staff employed by his Department by region and nation of the UK; and if he will make a statement; [6846]

(2) how many and what proportion of each civil service grade in his Department is located in each region and nation of the UK; what the average salary is for each grade; and if he will make a statement. [6850]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The details are set out in the tables.

Table 1: Number of staff by grade level and nation/region

Whole-time equivalent

Government office region	*All grades*	*SCS level*	*Level 6/7*	*SEO/HEO level*	*EO level*	*AO/AA level*	*Industrial/ Other grade*
London	14,678	89	339	1,239	4,891	8,094	27
South East	10,841	[1]—	39	483	3,591	6,601	126
South West	8,098	[1]—	31	412	2,476	5,125	51
West Midlands	10,956	5	45	542	3,383	6,980	[1]—
North West	17,990	15	204	1,276	5,098	11,058	340
North East	13,693	17	122	937	3,384	9,163	70
Merseyside	5,722	[1]—	26	236	1,677	3,780	[1]—
Yorkshire and Humberside	12,739	37	278	1,637	4,367	6,415	4
East Midlands	5,818	[1]—	27	263	1,870	3,652	5
Eastern	5,286	[1]—	16	185	1,519	3,565	[1]—
England total	105,821	167	1,127	7,210	32,256	64,433	627
Wales	6,490	[1]—	26	303	2,065	3,999	94
Scotland	13,822	[1]—	64	652	4,259	8,642	201
Great Britain total	126,133	173	1,217	8,165	38,580	77,074	922
Northern Ireland	8	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	8
Grand total	126,141	173	1,217	8,165	38,580	77,074	930

[1] Because there are three or fewer staff in this category the numbers have not been separately identified
[2] Staff numbers for Northern Ireland have not been identified by grade because the small numbers in each category could potentially identify individuals and their salaries

Notes:

1. The staff data from which these figures derive are as at 31 August 2001 as this represents the correct staffing position of DWP, which was formed in June 2001. Earlier DSS data are not comparable.
2. Employment service staff are included.
3. War Pensions Agency Staff are included as they remain within the overall DWP administrative structure pro-tem even though WPA is now technically part of the Ministry of Defence.
4. Casual and other staff on temporary contracts are included.
5. The grade groupings include specialist staff such as accountants, lawyers and auditors in their "generalist" grade equivalent.
6. Because the staffing make-up of DWP is different from the DSS, the figures above are not comparable with those provided for DSS in Civil Service Statistics 2000.

Table 2: Percentage of staffing numbers

Government office region	*All grades*	*SCS level*	*Level 6/7*	*SEO/HEO level*	*EO level*	*AO/AA level*	*Industrial/ other grades*
London	12	51	28	15	13	11	3
South East	9	[1]—	3	6	9	9	14
South West	6	[1]—	3	5	6	7	5
West Midlands	9	3	4	7	9	9	[1]—
North West	14	9	17	16	13	14	37
North East	11	10	10	11	9	12	8
Merseyside	5	[1]—	2	3	4	5	[1]—
Yorkshire and Humberside	10	21	23	20	11	8	0
East Midlands	5	[1]—	2	3	5	5	1
Eastern	4	[1]—	1	2	4	5	[1]—
England total	84	97	93	88	84	84	67
Wales	5	[1]—	2	4	5	5	10
Scotland	11	[1]—	5	8	11	11	22
Great Britain total	100	100	100	100	100	100	99
Northern Ireland	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	1
Grand total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

[1] Because there are three or fewer staff in this category the numbers have not been separately identified
[2] Staff numbers for Northern Ireland have not been identified by grade because the small numbers in each category could potentially identify individuals and their salaries

Notes:

1. The staff data from which these figures derive are as at 31 August 2001 as this represents the correct staffing position of DWP, which was formed in June 2001. Earlier DSS data are not comparable.
2. Employment service staff are included.
3. War Pensions Agency Staff are included as they remain within the overall DWP administrative structure pro-tem even though WPA is now technically part of the Ministry of Defence.
4. Casual and other staff on temporary contracts are included.
5. The grade groupings include specialist staff such as accountants, lawyers and auditors in their "generalist" grade equivalent.
6. Because the staffing make-up of DWP is different from the DSS, the figures above are not comparable with those provided for DSS in Civil Service Statistics 2000.

Table 3: Average staff salary by grade level and nation/region

£

Government office region	All grades	SCS level	Level 6/7	SEO/HEO level	EO level	AO/AA level	Industrial/ other grades
London	19,129	67,853	44,551	27,470	20,864	15,218	14,023
South East	15,855	[1]—	37,432	24,639	19,311	13,295	11,248
South West	15,456	[1]—	38,344	24,319	18,703	13,053	12,272
West Midlands	15,577	57,022	39,766	24,451	19,037	13,026	[1]—
North West	15,709	63,875	45,557	25,368	18,611	12,760	11,777
North East	15,283	63,371	41,354	24,769	18,408	12,749	11,923
Merseyside	15,191	[1]—	40,163	24,412	18,644	12,914	[1]—
Yorkshire and Humberside	17,339	63,778	39,350	25,012	18,932	13,081	11,113
East Midlands	15,777	[1]—	38,524	24,275	19,168	13,253	11,934
Eastern	15,672	[1]—	39,368	24,635	19,580	13,423	[1]—
England total	16,280	65,641	42,177	25,303	19,184	13,280	11,814
Wales	15,564	[1]—	38,605	24,381	18,604	13,261	11,291
Scotland	15,395	[1]—	39,509	24,477	18,740	12,951	11,440
Great Britain total	16,146	65,526	41,960	25,200	19,104	13,242	11,666
Northern Ireland	16,389	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Grand total	16,146	65,526	41,960	25,200	19,105	13,243	11,685

[1] Because there are three or fewer staff in this category the average salary has not been separately identified.
[2] Average salaries for Northern Ireland have not been identified by grade because the small numbers in each category could potentially identify individuals and their salaries.

Notes:

1. Average salaries include basic salary and job-based allowances, but not payments relating to working outside normal hours eg overtime, nor employer's National Insurance and Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme contributions.
2. The figures indicate averages and not the mean; calculation of the mean would have presented significant additional data processing attracting disproportionate costs.
3. The staff data from which these figures derive are as at 31 August 2001, as this represents the correct staffing position of DWP which was formed in June 2001. Earlier DSS data are not comparable.
4. Employment Service staff are included.
5. War Pensions Agency Staff are included as they remain within the overall DWP administrative structure pro-tem even though WPA is now technically part of the Ministry of Defence.
6. Casual and other staff on temporary contracts are included.

Departmental Spending

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total amount of spending by his Department was in each nation and region of the UK, in the last year for which figures are available; what proportion of his Department's total spending this constitutes; and if he will make a statement. [6851]

Mr. Nick Brown: The information is in the tables:

Benefit expenditure for 1999–2000 by country

	Benefit expenditure (£ million)	Proportion of GB total (Percentage)
Great Britain	98,241	—
England	83,081	85
Scotland	8,689	9
Wales	6,470	7

Benefit expenditure for 1999–2000 by English Government office region

	Benefit expenditure (£ million)	Proportion of GB total (Percentage)
North East	5,145	5
North West	12,973	13
Yorkshire and Humberside	8,809	9
East Midlands	6,805	7
West Midlands	9,165	9

Benefit expenditure for 1999–2000 by Government office region

	Benefit expenditure (£ million)	Proportion of GB total (Percentage)
South West	8,445	9
Eastern	8,314	8
London	11,509	12
South East	11,916	12

Notes:

1. Figures are consistent with Departmental Report 2001, but do not include some overseas expenditure and War Pensions Northern Ireland.
2. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of those leaving the New Deal for Lone Parents left to enter *(a)* jobs lasting less than 13 weeks, *(b)* sustained jobs and *(c)* jobs lasting more than 26 weeks. [9681]

Mr. Nick Brown: The New Deal for Lone Parents has already helped over 100,000 Lone Parents move into work. More detailed analysis of the length of time people leaving the programme for work remain in their jobs will be included in the evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents National programme, which is due to be published in spring 2003.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons *(a)* were eligible and *(b)* entered the New Deal for the Long-Term Unemployed under the early entry provisions in each year since its inception. [9333]

Mr. Nick Brown: The monthly New Deal Statistical First Releases, which are placed in the Library, give information on the numbers joining the New Deal under the early eligibility criteria. Early entry to the programme is voluntary and no estimates are available of the total number of people who would have been eligible to join the programme early.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of those entering *(a)* the environmental task force option and *(b)* the voluntary sector option in the New Deal for young people obtained a qualification through day release education or training in each year since 1998. [9329]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The monthly New Deal Statistical First Releases, which are placed in the Library, give information on the numbers of young people starting each of the New Deal options. Information on qualifications gained is not available.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discretionary payments can be made from the Advisers Discretionary Fund; and if he will make a statement. [8098]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: New Deal Personal Advisers can make an award from the Advisers Discretionary Fund, up to a maximum of £300 for any goods and services needed to support a jobseeker with jobsearch, or to help them overcome barriers which prevent them applying for or taking up a job.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of *(a)* personal advisers and *(b)* senior advisers in the new deal for young people are members of an ethnic minority, broken down by ethnic minority; and if he will give the same breakdown for the members of the new deal for young people. [7978]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Employment Service collected data on the ethnic breakdown of Personal Advisers across all the New Deals at the end of February 2001 as part of a one off exercise.

The results of that exercise are in the table.

Percentage

Ethnic group	*Proportion of Personal Advisers at end of February 2001*
White	78
People from ethnic minority groups[1]	7
No data held	15

[1] No data held on specific ethnic minority groups

Source:

Employment Service Head Office Personnel Division

The ethnic breakdown of clients on the New Deal for Young People programme are in the table.

Percentage

Ethnic group[1]	*Proportion of new deal for young people clients at the end of July 2001*[2]
White	79.6
Black-Caribbean	3.2
Pakistani	3.0
Black-African	2.1
Black-Other	1.6
Indian	1.4
Bangladeshi	1.0
Chinese	0.2
Other	3.0
Prefer not to say	4.9

[1] Providing ethnicity information is voluntary, we cannot compel individuals to specify their ethnic origin.

[2] The proportions shown are of those New Deal clients who completed an Employment Service form which requests information about ethnic origin. 95 per cent. of clients completed the form.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many personal advisers in the new deal for young people have left in each year since its inception; how many of these have left as a result of promotion in the Employment Service; and what estimate he has made of the average length of service of such personal advisers. [7979]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not available.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average cost per place on each of the four options in the new deal for young people in the last 12 months was. [7976]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

£

Option	*Unit costs for the year ending August 2001*
Subsidised employment	1,638
Full time education and training	1,358
Voluntary sector	2,360
Environmental Task Force	2,478

Source:

Employment Service Management Information on New Deal for Young People

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of women who in 2001 will reach the age of 60 years after the qualifying week for Winter Fuel Payment eligibility but before 25 December; how the qualification for automatic Winter Fuel Payments is triggered; and if he will make a statement. [7575]

Mr. McCartney: It is estimated that 70,000 women will attain the age of 60 between the qualifying week (17 to 23 September) and 25 December 2001.

Automatic entitlement to a Winter Fuel Payment is determined by identifying those people who meet the qualifying criteria, including age and household composition, from official records.

Civil Servants (Retirement Age)

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department can invite staff to remain in post beyond the normal retirement age; and what is the final age at which such staff must retire. [10148]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In the Department, the final age at which all staff in grades below the Senior Civil Service must retire is 65. Staff have the flexibility of choosing to retire at any time from the minimum retirement of 60 up to the age of 65.

The retirement age for Senior Civil Servants is 60.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), on 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 438W, on stakeholder pensions, what income range in pounds sterling per annum is the target group for stakeholder pensions. [11622]

Mr. McCartney: The Green Paper "Partnership in Pensions" identified moderate earners as people earning between £9,000 and £20,000. The Green Paper went on to explain that people earning above £20,000 were in most cases already making additional pension provision. However, it did make clear that higher earners without access to a good quality pension scheme would still be able to take advantage of the new stakeholder regime.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of people who are working and claiming benefits fraudulently. [7474]

Malcolm Wicks: Estimates have not been made for the total number of people who are working and claiming benefits fraudulently.

Pension Schemes

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on investigation into the Warwick Group Pension Scheme, the Debenholt Pension and Life Assurance Scheme and the Warwick Sport and Leisure Ltd. Retirement Benefits Scheme, including actions by *(a)* the Pensions Ombudsman and *(b)* the independent trustees (i) in respect of these schemes and (ii) in respect of the former trustees Norman and Simon Gidney. [9652]

Mr. McCartney: The Pensions Ombudsman has received complaints in relation to the Warwick Group Pension Scheme and the Debenholt Pension and Life Assurance Scheme. He has issued his determination in respect of a number of the complaints made, others remain to be considered. The Pensions Ombudsman is an independent statutory commissioner and we cannot comment on his determinations or on actions taken during his investigation of complaints. Copies of his determinations are available on the Pensions Ombudsman's website.

The Independent Trustee is still taking action to wind up the Warwick Group Pension Scheme and the Debenholt Pension and Life Assurance scheme which are associated schemes. The Warwick Sport and Leisure Ltd. Retirement Benefits Scheme has been wound up.

The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority has investigated breaches of the Pensions Act 1995 in relation to all three schemes. As a result of its investigation Mr. N. Gidney and Mr. S. Gidney were both disqualified from acting as a trustee of any occupational pension scheme and fined in respect of 13 breaches of the Pensions Act 1995.

Pensions (Employees)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many full-time employees *(a)* were in occupational pension schemes and *(b)* subscribed to personal pensions in each of the last five years. [11314]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The table shows estimates of the numbers of full-time employees contributing to occupational and personal pensions in each of the years 1996–97 through to 1999–2000. Because of a change in methodology on the Family Resources Survey—1999–2000 data are not comparable to earlier years.

Million

Year	*Total full-time employees with an occupational pension*	*Total full-time employees with a personal pension*
1996–97	9.4	3.3
1997–98	9.3	3.2
1998–99	9.6	3.4
1999–2000	9.3	2.6

Note:
Totals rounded to nearest 100,000
Source:
Family Resources Survey percentages applied to Labour Force Survey totals

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hawalla Banking System

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the potential misuse by terrorists of the Hawalla banking system; and if he will make a statement. [8003]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The informal nature of this banking system makes it difficult for law enforcement agencies to monitor financial transactions that may or may not be connected to criminal activities. However, the police will continue to give a high priority to the investigation of financial transactions instigated by criminals using banking systems, whatever their nature, around the world. In particular, the economic crime unit of the National Criminal Intelligence Service

is conducting a strategic assessment of Alternative Remittance Systems, such as Hawalla banking, including the possible use of these systems by terrorists and other criminals, which will inform us of what measures need to be taken.

Terrorist Threat

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of measures taken to counter the terrorist threat to Government buildings in Westminster and Parliament. [10244]

Mr. Blunkett: Protective security arrangements are the responsibility of the Secretary of State in each respective Department. Security measures in all Government Departments are kept under regular review to ensure that they provide adequate protection against the range of threats faced by Government Departments and buildings, including that from terrorism.

In the Palace of Westminster, Black Rod and the Sergeant at Arms have recently met and on behalf of both Houses are actively considering a number of issues with a view to improving security at the Palace and its ancillary buildings.

More generally, under the Civil Contingencies Committee which I chair, a sub-committee chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, is reviewing the contingency arrangements for the key infrastructure of the United Kingdom. This includes the key structures associated with the parliamentary process.

In light of the current situation these measures will remain under close scrutiny.

Security Industry

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further measures he plans to take to regulate the security industry. [10753]

Mr. Denham: The Private Security Industry Act 2001 sets out the Government's current plans for the regulation of the private security industry in England and Wales.

The Act establishes the Security Industry Authority, which will have responsibility for licensing security operatives and approving companies in designated sectors of the industry.

The Government wish to see the authority up and running as soon as possible. It will be open to the authority to make recommendations to amend the regulatory framework if it considers this desirable.

Overseas PhD Students

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many overseas PhD students in science disciplines are in the UK on work permits. [10914]

Angela Eagle: The number of PhD students in science disciplines in the United Kingdom on work permits is not available through our information technology systems and would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Child Curfew Orders

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child curfew orders have been issued in the Greater London area in the last 12 months under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [10944]

Mr. Denham: No applications have been received to impose child curfew schemes under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Sections 48 and 49 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, which took effect on 1 August 2001, have recently extended the upper age limit to 15 and allowed the police, as well as local authorities, to initiate schemes.

Metropolitan Police

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the pay and conditions of Metropolitan police civilian security staff at the Houses of Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [10782]

Mr. Denham: The pay and conditions of service of civilian security staff at the Houses of Parliament are matters for the Metropolitan Police Authority.

The Metropolitan Police Service is undertaking a review of pay and grading for all its civil staff, including the security staff at the Palace of Westminster.

The recommendations are due to be considered by the Metropolitan Police Authority's Human Resources Committee on 1 November.

Rehabilitation

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 213W, whether targets for rehabilitation are published for each prison; if he will list those for Nottingham prison; and if he will make a statement on progress made *(a)* at Nottingham prison and *(b)* in the UK. [10970]

Beverley Hughes: Targets for individual establishments are not routinely published. The targets for Nottingham prison for measures that relate to rehabilitation for the financial year 2001–02 are listed in the table. The targets for Her Majesty's Prison Service England and Wales were listed in my answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 213W.

Nottingham Prison	*Target 2001–02*
Purposeful activity hours	19.5
Offending behaviour programmes	24
Sex offender treatment programmes	—
Random mandatory drug testing	16.9
Drug rehabilitation/therapeutic communities	60
Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare Services (CARATS)	384
Detoxification	350
Basic skills awards—literacy	15
Basic skills awards—numeracy	15
Key work skills	5

Sex offender treatment programmes are not run at Nottingham prison. Performance for the last three financial years for Nottingham prison and HM Prison

Service England and Wales is detailed in the tables. The Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Office should be approached for information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively.

Nottingham Prison	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Purposeful activity hours	15.3	20.6	18.3
Offending behaviour programmes	19	21	25
Sex offender treatment programmes	0	0	0
Random mandatory drug testing	25.6%	21.6%	20.5%
Drug rehabilitation/therapeutic communities	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare Services (CARATS)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Detoxification	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Basic skills awards—literacy	[1]—	[1]—	27
Basic skills awards—numeracy	[1]—	[1]—	28
Key work skills	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—

[1] indicates that data for these indicators were not collected.

HM Prison Service England and Wales	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Purposeful activity hours	22.8	23.2	23.8
Offending behaviour programmes	3,129	4,664	5,986
Sex offender treatment programmes	589	585	786
Random mandatory drug testing	18.3%	14.2%	12.4%
Drug rehabilitation/therapeutic communities	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare Services (CARATS)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Detoxification	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Basic skills awards—literacy	[1]—	[1]—	7,269
Basic skills awards—numeracy	[1]—	[1]—	5,495
Key work skills	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Indicates that data were not collected centrally.

Data Retention

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the John Horrocks data retention report commissioned by his Department will be published. [10419]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The report has been completed and is currently being reviewed within Government. It will be submitted to Ministers. The report includes commercially sensitive information. A summary of its findings will be shared with industry contacts in November.

Speed Cameras

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many speed cameras there are, broken down by county at the most recent date available; and what percentage in each case are operational. [11123]

Mr. Denham: The Association of Chief Police Officers estimates that there are some 4,500 speed camera sites in England and Wales. Information on the percentage that are operational is not held centrally, nor is information on the number of speed cameras in each county.

Community Against Drugs Initiative

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent of consultation on the Community Against Drugs initiative. [11216]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Communities Against Drugs funding is paid to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. Partnerships are required to agree their spending plans with Drug Action Teams, and Home Office guidance identifies that other agencies and groups should be consulted in the development of these plans. We could not properly assess the extent of the consultation undertaken, by partnerships, until the end of 2001–02.

Crime and Disorder Act

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been made of racially aggravated offences under Part II of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [11368]

Mr. Denham: Information for 1998 and 1999 was taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database showing the number of persons proceeded against for racially aggravated offences under Part II of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Data for 2000 will be available later this year.

Persons proceeded against for racially aggravated offences under Part II of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998—England and Wales

Offence description	*Proceeded against 1998*[1]	*1999*
Racially Aggravated Wounding or inflicting Grievous Bodily Harm	2	58
Racially Aggravated Actual Bodily Harm	3	299
Racially Aggravated Common Assault	6	367
Racially Aggravated Criminal Damage	9	261
Racially Aggravated Intentional Harassment, Alarm or Distress	3	430
Racially Aggravated Offence of Harassment	3	113
Racially Aggravated—Harassment; putting people in fear of violence	2	63
Racially Aggravated fear or provocation of violence	5	317
Total	33	1,908

[1] Act came into effect in the last quarter of 1998

Race Relations Act

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been made by the police under section 70 of the Race Relations Act 1976 in respect of material or actions likely to incite racial hatred; how many resulted in convictions; and what penalties were imposed. [11387]

Mr. Denham: Section 70 of the Race Relations Act 1976 was repealed by the Public Order Act 1986, where the provisions on incitement to racial hatred can now be found.

Information provided by the Attorney-General's office showing the majority of the data requested—for the period 1997 to 2001 (to date)—is in the table.

Offences of incitement to racial hatred under Part III of the Public Order Act 1986

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001[1]
Number of consent applications	12	2	4	7	7
Withdrawn	—	1	—	—	—
Not granted	2	—	—	—	—
Prosecuted	10	1	4	7	7
Convicted	9	1	3	[2]4	[3]—

[1] To date
[2] Two results awaited
[3] Results awaited
Source:
Attorney-General's office

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied minors who are classified as asylum seekers are under the protection of local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [11369]

Angela Eagle: Local authorities state that as of 26 January 2001 they were supporting 6,078 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). This consisted of 1,376 under 16-year-olds and 4,702 16 to 17 year-olds.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans have been made by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* institutions involved in the preparations for Holocaust Memorial Day 2002; and if he will make a statement. [11272]

Angela Eagle: Holocaust Memorial Day on Sunday 27 January 2002 will be marked by a national event and associated activities in schools and local communities around the country. Planning has involved wide consultation with schools, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local authorities and other Government Departments. I plan to announce the full arrangements for Holocaust Memorial Day 2002 soon.

Probation Officers

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation officers there were in England and Wales at the latest date for which figures are available. [11751]

Beverley Hughes: There were 6,785 probation officers in post at 30 June 2001.

Childhood Abuse

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent assessment he has made of the physical and mental health of men and women in prison who have suffered childhood abuse; [10303]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the incidence of abuse in the childhood of men and women in prison. [10302]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* We are unaware of any research that has been carried out across the whole of the prison population of England and Wales which would enable us to estimate the proportion that had been abused in childhood. Our general understanding however, from anecdotal and other evidence, is that the number of prisoners who had been abused would be significant.

The Prison Service has information about the mental health of all prisoners and about the physical health of sentenced male prisoners aged 16 years and over, from surveys conducted by the Office for National Statistics and its predecessor, OPCS. However, it is not possible to extract the information for those prisoners who may have been abused in childhood.

Media Briefings

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since 10 June his Department gave briefings to the national media on announcements before their formal release; and if he will make a statement. [11478]

Mr. Blunkett: None.

Prison Population

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the present level of the prison population; and if it is his policy to increase this further. [11797]

Beverley Hughes: On 26 October 2001, there were 68,127 people in prisons in England and Wales. Within the sentencing framework set by Parliament, it is for the courts to determine who is sent to prison and for how long.

Police Establishment

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each local authority area in London *(a)* police establishment as of 31 March 1993, *(b)* police establishment as of 31 March 1997, *(c)* police establishment as of 31 March 2001, *(d)* police establishment as of 31 September 2001 and *(e)* projected target establishment for 31 March 2002. [10176]

Mr. Denham: The information has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. The Metropolitan police is unable to provide budgeted police officer work force totals for 1993 and 1997. Actual strength figures are available for 31 December in each of

those years, and with budgeted work force totals for March 2001 and September 2001 are set out in the table.

The budgeted work force totals can be subject to change in the light of changes in circumstances.

Division	Number of police officers		Budgeted work force	
	December 1993	December 1997	March 2001[1]	September 2001[2]
City of Westminster	1,901	1,697	1,580	1,642
Kensington and Chelsea	655	609	557	577
Hammersmith and Fulham	548	542	517	539
Camden	692	697	671	699
Islington	568	549	554	584
Harrow	277	289	295	311
Brent	620	613	606	637
Barnet	781	706	517	542
Ealing	653	627	611	656
Hillingdon	444	398	376	395
Haringey	562	527	533	562
Hackney	633	677	673	708
Tower Hamlets	690	568	549	578
Waltham Forest	474	464	453	474
Redbridge	536	497	390	414
Havering	375	334	320	334
Newham	578	590	583	616
Barking and Dagenham	287	300	279	294
Enfield	550	550	478	515
Southwark	850	861	801	839
Lewisham	588	610	584	612
Bromley	481	464	440	458
Greenwich	518	612	586	613
Bexley	273	282	310	328
Croydon	580	601	549	595
Sutton	390	405	254	270
Lambeth	947	917	875	923
Richmond upon Thames	321	283	260	274
Hounslow	483	457	411	435
Kingston upon Thames	396	367	256	272
Merton	312	293	290	303
Wandsworth	693	596	555	586
Total	18,656	17,982	16,713	17,585
Heathrow airport[3]	424	362	304	301
Divisional total	19,080	18,344	17,017	17,886

[1] Figures are full-time equivalents
[2] The budgeted work force total for each London borough division is set at the start of the financial year. Projected figures for 31 March 2002 are therefore the same as those for 30 September 2001
[3] These police posts are paid by Heathrow Airport plc

Child Abuse

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many care homes have been investigated since 1997 in the historical abuse investigations in each police authority area; [9418]

(2) what recent research he has undertaken to evaluate the pre-trial procedures in connection with sex abuse inquiries; what recent work he has undertaken to measure the difference in the impact on the rights and liberties of persons accused or suspected of sex abuse crimes from the impact on the rights and liberties of those accused of other offences; what analyses he has carried out on the impact of compensation on the reporting of sex abuse crimes; what recent assessment he has made of police investigative powers in relation to people accused of sex abuse; how many applicants for criminal injuries compensation relating to sex abuse are serving a prison sentence; what steps he takes to advertise the availability of compensation; what assistance police have received from solicitors acting on behalf of victims with respect to sex abuse inquiries; and if he will make a statement on the controls imposed on the police while interviewing *(a)* suspects and *(b)* witnesses and on the reasons for the differences between treatment of both groups; [9419]

(3) how many suspects have been identified in connection with historical institutional child abuse investigations, broken down by police authority and since 1997; on what basis in each such area persons have been regarded as suspects; how many such individuals have been *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged, *(c)* convicted and *(d)* acquitted; how many pleaded (i) not guilty and (ii) guilty; how many who pleaded in (i) and (ii) were convicted; of those arrested how many had no further action taken against them; how many individuals who were convicted appealed against their (x) conviction and (y) sentence; how many appeals were successful and, in each case, on what basis and how many failed and, in each case, on what basis; how many complaints of sexual abuse in such cases, broken down by authority were referred to the CPS; what percentage of the complaints received were so referred; how many cases the CPS accepted; what was the basis of each rejection; of the persons charged, how long they (A) waited and (B) were waiting before they came to trial; of the persons arrested, how many persons are on police bail; how many separate complaints have been received; how many complainants there are; how many of the victims have (aa) served and (bb) are serving time in prison; how many victims have applied for compensation; how much each individual has

received in (1) 1997, (2) 1998, (3) 1999 and (4) 2000; and how many applications for compensation are outstanding. [9417]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Information is not collected centrally on the number of investigations into institutional child abuse, on the number of care homes involved in such investigations, or on the numbers of people arrested, charged or convicted as a result. A survey carried out in 1998–99 on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Crime Committee established that 32 forces in England and Wales had been investigating claims of institutional child abuse or were doing so during the period covered by the questionnaire, (1 January 1998 to 30 June 1999). Many of the remaining forces stated that they had been engaged in such inquiries at other times. A similar survey was carried out by ACPO earlier this year to which 32 forces responded. During the period covered by this survey (1997 to 2000) those 32 forces detailed 96 investigations (some of which may have involved more than one institution) which had led to 543 arrests. Of the 1,197 referrals made to the Crown Prosecution Service no further action was taken in 940 cases. The survey revealed 193 successful prosecutions and 40 acquittals. Details of these individual cases are not centrally held.

The information retained by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (CICB) cannot be extrapolated to provide the information requested. Records are not kept regarding current or previous imprisonment of any applicants for criminal injuries compensation, and information held by the CICB cannot identify those who have applied for compensation following an allegation of historical institutional child abuse. There are no steps taken in such cases to advertise the availability of compensation to victims. If the police or social workers are asked about compensation they will advise the alleged victim to seek independent legal advice. For the vast majority of complainants compensation is not a motivating factor. Victims are seeking justice, not compensation.

The police have a duty to investigate all allegations of child abuse thoroughly, and to undertake a complete investigation in accordance with the law.

They are acutely aware of the need to ensure that their investigative procedures in these cases incorporate the necessary safeguards against false allegations, while fulfilling their duty to ensure that those who have committed serious crimes against young people in care do not escape justice. Discussions have taken place with ACPO and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary about what more can be done to ensure that the procedures in place for conducting these very difficult investigations are fair and robust.

ACPO are currently drawing up a manual for senior investigating officers working in child abuse cases, which will include a section on good practice in tracing potential witnesses and obtaining corroborative evidence. In parallel with this, an inter-agency working group is developing guidance to the police and social services on the handling of complex abuse investigations.

Both sets of best practice guidance should be completed shortly. Together they will provide a coherent policy framework for how to conduct child abuse investigations, building on best practice drawn from around the country and ensuring that the necessary procedures are in place to safeguard against the risk of false allegations.

Cannabis Plantations

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many legal cannabis plantations there are in the UK; and what plans there are to increase this number. [11152]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The cultivation of cannabis (hemp) for industrial purposes is licensed, per growing site, on an annual basis to cover that particular year's growing season. This year, 119 such licences have been issued. There is no restriction on the number of growers or growing sites that may be licensed during any particular year. Any increase or decrease in the number of licences issued would be influenced by commercial decisions and the ability of growers to meet the licence criteria.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Morganatic Marriages

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make it her policy to introduce legislation further amending the Regency Act 1937, and to amend the Royal Marriages Act 1772, to permit members of the Royal Family to enter into morganatic marriages. [11620]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are no plans to do so.

Community Legal Service Funding

Brian White: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to change the way applications for exceptional Community Legal Service funding are handled; and if he will make a statement. [12516]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor has today announced a number of changes to the way applications for exceptional Community Legal Service (CLS) funding will be handled. These changes are designed to make it easier for applicants to obtain funding in cases that would normally be outside the scope of the CLS. They follow on from the recent case of R *v.* the Legal Services Commission and the Lord Chancellor ex parte Jarrett, and from our experience of handling exceptional cases.

The main changes are as follows.

A new test has been added to the existing criteria for obtaining exceptional funding. Previously, apart from satisfying the standard Funding Code criteria, applicants had to show that their cases raised matters of significant wider public interest or were of overwhelming importance to them. Now, it will also be practically impossible for the applicant to proceed or there would be obvious unfairness.

Different criteria have been developed for inquests. This is because these cases are different from standard court cases, the criteria for which are not always suitable. For example, there is no need for a test of overwhelming

importance, since the death of a loved one will always be of overwhelming importance. The test for inquests is instead whether the family of the deceased need representation in order to help the coroner carry out the task of determining the cause of death.

The Legal Services Commission has been authorised to grant funding in certain types of inquest without having to seek the Lord Chancellor's authority in each individual case. This will make the application process shorter and more convenient for the bereaved. The cases in question are those where the death has occurred in police or prison custody, or during the course of police arrest, search, pursuit or shooting.

These changes reflect the Government's continuing commitment to human rights. Although the court did not find against the Government or the Legal Services Commission in Mrs. Jarrett's case, it encouraged us to reconsider our guidance on exceptional cases, which the Lord Chancellor has been happy to do. The new test for obtaining exceptional funding will make a major contribution towards achieving access to justice for people whose cases are complex or difficult, or who have particular problems that legal representation can help with. At the same time, the new arrangements for handling applications in inquests will improve the service we are able to give bereaved applicants, at a time when it is important for us to be as supportive as possible.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 2 November 2001

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost to the police of applying for an antisocial behaviour order. [9480]

Mr. Denham: Based on a survey of 21 cases conducted in April this year, the average cost of an antisocial behaviour order (ASBO) was calculated to be £4,800. This is the cost to either the police or the local authority and includes the staff costs associated with evidence gathering, preparing the case and attending court. It does not include dealing with appeals and breaches. Fuller details will be included in the review of ASBOs which we are aiming to publish by the end of the year.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what reason no statement was made at Home Office questions on 22 October in respect of the under-reporting of antisocial behaviour orders; and when he plans to make a statement; [11794]

(2) if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying the under-reporting of antisocial behaviour orders. [11793]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* In response to a written question on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 71W, I did in fact state that there had been some under-reporting of antisocial behaviour orders, and that we would be undertaking a one-off reconciliation exercise to establish its extent. I intend to announce its results in due course.

Police

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on plans to change the status of plain-clothed police officers to uniformed officers; and if he will make a statement. [5786]

Mr. Denham: We want to enhance the visibility of the police in a common-sense way as part of our programme for police reform. This means that, on some occasions, officers will be in plain clothes and, on others, in uniform. The decision on how this should be applied rests with local management.

Officers in uniform and in plain clothes are equally important and valued in their different roles: uniformed duties should not be regarded as of lesser status.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have *(a)* retired and *(b)* joined since 1997 in (i) east Sussex and (ii) the Senlac division. [9864]

Mr. Denham: The Sussex police are unable to provide information on either recruitment or retirement at divisional level since 1997. East Sussex is an integral part of the Sussex police. Information on recruitment and retirements is therefore for the force area as a whole for the four years to March 2001.

The table sets out recruitment and retirement figures for the Sussex police. Information on retirement and recruitment for the first six months of 2001–02 will be available in December.

Year	*Recruitment*	*Retirements*
1997–98	135	128
1998–99	109	127
1999–2000	101	107
2000–01	206	106

Islamic Fundamentalists

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the criminal law relating to common purpose with reference to the issues of *(a)* terrorism and *(b)* the activities of Islamic fundamentalist extremists; and if he will make a statement. [10084]

Mr. Denham: I have no such plans at present. I outlined the legislative steps necessary to counter the threat from terrorism in my statement to the House on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 923. However, the Law Commission is conducting a major review of the whole area of inchoate offences and secondary liability, which will include this area.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the type approval process for speed cameras and publish the operational guidance he has given to the police to avoid motorists being punished for errors caused by camera malfunction. [11217]

Mr. Denham: Any manufacturer wishing to seek type approval for a new speed camera device may approach either the Home Office or the Association of Chief Police Officers. The device in question will need to meet an operational need and either represent a technical advance or introduce greater competition into the market.

The Association of Chief Police Officers' Road Policing Enforcement Technology Committee considers representations from manufacturers seeking type approval. Where the Committee is satisfied that basic requirements are met, field tests are carried out and the Home Office, working with independent laboratories, conducts rigorous technical tests to ensure that the device is robust and reliable and that it can produce accurate readings or images under a variety of extreme conditions. The Home office has published handbooks for manufacturers about the procedures for type approval, outlining the requirements and specifications.

The Home Office provides a type approval order for any device which fully meets the specifications, and the device is approved for police use from the date of the order.

Operational guidance to the police concerning all road enforcement issues, including malfunctioning devices, is provided by the Road Policing Enforcement Technology Committee, and I am placing a copy in the Library. The Committee is reviewing the current guidance and will publish new Codes of Practice for forces towards the end of this year. Advice to police forces is that they should abandon any prosecution where there is doubt about the reliability of the device involved in providing the evidence.

CCTV (Northamptonshire)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the impact of CCTV on the level of crime in Northampton. [11279]

Mr. Denham: Police operational experience and various research studies show that Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) has considerable crime reduction and detection potential, particularly when used as part of a wider strategy.

The Home Office has made no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of CCTV in Northampton. However, the Northampton Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership consider that CCTV has contributed to the 5.9 per cent. overall fall in recorded crime in Northampton last year.

Northampton's existing CCTV system was recently expanded, with £155,000 funding from the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative, to include Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology. According to figures provided by the Partnership, since the introduction of ANPR, vehicle-related crime in Northampton has decreased by 21.6 per cent. against the same period last year. The scheme has led to 346 arrests as well as the recovery of 31 stolen vehicles and property worth £150,000.

In the first six months of the introduction of CCTV at Sixfields Leisure Park car park, Northampton, last year, there was a 40 per cent. reduction in theft of cars and a 50 per cent. reduction in theft from cars.

Further funding of £148,000 to expand the Northampton CCTV system to cover three residential areas has recently been approved under Round 2 of the CCTV Initiative, to target burglary, vehicle crime, antisocial behaviour, drugs offences and youth crime.

Car Phones

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance has been issued to police who stop people who are using a hand-held mobile phone when driving. [11787]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* There is no specific offence of using a hand-held mobile phone while driving, and accordingly no guidance has been issued. Existing legislation places the responsibility on drivers to have proper control of their vehicles at all times. Any motorist who fails to do so, for whatever reason, is liable to be prosecuted by the police. Drivers may be charged with failing to exercise proper control of a vehicle, careless and inconsiderate driving, or even dangerous driving, if using a mobile phone causes them to drive in such a manner.

In line with the commitment given in the Road Safety Strategy we are keeping under review the case for specific legislation. At present, however, we share the view of the Association of Chief Police Officers what existing legislation provides sufficient powers to prosecute successfully any driving offences that may arise from the use of mobile phones. Our focus is therefore on raising awareness of road safety risks.

Crime Targets

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the goal to increase by 100,000 the number of recorded crimes for which an offender is brought to justice has not been met; if he has plans to revise this target; and if he will make a statement. [11796]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* As the White Paper "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead" made clear, the criminal justice system-wide target to increase by 100,000 the number of recorded crimes ending in an offender being brought to justice has been set to be met by 2004.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make changes to the definition of "brought to justice" for the purposes of departmental targets; and what factors will be taken into account in his decision. [11795]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I have no plans at present to change the definition of "brought to justice" used in the attrition target.

Foreign Armed Forces (UK Citizens)

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what statutory powers govern the rights of UK citizens to serve with foreign armed forces; [11972]

(2) what statutory powers he has to take action against British citizens serving with foreign armed forces. [11980]

Mr. Denham: There are a number of offences for which a person serving with a foreign armed force could be prosecuted. Whether an offence has been committed and a prosecution is justified in an individual case, and, if so, what the appropriate charge is, are matters for the Crown Prosecution Service to decide after a full police investigation.

There are a number of protections under international instruments for those serving with armed forces, whether foreign or United Kingdom.

Police Reform

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the level of support within ACPO for his police reform programme, with particular reference to proposals relating to the responsibility for charging suspects. [12002]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I have regular discussions with members of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) on a variety of policing issues. It is evident from those meetings that there is broad support within the Association for the police reform programme.

The proposal that responsibility for charging suspects should be transferred from the police to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) was made by Sir Robin Auld in his Review of Criminal Courts, the report of which is now out to consultation. The views of the ACPO on this and other recommendations in the report are awaited.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Commissioner for Standards

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission (1) when the Commission *(a)* decided and *(b)* announced that a Commissioner for Standards would not necessarily be invited to accept a first re-appointment without open competition; [11111]

(2) when the conclusions of the studies of staff overloading in the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner were sent to the *(a)* Commission and *(b)* the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. [11109]

Mr. Kirkwood: On *(a)* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 2 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 640–41W. On *(b)* staffing issues are a matter for the House of Commons Commission: no official report on the staffing of the Commissioner's office has been made to the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if the Commissioner will seek the views of the Commissioner for Public Appointments on the timing and substance of their decisions on open competition for the post of Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [11112]

Mr. Kirkwood: The appointment of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is not within the remit of the Commission for Public Appointments. However, the House of Commons Commission is applying the general principles set out by the Commission for Public Appointments, so far as they are applicable to the circumstances of this appointment.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the advertisement for the post of Commissioner for Standards will be published; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [11177]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House of Commons Commission has agreed that an advertisement should appear in the national press on Sunday 4 November. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the Commission *(a)* decided and *(b)* told the Commissioner for Standards that she would be invited to re-apply for her post. [11110]

Mr. Kirkwood: The matter was considered by the Commission on 15 October. The Commissioner was told of its decision the next day.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when, and by what means, the former Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards was consulted about possible re-appointment; and what advice he was given about the nature of the competition. [11495]

Mr. Kirkwood: The first Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Sir Gordon Downey, indicated before the expiration of his term that he intended to retire. The matter did not therefore arise.

House of Commons Commission

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make available to hon. Members the *(a)* agendas and *(b)* minutes of proceedings of the Commission. [11105]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Commission meetings are deliberative and its papers are not published. The Commission publishes considerable details about management and services in its annual report, the last of which was published on 18 July 2001. The Commission is at present considering what information it could usefully place on the parliamentary intranet.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Religious Broadcasting (Digital Licences)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what his policy is on the renewal of Premier Christian Radio's analogue licence and its replacement by a digital licence. [1575]

Dr. Howells: Premier Christian Radio has now withdrawn its judicial review proceedings challenging the Radio Authority's decision that it is disqualified from holding a digital multiplex licence and/or a digital sound programme licence.

The Radio Authority advertised Premier's local analogue licence on 18 September with a closing date for applications on 8 January. All MPs with constituencies in Greater London (111 of them) have been written to inviting their comments. The date of the award will depend on whether or not the Authority receives any competition for the licence, but will probably be in March or April.

Under the current legislation, the Radio Authority is prevented from awarding religious bodies a local digital sound programme licence. The Government are committed to bringing forward legislation in the forthcoming Communications Bill which would remove this prohibition. The position in relation to local multiplex licences is still under consideration.

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much of the expenditure by her Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation; which expenditure

programmes are allocated with respect to this Index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if she will make a statement. [8937]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* There are two major schemes for which my Department has made expenditure allocations during the period with reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The Department allocated £75 million from the Capital Modernisation Fund for Space for Sport and Arts. Expenditure will start this year and extend into 2003–04. This scheme, sponsored with the Department for Education and Skills, seeks to provide in the areas of greatest need around 300 new sports and arts facilities in primary schools for use by both pupils and the wider community. This funding is being supplemented by Lottery funding of £25 million from Sport England, £25 million from the New Opportunities Fund and £5 million from the Arts Council of England. The Department invited 65 local education authorities to participate in the scheme. These were selected using a number of indices of educational, socio-economic, sporting and cultural deprivation—including the DTLR's indices of deprivation 2000; meeting the criteria for other programmes such as Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, Sports Action Zones and Health Action Zones; nomination by Regional Arts Boards; and being within the Arts Council of England's priority regions.

The Department has also allocated £40 million (£15 million in 2002–03 and £25 million in 2003–04) to the Arts Council of England for the establishment of 16 pilot Creative Partnerships in deprived areas to provide exciting and challenging opportunities for young people to experience, learn from and enjoy artistic and creative activities. The partnerships, which will be run by the Arts Council, will focus on bringing together schools, arts and other creative organisations and commercial creative industries to provide enhanced opportunities for every school child in the chosen areas of deprivation. DTLR's Index of Multiple Deprivation, was used in determining these areas. Other measures of economic and educational deprivation and an assessment of cultural deprivation were also taken into account. The Department also considered the capacity of the areas selected to deliver Creative Partnerships, the need for balanced geographical spread and the inclusion of rural and coastal areas as well as urban ones.

In addition, many programmes and initiatives run by Lottery distributors are targeted at deprived areas, using the Index of Multiple Deprivation and a variety of other indicators.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action her Department took in recognition of Energy Efficiency Week. [11510]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport did not take any specific actions for Energy Efficiency Week but continued with longer-term projects to meet, and exceed, the Government targets in respect of energy saving. Through the Royal Parks Agency projects to produce electricity through wind power, water power and solar energy are being planned at Bushey Park. Those projects, together with a combined heat and power project using managed forestry and the produce from normal land management as fuel, will heat a swimming pool, supply electricity to some parts of the park and, possibly, export some power to the national grid.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many publications were issued by her Department in each of the last four years. [11839]

Dr. Howells: The number of publications issued by my Department in each of the last four years was:

Year	*Number*
1997–98	12
1998–99	18
1999–2000	31
2000–01	26

To date, nine publications have been produced in the 2001–02 financial year.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with Fakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan, regarding the involvement of women in the talks involving interested parties to a post-Taliban Government for Afghanistan. [11301]

Clare Short: I met Ambassador Brahimi on 9 October and reiterated our support for his efforts to develop a broad-based and representative Afghan Government. Ambassador Brahimi has demonstrated a commitment to addressing the human rights dimension of the governance of Afghanistan. The involvement of women in those discussions and the use of expertise on gender issues will help to ensure that the rights of the entire population of Afghanistan are protected and promoted, particularly recognising the complexity of gender issues in Afghanistan. We will continue to provide whatever assistance we can to Ambassador Brahimi and support the crucial role he plays in Afghanistan's future.

Third World Debt

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans the Government have to reduce third world debt; and what information she has collated on those of other European Union member states. [11776]

Clare Short: The Government have been at the forefront of global initiatives to tackle the unsustainable debt burden facing some developing countries, and led the way in securing the revision of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, which was agreed at the annual meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in September 1999. So far, 23 countries have qualified for this exceptional relief. More than $23 billion of debt relief has been agreed for those countries, which together owe $74 billion, so a major part of their debt has been written off.

In December 2000, the Government announced that the UK would go further than is required under the HIPC initiative and would provide 100 per cent. bilateral debt relief to countries when they qualify for HIPC relief. We will hold all debt payments received from HIPC countries in trust and, at that point, will return these payments to them. In addition, the UK has pledged over $300 million to the HIPC trust fund to meet the costs to the multilateral development banks of delivering HIPC debt relief. This includes our share of $85 million in EC contribution. We have also provided $43 million to assist the IMF with their share of such costs.

Most of our partner states in the European Union have also made bilateral contributions to the trust fund, on top of their share of the EC contribution. In addition, those member states that are major creditors deliver bilateral debt relief through the Paris Club of Official Bilateral Creditors to countries that have qualified for HIPC relief, with the majority providing 100 per cent. debt relief on their remaining bilateral debts.

Summer Recess (Departmental Publications)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by her Department during the summer recess. [9229]

Clare Short: My Department issued five press notices and no consultation documents during the summer recess.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security Normalisation

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the direct costs are of the security normalisation measures he announced on 24 October. [11071]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The normalisation measures announced on 24 October 2001 were the closure of two observation towers on Camlough and Sturgan mountains, the sangar at Newtownhamilton, and an Army base at Magherafelt.

Initial demolition work at all four sites has commenced with Royal Engineer manpower and helicopter support using assets already available in Province. Additional costs of some £10,000 have been incurred to date covering the hire of additional equipment such as cranes and skips.

Further work will be required at each of the sites, and in many cases this will be done by civilian contractors. The scope and cost of these contracts is still being assessed.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Drainage Systems

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the policy of the Duchy of Lancaster is towards drainage works on tenanted agricultural land where those works are the responsibility of the landlord; and if he will make a statement. [11727]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply.

Responsibility for the drainage of tenanted agricultural land is laid down in farm tenancy agreements. The Duchy's policy is to abide by its contractual obligations under such agreements.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the budget of the Duchy of Lancaster is in respect of the maintenance, repair and replacement of drainage systems on Duchy agricultural land. [11728]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply.

The budget of the Duchy of Lancaster for the maintenance and repair of agricultural property for the year to March 2002 is £173,100 which is not allocated to specific types of repair.

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he last met the Chairman of the Better Regulation Task Force. [11830]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend Lord Macdonald is the Minister responsible for regulatory reform. He last met Lord Haskins, Chairman of the Better Regulation Task Force, on 23 October.

Deregulation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to *(a)* reduce and *(b)* limit the number of regulations affecting industry. [11828]

Mr. Leslie: The Government are committed to minimising the burden of regulation on business.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment is required for each new proposal for regulation affecting business to ensure it is necessary and that the benefits justify the costs. The Panel for Regulatory Accountability, now given Cabinet Committee status, meets regularly to discuss regulatory performance with departmental Ministers.

The Regulatory Reform Act 2001 now provides a useful tool for reforming over-burdensome, over-complex and outdated primary legislation.

A draft Regulatory Reform Order (relaxing licensing in pubs and clubs for the forthcoming new year's eve) has already been laid before Parliament for scrutiny, and consultation exercises on a further eight proposals have now finished. There is one consultation exercise on reform of credit unions currently under way.

Cabinet Office Refurbishment

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the improvements being carried out to accommodate him at the Cabinet Office indicating the cost of each item of improvement; and when he expects the improvements to be completed. [12000]

Mr. Leslie: The office of the Deputy Prime Minister will move to the Ripley building when renovations are completed next summer. A very small number of modifications to the original plan will be made to accommodate ministerial offices (for example blocking off and opening up doorways).

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

UK Gas Market

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent action the Government have taken to address concerns about the UK gas market; and if she will make a statement. [12658]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are very aware of concerns about the operation of the GB gas market in the light of rising gas prices. While we remain convinced that the primary reason behind the increase is arbitrage across the interconnector with high oil related gas prices in the European market, we are aware of the need to consider the impact of the operation of the other parts of the gas chain on the downstream market. Indeed, this forms an integral part of our strategy to address gas prices.

The Government have therefore today published a consultation document entitled "A Consultation On Concerns About Gas Prices And Possible Improvements To Market Efficiency", which considers the various concerns made about the gas market. The document also considers the wider benefits to the gas market of increased information flows between the onshore and the offshore. This builds on a joint workshop with the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association held on 10 September.

The intention behind the document is to stimulate debate and to see if the concerns stand up to scrutiny. If we find any evidence of actual anti-competitive behaviour we shall bring it to the attention of the appropriate competition authority.

Copies of the consultation document can be found on the Department of Trade and Industry's website at www.dti.gov.uk/energy

Mineshafts

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Minister of State intends to meet with parliamentary colleagues to discuss the Government's response to the Herriot-Watt report on mineshafts. [9348]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* I am pleased to confirm that a meeting with parliamentary colleagues to discuss the Herriot-Watt University report on mineshafts has been arranged for 15 November.

Microsoft

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to review the implications of *(a)* US and *(b)* EU competition policy rulings for Microsoft's operations in the UK, with particular reference to Microsoft's contracts with the Government and their agencies. [10453]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The implications of the US and EC competition inquiries for Government contracts with Microsoft are being carefully considered.

Car Prices

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the cost of purchasing vehicles in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the rest of Europe; what recent measures have been introduced to reduce the cost of cars in the UK; and what plans she has to take further measures. [10114]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Both the Competition Commission, in its April 2000 monopoly report, and the European Commission, in its six-monthly surveys of prices, report prices in the UK to be significantly higher than in comparable countries in Europe.

The Competition Commission blamed the high prices of cars in the UK on practices associated with the selective and exclusive distribution system used by manufacturers, and allowed under the EC block exemption on vehicle distribution.

The Government's view is that competition is the best safeguard of consumer interests and that the current block exemption is not satisfactory.

The block exemption is due to expire in September 2002 and the European Commission is expected to publish draft proposals for reform around the turn of the year.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is in respect of the use of sunset clauses in legislation. [11876]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's policy is always to consider whether sunset clauses ought to be included in legislation we bring forward.

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the estimated cost to British businesses is of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive; [11858]

(2) what assessment she has made of the effects of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. [11860]

Mr. Wilson: The directive is currently in draft form and a full assessment of the costs and effects will not be possible until it is published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.

The Department of Trade and Industry submitted a partial Regulatory Impact Assessment on a previous draft of the proposal to the House on 2 October 2000. A copy of this was placed in the Library of the House.

Ineos Chlor Chemicals

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding the future of the Ineos Chlor Chemicals plant in Runcorn; and if she will make a statement. [11762]

Ms Hewitt: The Department is in discussion with Ineos Chlor about its plans for the future of the Runcorn plant and with other interested parties. I met representatives of Ineos Chlor on 30 October.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is towards granting Government assistance to the Ineos Chlor Chemicals group; and if she will make a statement. [11763]

Ms Hewitt: The primary mechanism for giving direct financial assistance to companies in the Assisted Areas is Regional Selective Assistance (RSA). Companies have to meet the criteria applicable to the scheme before an offer can be made.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has collated on the proportion of electricity supply met by *(a)* nuclear power, *(b)* coal-fired generation, *(c)* gas-fired generation, *(d)* oil-fired generation and *(e)* renewables for (i) each member country of the EU, (ii) the USA, (iii) Canada, (iv) Australia, (v) Russia, (vi) India and (vii) China. [11764]

Ms Hewitt: Available information gives the proportion of gross electricity production in each country met from each fuel source. Some of the electricity produced may be exported while some countries may import electricity. The data are the latest available and relate to 1999.

Proportion of each country's gross electricity production met from each energy source

Percentage

	Nuclear	*Coal*[1]	*Gas*[2]	*Oil*	*Renewables*[3]
EU member states					
Austria	—	9	14	5	72
Belgium	58	15	23	1	3
Denmark	—	52	23	13	12
Finland	33	21	14	1	31
France	75	6	2	2	15
Germany	31	51	10	1	7
Greece	—	65	8	17	10
Ireland	—	34	32	28	6
Italy	—	11	33	34	22
Luxembourg	—	—	20	—	80
Netherlands	4	25	57	8	6
Portugal	—	35	19	25	21
Spain	28	36	9	12	15
Sweden	47	2	—	2	49
UK	26	29	39	1	5
USA	20	51	16	3	10
Canada	13	19	4	3	61
Australia	—	78	11	1	10
Russia	14	19	43	5	19
India	2	75	6	1	16
China	1	77	1	4	17

[1] Includes hard coal, sub bituminous coal, lignite and peat.

[2] Includes natural gas and manufactured gases.

[3] Includes geothermal, solar, wind, tide, wave, ocean, hydro and combustible renewables.

Sources:

EU, USA, Canada and Australia—"Electricity Information, 2001" published by the International Energy Agency (IEA). The information for Russia, India, China is taken from the IEA's database.

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met the chairman of the better regulation task force. [11829]

Ms Hewitt: I met Lord Haskins on 5 September.

Parliamentary Questions

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the holding answer of 22 October, ref: 2001/664, when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a substantive reply to his question. [12096]

Mr. Wilson: I have answered my hon. Friend's question today, PQ No. 9348.

Fireworks

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what checks are carried out by the Health and Safety Executive prior to the *(a)* registration and *(b)* licensing of premises for the storage of fireworks. [11506]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

HSE licenses all explosives factories and stores holding more than 7,200 kg of fireworks. Stores holding less than 7,200 kg must either be licensed by the local authority or, depending on the quantity held, registered with it.

Where HSE is the licensing authority it considers a range of issues including the nature of the processes, the layout of the site and the construction of the buildings. In particular it will wish to ensure that adequate separation distances are maintained between explosives buildings and other buildings both on and off site. The draft licence is then submitted to the local authority for its assent. HSE will also make an inspection visit before operations start to ensure that the factory or store complies with the licence conditions.

Where the local authority is granting a licence it will normally check on the construction of the store and whether the distance between it and neighbouring inhabited buildings meets the minimum requirements. Registered premises are also subject to legal requirements. However due to the relatively small quantities involved local authorities would not normally undertake checks prior to registration.

DEFENCE

Defence Procurement Agency

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to merge the Defence Procurement Agency and the Defence Logistics Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [9394]

Mr. Hoon: I have no plans to merge the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) and the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO). Both organisations are recently formed and have clear and distinct responsibilities, as set out in the Strategic Defence Review. The role of the DPA is to procure new equipment capability for the armed forces and to deliver this in accordance with agreed

parameters for time, cost and performance. The DLO has been established to provide joint logistic support to the armed forces for training and operations, only one element of which is equipment support.

Although I am not considering a merger of the two organisations, the Ministry of Defence continues to explore improvements to the way the DPA and DLO work together on the equipment programme. We are also introducing simpler, common processes and systems to improve interoperability. This is being pursued through a joint steering group set up to manage work under a number of approaches, key among which are finance management, human resources management, through-life management, e-business, key supplier management and common tools for integrated project teams.

Missile Defence

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions the Government have undertaken with NATO member states about the integration of NATO missile defence research with US plans to deploy a missile defence system. [10967]

Mr. Hoon: No such discussions have taken place. The NATO feasibility studies for theatre missile defence, which started in July 2001 and will take 18 months to complete, are looking at options for protecting NATO forces. They are different from plans for a limited missile defence for the United States.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Government are intending to participate in the US's expressed plan to develop a missile defence to protect the US and its allies. [10965]

Mr. Hoon: The President of the United States has made clear that he wants the US's friends and allies to be protected against the potential ballistic missile threat. But no specific proposals have been made. We have a long-standing dialogue with the US on missile defence, and are ready to discuss any specific proposals they might make.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Government's policy is on the development of a ballistic missile defence shield. [11076]

Mr. Hoon: It remains premature to decide on acquiring a ballistic missile defence capability for the UK or our deployed forces. This is based on our current assessment of the threat, the rapidity with which defensive technologies are changing, and the need to address the threat through a range of measures. Our options for the future remain open.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what joint US-UK research projects are under development in support of the US missile defence plans; and if he will place an unclassified list of the projects in the Library. [10968]

Mr. Hoon: Joint US/UK research projects in support of missile defence are undertaken under the auspices of the 1985 UK-US Strategic Defence Initiative Memorandum of Understanding. A list of the projects concerned was given in the answer I gave on 26 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 526W, to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor). No further agreements have been signed.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether *(a)* US and *(b)* UK policy on missile defence has changed since 11 September. [11778]

Mr. Hoon: UK policy on missile defence is unchanged. The United States Administration has made it clear that it remains committed to the deployment of a limited missile defence system for the United States, but they have not yet decided exactly what sort of system they will seek to deploy.

Afghanistan

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many enemy lock-ons have been detected by British aircraft over Afghan airspace. [11015]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* None.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what stocks of cluster bombs are held by UK armed forces in the Afghan theatre of conflict. [11434]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* There are currently a number of BL/RB 755 type cluster munitions on board RFA Fort Victoria, which is in the Afghan theatre of conflict. These weapons are for use by the GR7 Harrier aircraft, which is not deployed with the task force. There are, therefore, currently no plans for their use.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost is of Exercise Saif Sareea II; how much the Government have spent in total in its operations against Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden; and if he will make a statement. [11965]

Mr. Hoon: Our most recent estimate of the cost of Exercise Saif Sareea II is around £90 million. We are confident that when all bills are finally presented, the actual cost will be within that estimate. With respect to Operations in Afghanistan, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 114W.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy not *(a)* to authorise and *(b)* to condone the use of cluster bombs in Afghanistan. [12296]

Mr. Hoon: Cluster bombs are legitimate weapons that have not been prohibited by any Treaty or Convention. Those used in Afghanistan contain bomblets designed to detonate on impact and to destroy buildings and vehicles. They are not designed as anti-personnel weapons and do not contain any landmines. They are the most effective weapon against certain targets. The coalition will continue to use them, with discretion and proportionality, against legitimate and appropriate terrorist and military targets.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are used to settle targets for bombing in Afghanistan; what definition of fixed military target is used; how many fixed military targets have been *(a)* identified and *(b)* attacked; how many such targets have been attacked more than once; and what assessment he has made of unintended damage to (i) property and (ii) people resulting from such attacks. [12245]

Mr. Hoon: It is not UK policy to comment in detail on targeting issues. Attacks are limited strictly to military objectives, including those objects which by their nature,

location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralisation, in the circumstance ruling at the time, offer a definite military advantage. Every effort is made to avoid incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects when selecting targets for attack.

As of 31 October, the total number of targets attacked is somewhat in excess of 100, of which around one half have been attacked more than once.

Following an attack on a target, Battle Damage Assessment is conducted to establish the success of that attack. Although we investigate all claims carefully, it is impossible to make a precise assessment of exactly how many civilians may have been killed or injured as a result of coalition action. Painstaking efforts are taken to minimise any unintended injury or damage but, regrettably, on occasion mistakes will happen and where we know this has happened, the coalition has said so publicly. However, we are clear that Taliban reports of civilian casualties are grossly exaggerated.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what safeguards will be put in place to protect *(a)* UK and other military personnel and *(b)* civilians from hazardous residues from depleted uranium in the current conflict in Afghanistan. [12184]

Mr. Hoon: Depleted uranium-based ammunition has not been used in current operations in Afghanistan. We are not aware of any plans for it to be used in future.

In the event that depleted uranium ammunition were to be used in Afghanistan and that UK service personnel might come into contact with it, appropriate guidelines would be issued to ensure that the already low risks to health were minimised.

A great deal of information on depleted uranium has already been put into the public domain. Should the need arise, we would discuss with coalition partners and civil agencies what information needs to be made available to the Afghan civilian population. Regrettably, the activities of the Taliban authorities in restricting the flow of information into Afghanistan could make this unnecessarily difficult for UN and other agencies to achieve.

US Domestic Preparedness Programme

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 242W, on the US Domestic Preparedness Programme, what aspects of US homeland security he plans to implement in the United Kingdom. [10964]

Mr. Hoon: Following the events of 11 September, the Government embarked on a wide ranging review of all their established contingency plans to counter terrorism and manage the circumstances in the UK and the threat to UK security. While elements of the US response to terrorism could be relevant to the UK, our domestic security posture reflects the geography of the UK and the threat of terrorism here which are different from those of the US.

We are conducting work, as I informed the House on 4 October, to ensure that we have the right concepts, force structures and capabilities in place to deal with asymmetric threats. This work will look both at the defence of the UK and our ability to counter and deter terrorism abroad. It is too early to say what measures we will implement as a result of this work, though consultation with the US and other Allies will make an important contribution.

Departmental Expenditure

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the overall expenditure by his Department in consultancy fees was in the financial years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1997–98 and *(e)* 1996–97. [12166]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's annual returns of expenditure on External Assistance, which include the payment of fees to consultants, for the years 1996–97 to 1999–2000, are available in the Library of the House.

The expenditure return for 2000–01 is not yet available, but, in accordance with past practice, copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Tracer Programme

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the Tracer programme to date; and what further expenditure is planned to the end of the programme. [11619]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* UK expenditure on the Tracer programme to 30 September 2001 is £108 million. A further £23 million has been committed for the planned completion of the current assessment phase in July 2002 when the collaborative programme will end.

HMNB Clyde

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress is being made on the contractorisation of his Department's civilians at HMNB Clyde; and what the time scale is for the change. [12174]

Dr. Moonie: Proposals have now been received from the Dockyard companies for partnering arrangements with the three Naval Bases at Portsmouth, Devonport and Clyde with the aim of modernising warship support. Alternative proposals have also been received from the joint Ministry of Defence Trades Unions and these are being assessed alongside the Company proposals. On current plans we would expect to announce the decision on the way ahead in the new year, with transition to any new arrangements anticipated to complete next summer.

Challenger II

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the manufacture of ammunition for the Challenger II main battle tank. [11048]

Dr. Moonie: The final batch of the armour piercing round (CHARM 3) has recently been manufactured and this completes current plans for the procurement of Challenger II ammunition other than the Squash Head Practise training round.

Disinfectants and Repellents

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if disinfectants and repellents for use by HM forces in hot climates are hazardous to health; and to what extent the instructions for their use are clear to users. [12183]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence uses a wide range of disinfectants and repellents, many of which are subject to the requirements of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH). These regulations require that an assessment of the risks to health and of the actions that need to be taken when using such a substance are carried out before it is used. Among other things, the assessment must consider the circumstances of use—for example whether it will be used in a hot or cold environment, in windy conditions, or in a confined space—and the information, instruction and training that must be provided for the eventual user. MOD and HM forces have management systems in place to ensure that such COSHH assessments are undertaken, that their conclusions are implemented and that, among other things, clear information, instruction and training is provided for and to the user.

HMS Ocean

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Ocean came into service; how long her refit is scheduled to take; and when she will return to service. [12067]

Dr. Moonie: HMS Ocean was handed over to the Royal Navy in March 1999 and her first refit is not planned to take place until 2008. However, in order to enable her to continue to operate until then, she will require a routine docking period. It had been planned to begin this work in January 2002 at Portsmouth, but due to current operational circumstances it has been decided to postpone the docking period. Instead, some essential maintenance work will be undertaken at her base port, Devonport, when she returns from the Gulf in late November. This will enable Ocean to be made available for operational programming early in 2002 rather than in late spring, which would have been the case had her docking period proceeded as planned.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans Her Majesty's Government have made for the armed forces to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty's reign; and if it is proposed to issue medals. [12299]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 23 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 294W, to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt), which detailed the plans for the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The then Home Secretary my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) announced on 15 February 2001 that there would be a Golden Jubilee Medal.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is to be the cost of issuing the Queen's Jubilee Medal to members of the armed forces with five years service; what the cost of issuing the medal to all members of the armed forces would have been; and if he will make a statement. [12161]

Dr. Moonie: The estimated cost of awarding the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal to all those members of the armed forces, volunteer reserve forces and the royal fleet auxiliary who will have completed five years' qualifying service on 6 February 2002, is £3.8 million. The funding that would be required to include all those who are serving on that date would be an additional £1.8 million.

The potential cost of the medal was not a deciding factor in determining the qualifying criteria. The requirement for a minimum of five years' qualifying service gives due recognition to those who have committed themselves to and completed a significant period of service to the Crown.

Scottish Regiments

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans exist to house Scottish regiments in Scotland; [12176]

(2) where the Scottish regiments are stationed; and where their postings will be in the future. [12178]

Dr. Moonie: Scottish regiments are routinely based in Scotland. Currently, The Highlanders (Seaforth, Gordons and Camerons) are stationed at Redford Barracks, Edinburgh and The Royal Highland Fusiliers (Princess Margaret's Own Glasgow and Ayrshire Regiment) at Fort George, Inverness. Such deployments will continue in future, as part of the Army's Arms Plot.

The current location of the other Scottish regiments of the Foot Guards, Scottish Division and Royal Armoured Corps are as follows: Wellington Barracks, London (Scots Guards); Somme Barracks, Catterick (The King's Own Scottish Borders); Ballykelly, Northern Ireland (The Royal Scots (The Royal Regiment)); Belfast, Northern Ireland (The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Princess Louise's)); and Fallingbostel, Germany (The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) and The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers and Greys)).

During the next 12 months, it is planned that The Royal Scots will be posted to Dreghorn Barracks, Edinburgh.

Defence Contracts

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what defence contracts are placed in Scotland; what is their total value; with what firms they have been placed; what is the value to each firm; and what is the timescale over which each contract will be paid to the contractors. [12175]

Dr. Moonie: Information at the level of detail requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In addition, details of individual contracts and their values are withheld under Exemption 14 (Information given in confidence) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. However, in respect of contracts placed in Scotland, I draw the hon. Member's attention to the publication, "UK Defence Statistics 2001", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Table 1.9 contains information on defence expenditure on equipment in UK regions, including Scotland.

Defence Agencies

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the defence agencies, the location of each of their headquarters, the staff totals of each, the numbers of each of their staffs in Scotland, their annual expenditure, and their annual expenditure in Scotland, in the last available year. [12179]

Dr. Moonie: Information about Defence Agencies, including the location of their headquarters, the number of staff employed and their annual expenditure, have been given in Annexe K of the Ministry of Defence Departmental Performance Report 1999–2000, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. I will write to the hon. Member about the other aspects of his question and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the defence agencies that have trading status. [12177]

Dr. Moonie: Currently, four defence agencies operate as Trading Funds. They are: the Meteorological Office, the UK Hydrographic Office, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, and the Defence Aviation Repair Agency.

Vaccinations

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the vaccinations available to service personnel as protection against chemical and biological warfare have been *(a)* tested and *(b)* improved since the Gulf war; and if they are free from hazardous side effects. [12182]

Dr. Moonie: The only immunisation used to protect UK service personnel against the possible use of biological warfare agents during the Gulf conflict, which is still in use, is an anthrax vaccine. No significant alterations to this vaccine as used by the Ministry of Defence have been made since the Gulf conflict. No serious side effects have been reported. No immunisations were or are used to protect against chemical warfare agents.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if UK military personnel involved in the conflict in Afghanistan will be obliged to be vaccinated against exposure to chemical and biological warfare. [12181]

Mr. Hoon: We take all measures necessary to ensure that service personnel are afforded appropriate protection against chemical and biological warfare agents commensurate with the perceived threat. The only licensed vaccine currently used to protect UK service personnel against exposure to biological warfare agents is an anthrax vaccine. The vaccine is offered to specific units of our armed forces on the basis of an assessment of the threat they face, which in turn depends on their deployment role. We continually review whether it is appropriate to offer anthrax vaccine to personnel who may be involved in new deployments, as part of their wider package of protective measures against chemical or biological attack. Vaccination of UK service personnel is not obligatory but voluntary, and is given on the basis of informed consent.

It is not possible to vaccinate against chemical warfare agents.

TREASURY

Taxation

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of married or cohabiting couples with children where neither partner is a higher rate taxpayer whose combined taxable income exceeds the higher rate threshold by *(a)* less than £7,800 and *(b)* more than £7,800. [4075]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 July 2001]:* The number of married or cohabiting couples with children where neither partner is a higher rate taxpayer whose combined taxable income exceeds the higher rate threshold by *(a)* less than £7,800 is estimated to be 500,000 and *(b)* more than £7,800 is estimated to be 900,000.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to improve the reliability of the conventions, assumptions and sampling methods used to calculate the *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect tax burden on typical households; and if he will make a statement. [4634]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The conventions and assumptions used to calculate *(a)* the direct tax burden are reliable and are set out in the Tax and Benefit Reference Manual. On *(b)*, as the Tax and Benefit Reference Manual has made clear, estimates on the indirect tax burden on typical households are not made because spending patterns vary considerably between households of the same type and income.

Equitable Life

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations underlay the policy of the FSA and the Treasury on informing Equitable Life insurance policy holders on the sufficiency of funds within the with-profit fund to cover guaranteed annuity rate liabilities. [7315]

Ruth Kelly: Both Government and regulators are concerned to see that insurance and investment businesses comply with the statutory and regulatory requirements placed on them.

Insurance companies are subject to statutory disclosure requirements under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 and the Companies Acts. Investment firms are also subject to prudential and conduct of business regulation.

National Insurance Contribution Office

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average length of time taken by the contracted-out employment group of the National Insurance Contribution Office to provide figures for contracted out schemes to buy members back into the state system in the last five years; how many cases have taken longer than the average time; and what the length of period involved was. [10411]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The information requested is not available.

Colorectal Cancers

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths there were in *(a)* absolute numbers and

(b) per capita of the whole population; and what the five year survival rate was of sufferers of colorectal cancers in each region and nation of the UK in (i) 1998, (ii)1999 and (iii) 2000. [10938]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 31 October 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many deaths there were in (a) absolute numbers and (b) per capita of the whole population; and what the five year survival rate was of sufferers of colorectal cancers in each region and nation of the UK in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2000. (10938).

The latest available information on five year survival from colorectal cancer in the UK and the numbers and age-standards rates[1] of deaths (person) from colorectal cancer[2] for England and its constituent Health Regions, and the other countries of the UK in 1998, 1999 and 2000[3] are given in the attached tables.

The results for England and its regions, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, are based on cases diagnosed during 1992–94, 1985–89, 1991–95, and 1993–96, respectively; and followed up to the end of 1999, 1994, 1998 and 1999, respectively.

The figures for England and its regions are directly comparable, but because of the differences in coverage and end of follow up, and for other reasons, the figures for the separate countries of the UK are not, and they cannot be made so.

	Number of deaths			*Rate[1] per 100,000 population*		
Country/region[4]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
England	13,962	13,613	13,223	20.4	19.8	19.0
Northern and Yorkshire	1,860	1,743	1,815	21.1	19.8	20.5
Trent	1,482	1,497	1,365	20.5	20.7	18.5
Eastern	1,516	1,443	1,391	19.8	18.7	17.6
London	1,554	1,407	1,408	18.8	17.0	16.9
South East	2,468	2,448	2,327	20.0	19.5	18.5
South West	1,549	1,641	1,556	19.3	20.3	18.9
West Midlands	1,565	1,542	1,519	21.7	21.2	20.4
North West	1,968	1,892	1,842	22.0	21.0	20.5
Wales	994	971	990	22.8	21.9	22.3
Scotland	1,660	1,698	1,616	24.5	24.8	23.2
Northern Ireland	443	410	N/A	22.9	20.7	N/A

[1] Age standardised using the European standard population
[2] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, codes 153 and 154, except for Scotland in 2000: International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, codes C18-C21
[3] Data for England and Wales based on deaths occurring each year, excluding non-residents. Data for Scotland and Northern Ireland based on deaths registered each year, including non-residents
[4] Boundaries as at 1 April 1999
Sources:
Office for National Statistics, General Register Office for Scotland, and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Country/region[5]	*Cancer site[6]*	*Sex[6]*	*5 year relative survival (%)*
England	Colon	Male	42.6
		Females	42.1
Northern and Yorkshire	Colon	Persons	38.3
Trent	Colon	Persons	38.5
Eastern	Colon	Persons	42.7
London	Colon	Persons	41.2
South East	Colon	Persons	45.7
South West	Colon	Persons	46.6
West Midlands	Colon	Persons	42.9
North West	Colon	Persons	38.8

Source:
England: Office for National Statistics. Cancer survival 1992–1999. London: ONS, 31 January 2001

Country/region[5]	*Cancer site[6]*	*Sex[6]*	*5 year relative survival (%)*
Wales	Large bowel	Males	39
		Females	42

Source:
Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit. Cancer Registration and Survival in Wales 1985–1994. Cardiff: WCISU, 1999

Country/region[5]	*Cancer site[6]*	*Sex[6]*	*5 year relative survival (%)*
Scotland	Colon	Males	45.0
		Females	45.1
	Rectum	Males	42.8
		Females	45.0

Source:
Scottish Cancer Intelligence Unit. Trends in Cancer Survival in Scotland 1971–1995. Edinburgh: Information & Statistics Division NHS in Scotland, 2000

Country/region[5]	*Cancer site[6]*	*Sex[6]*	*5 year relative survival (%)*
Northern Ireland	Colon	Males	49
		Females	51
	Rectum	Males	49
		Females	48

[5] Boundaries as at 1st April 1999.
[6] Survival rates for cancers of the colon and rectum are closely similar. As survival rates from colorectal cancer for males and females are closely similar (see figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland) the more precise figures for all persons (males and females combined) are given for the regions of England
Source:
Fitzpatrick DA, Gavin AT. Survival of Cancer Patients in Northern Ireland 1993–1996. Belfast: Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, 2001

Euro

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proposed date for a referendum on euro entry. [11099]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's policy on the euro remains as set out by the Chancellor in his statement to Parliament in October 1997 and restated by the Prime Minister in February 1999. The Government have said they will complete an assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. Once the assessment has been completed, the Government will make a decision on UK membership of the single currency. If the Government recommend UK entry, it will be put to a vote in Parliament and then to a referendum of the British people.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to undertake a review of the operation of individual learning accounts to ensure that the introduction of the child trust fund or saving gateway does not give rise to fraud. [R] [11889]

Ruth Kelly: The Government launched consultation on further proposals to encourage saving and asset-building, especially among households with low incomes, in "Saving and Assets for All" published by HM Treasury in April 2001. The consultation is focused on proposals for the child trust fund and the saving gateway. The Government intend to report back on the results from the consultation and on their further intentions for these initiatives around the time of the pre-Budget report in autumn 2001. The Government will continue to develop these proposals, including through consultation with interested parties such as financial services providers, to ensure that concerns, including the possibility of fraud, are properly addressed.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action his Department took in recognition of Energy Efficiency Week. [11509]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 592W.

HM Treasury is continually looking to introduce saving schemes to the Department. For example, we registered with the Watermark Project to reduce water consumption in the Parliament street building and have implemented all their recommendations and have taken advantage of a shared saving scheme.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many publications were issued by his Department in each of the last four years. [11821]

Ruth Kelly: Official documents produced since 1997 for external distribution by or on behalf of the Treasury are listed in the Department's annual report, "The Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments: The Government's Expenditure Plans 2001–03 to 2003–04 and Main Estimates 2001–02", published in April 2001 and on the Treasury's public website.

Departmental Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish details of each Department's performance against its public service agreement targets. [11843]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 373W.

Child Trust Funds

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) in the first year that child trust funds are available, if he will state his target for *(a)* the total number of people who will take advantage of a saving gateway scheme and *(b)* the total number of people who will take advantage of a saving gateway scheme with (i) no previous savings and (ii) a level of savings consistent with the lowest decile of average per head saving levels; [11897]

(2) what assessment he has made of the calculation of the likely cost effectiveness of the child trust fund and saving gateway proposals; [11925]

(3) what his target is for *(a)* the number of families which take advantage of a child trust fund and *(b)* the total number of families which take advantage of a child trust fund with (i) no previous savings and (ii) a level of savings consistent with the lowest decile of average per family saving levels, in the first year that child trust funds are available; [11892]

(4) what his target is for the average percentage of the maximum available savings limit which he expects to be used up by people taking advantage of a saving gateway scheme in the first year of the scheme's availability; [11900]

(5) if he will make a statement on the intended interaction of the saving gateway, stakeholder pension and the pension credit; [11895]

(6) in the first three years of each scheme's operation, how many new savers he expects to be created by *(a)* the child trust fund and *(b)* the saving gateway; [11899]

(7) what assessment he has made of the effect which the saving gateway will have on individuals intending to save into a stakeholder pension scheme; [11898]

(8) if he plans to allow equity investments to be held in the saving gateway and child trust fund schemes; [11890]

(9) if he has calculated the likely deadweight costs to the Exchequer in the first year of operation associated with the *(a)* savings gateway and *(b)* child trust fund. [11891]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 207–08W.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether there are members of the Council of Economic Advisers on contracts that are *(a)* permanent, *(b)* temporary and *(c)* secondments. [11608]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 467W.

The Council of Economic Advisers are temporary civil servants appointed under Article 3 of the Civil Service Order in Council 1995 (as amended).

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the yield of inheritance tax in each of the last four years. [11853]

Dawn Primarolo: Figures on inheritance tax yield are contained in table 1.2 of Inland Revenue Statistics 2000, which is available, updated to 2001 on the Inland Revenue website: www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/menus/stats.htm.

Deceased Persons (Estates)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in how many cases, in each of the last four years, the proceeds of the estates of deceased persons reverted to the Inland Revenue. [11852]

Dawn Primarolo: Where a deceased person dies intestate and without entitled blood relatives the estate falls to be dealt with by the Treasury Solicitor on behalf of the Crown. In each of the last four years an average of 1,700 estates have been referred to the Treasury Solicitor, but not all of these revert to the Crown as in about a third of cases a will or relatives are traced.

Tax Credits

John Mann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Bassetlaw have received working families tax credit and child credit to date. [11585]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of families in each constituency receiving working families tax credit (WFTC) are shown in "The WFTC Quarterly Enquiries", copies of which are in the Library.

It is estimated that about 5 million families will benefit from the children's tax credit. Figures for each constituency are not available, but it is estimated that about 400,000 of these families are in the east midlands.

Service Delivery Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to revise the targets contained in the service delivery agreements published in autumn 2000. [11827]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government will be reviewing Departments' service delivery agreements, as part of the 2002 spending review. Departments will publish new ones after the review.

Civil Marriages

Margaret Moran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to change the law relating to civil registration of marriages to permit reference to parents of the bride or groom to include mothers. [11587]

Ruth Kelly: In 1998, the then Economic Secretary to the Treasury commissioned the Registrar General to carry out a fundamental review of the Civil Registration service in England and Wales. This was in recognition of the fact that much of the Civil Registration system is outdated and does not meet the needs of today's society.

In September 1999, the Registrar General published a consultation paper, "Registration: Modernising a Vital Service". The consultation period ended on 6 December 1999. The responses have been used to set out options for the future development of the registration service, so that it can adapt to the changing needs and attitudes of a modern society.

Many of the responses to the consultation document were in support of equality of treatment for men and women in the records of births, deaths and marriages. Proposals on how this could be achieved are now being formulated and the intention is to publish a policy paper in due course.

Secondees

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list secondees in his Department from the private sector to *(a)* the Inland Revenue, *(b)* the Office of Government Commerce and *(c)* Customs and Excise. [11610]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the seconding private sector companies and the secondees' Departmental responsibilities are shown in the table:

Number of staff	*Dates*	*Organisation*	*Work area*
(a) Inland Revenue			
1	13 March 2001 to 19 March 2003	British Telecom	Diversity & equality project
1	1 August 2001 to 31 July 2002	Accenture	Better quality services review project
1	24 September 2001 to 31 March 2002	KMPG	Policy adviser
1	1 June 2001 to 30 November 2001	Mercers	Defined benefit simplification project
1	1 June 2001 to 31 November 2001	Slaughter & May	Defined benefit simplification project
1	18 October 2001 to 18 October 2002	Barclays Bank	Joint voluntary arrangements service corporate insolvency support adviser
1	1 June 2001 to 30 November 2001	Watson Wyatts	Defined benefit simplification project
1	5 March 2001 to 28 February 2003	Boots plc	People programme: Diversity & equality project

Number of staff	Dates	Organisation	Work area
(b) Office of Government Commerce			
1	1 April 2000—under consideration	Quality Business Management Ltd.	Director of management policy practice and legal directorate measurement division
1	8 August 2000 to 8 August 2002	BAA	Construction director property and construction directorate
1	9 July 2001 to 8 January 2002	Computer Science Corporation	IT Directorate consultancy division
1	9 July 2001 to 8 July 2002	Zurich Management Services	Private finance adviser, policy practice and legal directorate
(c) Customs & Excise			
1	11 June 2001 to 10 June 2002	British Telecommunications plc	Marketing a public sector benchmarking system

Training Tax Credit

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce a tax credit for training. [11971]

Dawn Primarolo: As set out in Budget 2001, the Government are willing to consider what else they can contribute to extending opportunity for all in work, particularly to obtain a qualification up to level 2. But Government action alone cannot bring about the change necessary to impact on the problem of low skills. It will be important that everyone—employers, individuals and Government—take seriously their responsibility to deliver a high skill, high productivity economy.

Payroll Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the progress of the Carter report into payroll services; [12085]

(2) what plans he has to reduce the costs to business associated with *(a)* current and *(b)* future payroll obligations. [12086]

Dawn Primarolo: Patrick Carter's review of payroll services has been completed and is currently under consideration.

Offshore Rigs

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he intends to take following the ruling in the case of Joseph Lavery *v.* Ian MacLeod (HMIT) relating to the foreign earnings deduction status of offshore jack-up rigs; and if he will make a statement. [12192]

Dawn Primarolo: There has been a separate Court of Appeal hearing since the Special Commissioners case of Lavery *v.* MacLeod. The Court of Appeal held that a jack-up rig should be treated as a ship for the purposes of the foreign earnings deduction. The Inland Revenue is currently considering the actions that it needs to take as a consequence of the decisions in these cases.

Barnett Formula

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which areas of new comparable expenditure have been applied to Scotland under the Barnett formula and when, since 1979; and what has been the annual impact of each of these spending lines on the Scottish budget allocation. [12191]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information on extensions to the Scottish block was published in the Treasury Committee report (HC 341 of 1997–98) on the Barnett formula in December 1997. Since then, information on the Barnett comparability factors and the assigned budget has been published in the Statement of Funding Policy, updated in July 2000. The Scottish block is determined as a block and is not hypothecated to particular spending lines.

Bio-fuel Incentives

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce fiscal incentives to encourage the use of bio-fuel to meet the EU target for 2005. [12004]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 61–62W.

Graduate Incomes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the average post-tax income of full-time employed *(a)* graduates and *(b)* non graduates aged (i) 18, (ii) 22, (iii) 30, (iv) 40, (v) 50 and (vi) 60 years in *(a)* 1960, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* 2000, based on 2000 purchasing power; [12278]

(2) what was the average earnings of full-time employed *(a)* graduates and *(b)* non graduates aged (i) 18, (ii) 22, (iii) 30, (iv) 40, (v) 50 and (vi) 60 years in *(a)* 1960, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* 2000, based on 2000 purchasing power. [12277]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 31 October 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions about the average earnings and average post-tax income of graduates and non-graduates (12277, 12278).

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of average gross weekly earnings for graduates and non-graduates. However, it only collects information about qualifications from respondents of working age (men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59). Therefore, it does not provide estimates for female graduates and non-graduates aged 60 years or over.

The LFS does not provide earnings estimates for 1990 or previous years as questions on earnings were first introduced in winter (December to February) 1992. Estimates for spring (March to May) 2000 are given in the table overleaf.

The LFS does not collect information about post-tax income.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time[1] employees by age and whether a graduate or non-graduate; United Kingdom; spring (March to May) 2000; not seasonally adjusted

£

	All full-time employees of working age[2,3]	Graduates	Non-graduates
All aged 18 years	155	[5]—	155
All aged 22 years	250	272	244
All aged 30 years	382	468	351
All aged 40 years	448	719	391
All aged 50 years	436	715	382
Men aged 60 years[4]	431	[5]—	382

[1] The definition of full-time/part-time is based on respondents' self-assessment
[2] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59
[3] Includes people who did not state their qualifications
[4] Estimates for women aged 60 years are not available as the questions about qualifications only apply to people of working age
[5] Sample size too small for reliable estimate

HEALTH

Regulation

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the priorities of the Council for the Regulation of Healthcare Professionals relating to the harmonisation of regulatory systems across the professions. [11582]

Mr. Hutton: Following publication of the Kennedy report that the "regulatory bodies be brought under the overall leadership of one overarching body", a public consultation was held on the establishment of a new Council for the Regulation of Healthcare Professionals which ended on 30 September. Legislation on establishing the new Council will be published shortly. We intend that the Council will be independent of the Government and it will be for the Council itself and not Ministers to take decisions on its priorities.

Haemophilia

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to combact the shortage of recombinant clotting factors that are provided to haemophiliac patients. [9500]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is working with the professionals, organisations and industry to help ensure that the needs of haemophilia patients are met, and that those for whom recombinant coagulation factors are required are able to get them.

Nursing and Residential Care

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and residential care *(a)* homes and *(b)* beds have closed in South Tyneside in each year since 1997. [8828]

Jacqui Smith: The available information is in the table. No information is available on the number of beds affected through homes closing or opening.

Number of care home establishments closures and new home registrations in Gateshead and South Tyneside

Year ending 31 March	Residential[1]	Nursing[2]
Establishment closures		
1999	3	1
2000	7	5
New registrations		
1999	5	0
2000	7	3

[1] South Tyneside and Gateshead local authority areas
[2] Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority
Source:
Registration and Inspection Survey

Nuchal Translucency Scans

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of nuchal translucency scans. [9093]

Jacqui Smith: The advice of the United Kingdom National Screening Committee on Down's Syndrome screening is that all women should be offered second trimester serum screening to consist of at least a double test and a move towards triple or quadruple tests when possible. Other combinations of serum analytes and screening in the first trimester, including ultrasound scans, will be kept under review. Nuchal translucency scans are currently estimated to be available in about 8 per cent. of maternity units.

Communicable Disease Control

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if consultants in communicable disease control will work for *(a)* primary care trusts and *(b)* strategic health authorities. [9056]

Jacqui Smith: We are currently considering in the light of "Shifting the Balance of Power" what arrangements for the employment of consultants in communicable disease control will be suitable in the future. Such arrangements will be aimed at ensuring a comprehensive health protection function at local level.

Social Work Recruitment (Wales)

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Executive of the National Assembly for Wales regarding social worker recruitment and retention; and if he will make a statement on the results of these discussions. [9265]

Jacqui Smith: Officials of the Department have had extensive discussions with officials of the Executive of the National Assembly for Wales about social worker recruitment and retention. Ministers have been kept informed of these discussions. The result is an agreement that any Welsh people who contact the recruitment helpline recently launched in England, or request information via e-mail, will be given the information they require and will be directed to the Care Council for Wales for further information. The Department will continue to

work closely with the National Assembly for Wales, and will share information and learning on the recruitment and retention of social workers.

Bed Blocking

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1122W, on bed blocking, how many NHS hospital beds were subject to bed blocking by patients of all ages, broken down by each hospital trust in England and Wales, shown in actual terms and as a percentage of beds in use. [11061]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers health authorities have to ensure that payments to nursing home owners in respect of assessed nursing care needs are passed on in full to the relevant clients; and what monitoring of such payments he requires to be carried out. [10939]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance issued to the national health service makes clear that, from 1 October, those funding the full cost of their care in a nursing home from their own resources should not be charged for the cost of their care by a registered nurse as determined by an NHS nurse.

Nursing homes will be receiving payments in respect of their clients' individual nursing needs from that date. This should be passed on to the individual through lower fees. The individual cannot be charged for services that the NHS is paying for and this will be reflected in the contracts between NHS bodies and nursing homes and between individuals and the home. NHS bodies will ensure that the contracts that they have with individual nursing homes are complied with and that any complaints relating to NHS funded nursing care are investigated.

NHS Staff (Pay)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the average rise in the pay of NHS staff for each year since 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [11038]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Year	*Percentage*
1997–98	3.61
1998–99	4.02
1999–2000	4.0
2000–01	3.34
2001–02	3.75

Notes:

This is an average of the general increases to national pay scales for all of the staff groups in NHS trusts and health authorities, weighted by the total salary bill of each group. It omits the value of increments and other changes in pay

Sources:

Pay Advance letters, Department of Health's National Health Service August 2000 staff earnings survey

Waiting Lists

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the Department of Health in Northern Ireland about the initiative to reduce waiting lists through the funding of operations for UK citizens in other European countries. [11661]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* Officials in the Department have had discussions with colleagues in Northern Ireland about the implications of recent European Court of Justice rulings on cross-border health treatment for treating United Kingdom patients abroad. However, the decision to commission treatment for patients from Northern Ireland elsewhere in the European Economic Area is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

E112 Regulations

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has made to review the E112 regulations to ensure that they operate transparently and objectively. [11047]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The Department is currently reviewing the E112 arrangements to ensure they comply with the judgments of the European Court of Justice in cases C 368/98 and C157/99.

Treatment Abroad

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has made to monitor the quality of care for United Kingdom patients going abroad to receive NHS treatment; [11045]

(2) how long it will take to put in place systems to guarantee patients high standards of care for treatments taking place abroad. [11043]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* Monitoring quality of care is primarily a matter for primary care trusts (PCTs), although we recognise that commissioning care overseas raises particular issues. To aid them in this task the Department will publish guidance for PCTs on commissioning treatment for National Health Service patients overseas based on the experience of the three test-bed sites which are currently working up plans to send patients to mainland Europe. The Department will also develop through an open tendering process a list of approved providers/intemediaries whom PCTs may approach when considering sending patients overseas. Finally, officials are considering what role the Commission for Health Improvement might play in monitoring standards of foreign providers.

Primary care trusts will need to satisfy themselves through paper evidence, through clinicians visiting the relevant providers and through the contractual process that their patients will receive good clinical care. Although this process should be rigorous, it need not take many weeks. Our aim is that, if possible, the first patients travel to receive treatment in mainland Europe before the end of the year.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what definition he uses for an unreasonable period of delay for treatment within the NHS, as phrased in the European Court of Justice ruling on treatment of patients abroad. [11041]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The European Court of Justice did not define what was meant by "undue delay", by implication leaving that a matter for determination by each member state. In England, if an application for treatment elsewhere in the European Union under the E112 scheme was made on grounds of delay, the Department would take account of the national targets for waiting times as published in the NHS Plan and of the individual patient's clinical need.

Smallpox

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans have been made to vaccinate the United Kingdom population against smallpox; and if he will make a statement. [11160]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* There are no plans to vaccinate the United Kingdom population against smallpox. There is no specific threat to the UK population from this disease, which has been eradicated worldwide.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 619W, on individual learning accounts, when she first ordered *(a)* an audit and *(b)* an inspection into a complaint that learning providers were misusing the operation of the individual learning account scheme. [12288]

John Healey: The first audit was conducted in December 2000; and the first inspection in July 2001.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of specialist schools selected pupils by aptitude in each of the last five years. [12088]

Mr. Timms: This information is not available for each of the last five years. In 1999–2000, when 403 specialist schools were operational, about 7 per cent. of the non-selective schools selected some of their pupils on the basis of aptitude in the specialisms. This information will be available annually in future, with information in relation to 2000–01 available in February 2002.

Student Support

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what further response to the sixth report from the Select Committee on Education and Employment she plans to publish on the Government's commitment to a review of student support arrangements. [11040]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The Government have responded to the Education and Employment Select Committee's sixth report on student retention and has since announced a review of student funding. Any reforms emerging for the review will build on the new arrangements for student support introduced by the Government in 1998. It will be conducted in the context of our goal to get 50 per cent. of people under 30 into Higher Education by 2010, our ambition to expand access to HE from under-represented groups, and our continuing concern to deliver excellence in the HE system. We are, therefore, reviewing the balance between state funding and the contributions made by students and their families. A wide range of options is being considered and no decision is likely to be announced on the proposals until next year.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the *(a)* terms of reference, *(b)* names of participating groups or individuals and *(c)* the time scale of the proposed review of student support arrangements; and if she will make a statement. [10954]

Margaret Hodge: The Government are reviewing our student funding policy. Any reforms emerging from the review will build on the new arrangements for student support introduced by the Government in 1998. It will be conducted in the context of our goal to get 50 per cent. of people under 30 into Higher Education by 2010, our ambition to expand access to HE from under-represented groups, and our continuing concern to deliver excellence in the HE system. We are, therefore, reviewing the balance between state funding and the contributions made by students and their families. A wide range of options is being considered and no decision is likely to be announced on the proposals until next year. We have said that we plan to consult on any proposals for change that emerge from the review.

AS-levels

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many AS-level exam scripts were not formally marked by the examining boards this year; what percentage this is of the total number of AS-level scripts; and if she will make a statement. [10741]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* It is not possible to give a percentage of the total number of AS-level scripts that were not formally marked in summer 2001, as the number of scripts per subject is variable.

As at 16 August, when provisional results were announced by the Joint Council for General Qualifications, a total of 6,461 special awards were made for AS-level subjects as a result of exam scripts not having been formally marked by the examining boards in summer 2001. This is 0.84 per cent. of 768,630 requests for "cash-in" of AS subject qualifications in England this summer.

Civil Defence Guidance

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what new civil defence guidance has been issued to schools since 11 September. [12087]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The further guidance referred to in my previous answer to the hon. Member on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1233W, was notified to local education authorities on 19 October for them to use in advising schools.

Language Colleges

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what are the *(a)* name, *(b)* local education authority, *(c)* character, *(d)* date of designation, *(e)* agreed targets for each year within the period of

designation and (*f*) unmet targets to date, of each designated language college in (i) south-east England, (ii) south-west England and (iii) London. [11918]

Mr. Timms: Information on the name, local education authority, character and date of designation of specialist language colleges currently operating in south-east England, south-west England and London is set out in the table.

We do not publish targets for individual language colleges. Targets are agreed and reviewed annually with individual schools, and are subject to modification in the light of changing circumstances. However, all language college targets support the delivery of the main aims of the language college programme. These are:

to raise standards of teaching and learning in Modern Foreign Languages (MFLs) and foster an international ethos and cultural awareness throughout a school;

to ensure young people leave school with the knowledge and skills they and employers need by giving pupils an early understanding of the world of work, through the active participation of business community sponsors in school life, and thereby enhance pupils' understanding of applications of modern foreign languages;

to encourage the dissemination of good practice and the sharing of resources through closer contacts between language colleges, other schools and the wider community.

Individual targets and performance against those targets for each year of operation in the 49 language colleges included in the table could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

School name	*LEA*	*Character*	*Operational as from September*	*Region*
1. Dartford Grammar School	Kent	Foundation	1995	South-east
2. Hendon School	Barnet, LB of	Foundation	1995	London
3. Bohunt School	Hampshire	Foundation	1996	South-east
4. Bullers Wood School	Bromley, LB of	Foundation	1996	London
5. Convent of Jesus and Mary High	Brent, LB of	Voluntary-Aided	1996	London
6. Katharine Lady Berkeleys	Gloucestershire	Foundation	1996	South-west
7. Millais School	West Sussex	Community	1996	South-east
8. Royal Grammar School (The)	Buckinghamshire	Foundation	1996	South-east
9. Sir Bernard Lovell School	South Gloucestershire	Community	1996	South-west
10. Tavistock College	Devon	Community	1996	South-west
11. Tomlinscote School	Surrey	Community	1996	South-east
12. Torquay Boys' Grammar	Torbay	Foundation	1996	South-west
13. Willink School (The)	West Berkshire	Community	1996	South-east
14. Cranford Community High School	Hounslow, LB of	Community	1997	London
15. Didcot Girls' High School	Oxfordshire	Community	1997	South-east
16. Elliott School	Wandsworth	Foundation	1997	London
17. Haydon School	Hillingdon	Foundation	1997	London
18. Imberhorne School	West Sussex	Community	1997	South-east
19. Penrice Community School	Cornwall	Community	1997	South-east
20. St. John Baptist Catholic Comprehensive School	Surrey	Voluntary-Aided	1997	South-east
21. William Ellis School	Camden, LB of	Voluntary-Aided	1997	London
22. Ashcombe School	Surrey	Community	1998	South-east
23. Lord Grey School	Milton Keynes	Foundation	1998	South-east
24. Holt School (The)	Wokingham	Community	1999	South-east
25. Our Lady's Convent High School	Hackney, LB of	Voluntary-Aided	1999	London
26. Saint George's C of E School	Kent	Voluntary-Aided	1999	South-east
27. Sir John Colfox School	Dorset	Community	1999	South-west
28. Weald of Kent Grammar School	Kent	Community	1999	South-east
29. Bournemouth School	Bournemouth	Foundation	2000	South-west
30. Chatham Grammar School for Boys	Medway	Community	2000	South-east
31. Clevedon Community School	North Somerset	Community	2000	South-west
32. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School	Islington, LB of	Community	2000	London
33. Hele's School	Plymouth, City of	Community	2000	South-west
34. Highcliffe School	Dorset	Foundation	2000	South-west
35. John Bentley School (The)	Wiltshire	Foundation	2000	South-west
36. Kingsmead Community School	Somerset	Community	2000	South-west
37. Mountbatten School (The)	Hampshire	Community	2000	South-east
38. Romsey School (The)	Hampshire	Community	2000	South-east
39. Ryde High School	Isle of Wight	Community	2000	South-east
40. Sir John Cass's Foundation Redcoat School (The)	Tower Hamlets	Voluntary-Aided	2000	London
41. Sir Thomas Rich's School	Gloucestershire	Community	2000	South-west
42. Woodbridge High School	Redbridge	Community	2000	London
43. Aylesbury High School	Buckinghamshire	Community	2001	South-east
44. Connaught School for Girls	Waltham Forest, LB of	Community	2001	London
45. Greenford High School	Ealing, LB of	Foundation	2001	London
46. Hayle Community School	Cornwall	Community	2001	South-west
47. Henry Box School (The)	Oxfordshire	Community	2001	South-east
48. Pate's Grammar School	Gloucestershire	Voluntary-Aided	2001	South-west
49. Piggott School (The)	Wokingham	Voluntary-Aided	2001	South-east

Social Exclusion (Young People)

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made on implementing the recommendations of the social exclusion report on young people. [9300]

Mr. Denham: The recommendations of the Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team (12) report on Young People centred around four themes; improving the way Government develop and implement policy and services for children and young people; a new focus on preventive services; improving individual services for children and young people; and designing policies around their needs, especially through involving children and young people in thinking about policies and services. Substantial progress has been made in all these areas.

To improve the way the Government develop policy the Prime Minister has established a new cabinet committee on children and young people's services, created the interdepartmental ministerial post of Minister for Young People and established the interdepartmental Children and Young People's Unit to be responsible for this work.

A new focus on preventive services and action to address the social exclusion of children and young people has been provided by the new Children's Fund. The Fund is worth £450 million over 2001–02 to 2003–04, of which £380 million is devoted to the development of preventive services by partnerships throughout England and £70 million is devoted to the Children's Fund Local Network making grants to voluntary organisations working on projects to tackle child poverty.

Improving individual services for children and young people was a key theme of the Spending Review 2000, in particular through the introduction of the Connexions service for 13–19 year olds. The first Connexions Partnerships began to deliver services from April this year. £420 million is being invested in Connexions in 2002–03, rising to £455 million in 2003–04. To ensure that national health service provision is designed around children we have announced the establishment of a new NHS National Service Framework. Targeted programmes to support children and young people's individual education needs were set out in the White Paper, "Schools—achieving success" (Cmd 5230). This progress will be further promoted through the cross-cutting review on children at risk announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, in response to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli, Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 38W.

In "Tomorrow's Future: Building a Strategy for Children and Young People", published on 22 March, the Government set out their commitment to developing an overarching strategy for Children and Young People to ensure that we designed policies around the needs and priorities of young people, including the encouragement of new approaches in Government to ensure effective involvement and participation of children. In the near future, I will be publishing a consultation document on the Government's new strategy for Children and Young People.

School Organisation Committees

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact her proposal to extend the power of the learning and skills councils to put forward reorganisation proposals for 16 to 19 education provision will have on the role of local school organisation committees. [11534]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The proposal will enable learning and skills councils (LSCs) to take the lead in developing and implementing strategic plans for local 16–19 provision across the full range of 16–19 providers. School Organisation Committees (SOCs) will have the right to comment on LSC proposals which affect their area. The range and type of proposals that a School Organisation Committee may itself consider in relation to school organisation will be unaffected. Nor does the proposal affect the range of decisions that a SOC may make, except where a proposal it is considering clashes with one which the LSC has submitted to the Secretary of State, in which case consideration by the SOC would be delayed until a decision is made on the LSC proposal.

Cost of Living (Students)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made on the cost of living for students in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [11126]

Margaret Hodge: The most recent assessment made by my Department was in the Student Income and Expenditure Survey 1998–99, published in December 2000, which was the fourth survey since the series began in 1988–89. This showed that average spending on essential items such as food and accommodation had not risen in real terms since 1995–96 but average spending on clothes and discretionary items such as entertainment had gone up sharply. Student income from all sources had risen since 1995–96 by 12 per cent. in real terms, with greater commercial borrowings, earnings from employment and withdrawal from savings. Since 1998–99 the value of the student loan has continued to be increased annually in line with inflation.

Higher Education

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her targets are for participation in *(a)* higher education and *(b)* first degree courses for each year to 2010. [11033]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* We have announced our plans up to 2003–04. We will fund 1,087,000 students (full-time equivalent) in 2001–02; 1,101,000 in 2003–04; and subject to any changes flowing from the current Spending Review, 1,115,000 in 2003–04. As part of the Spending Review we will be looking at our plans up to 2005–06 and beyond.

Sure Start (Northamptonshire)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much Sure Start money has been allocated to the Northampton, South constituency. [11289]

Jacqui Smith: Northampton was invited to take part in the third wave of Sure Start, and local stakeholders were invited to choose the programme's catchment area. They decided to situate the programme in Spencer, Kings Heath and St. James, which are outside of the Northampton, South constituency. Northamptonshire has also been invited to develop a smaller scale Sure Start programme as part of the £22 million wave of programmes announced in July 2001, aimed at rural areas and small pockets of deprivation. Local stakeholders also decided to locate this programme outside of the Northampton, South constituency.

The Government are committed to establishing 500 Sure Start programmes by March 2004. So far, 437 have been announced over five waves and a sixth wave will be announced next year. The next 63 programme areas are not yet decided, but the districts will be identified using similar criteria to those used previously, which is on the basis of level of need and deprivation.

Special Measures (Schools)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools were put under special measures in each of the past five years; how many were put under special measures for longer than two years; what additional resources are allocated to such schools; and what plans she has for the direct funding of them. [10496]

Mr. Timms: The number of schools judged by Ofsted to require "special measures" in each of the last five years is as follows:

Academic year	*Number*
1996–97	326
1997–98	515
1998–99	442
1999–2000	396
2000–01	320

The Government are committed to ensuring that the number of schools subject to special measures continues to decline year-on-year.

Over the last five years, a total of 180 schools have been in special measures for more than two years, of which 135 subsequently improved and were taken out of special measures and 16 have now closed. The Government's policy is now that all schools in special measures should be turned round within two years or closed. The recent White Paper "Schools: Achieving Success" proposes further options to support more rapid improvement when schools fail.

This year, local education authorities in England have been allocated £70,000 in school improvement grant for each secondary school in special measures and £25,000 for each equivalent primary school.

The Government have no plans to introduce direct funding of schools in special measures.

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much of the expenditure by her Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation; which expenditure programmes are allocated with respect to this index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if she will make a statement. [8932]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* Department for Education and Skills expenditure is allocated according to a variety of methods. Expenditure on the following programmes, none of which existed prior to 1998–99, which is allocated with reference to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation, is shown in the table.

The vast majority of programmes targeted at schools serving deprived areas make use of recent data regarding numbers of children in receipt of free school meals. This is because these data are up to date and are at school-level. Figures for these programmes, other programmes allocated using different measures, and any relevant programmes that finished before the current financial year, have not been included in the table, because this information could have been obtained only at disproportionate cost.

£ million

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Nursery Education Grant	—	40	100	200	238
Neighbourhood Support Fund	—	—	60	60	60
Education Maintenance Allowances[1]	—	11	78	159	192
Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative[2]	—	—	—	46	74
Learning and Skills Council/Further Education—Widening Participation Initiative [3,4]	22	52	66	94	n/a
Sure Start[5]	—	7	58	184	449

[1] The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) pilot areas were selected using a number of indicators, one of which was the Index of Local Deprivation (1998). EMA pilots began in 15 areas in September 1999 and were expanded to a further 41 areas in September 2000.

[2] Funding allocated at the Spending Review 2000. Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative funding has been allocated using the 20 per cent. extent measure from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2000). It identifies the number of wards within each LEA that fall within the 20 per cent. most disadvantaged in the country. Local education authorities received an allocation of funding according to the number of wards within their area that fall within the 20 per cent., weighted with the population of 0 to four-year-olds.

[3] From 1998–99, Further Education institutions could claim additional funding for students resident in deprived areas. This funding was extended in 1999–2000 to include other types of students.

[4] Widening Participation Initiative allocations for 2002–03 have not yet been finalised.

[5] The Sure Start programme is a cross-departmental programme but is also within the Department for Education and Skills' Departmental Expenditure Limit.

Sixth Forms

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes have been made to the funding of individual sixth forms by the Learning and Skills Council, *(a)* excluding pure indexation and *(b)* in absolute terms. [11130]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Learning and Skills Council will begin funding local education authorities for their school sixth-form provision from April 2002. Schools have been given a guarantee that their funding will not fall in real terms provided their pupil numbers have not fallen.

Departmental Properties

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate the total annual running costs for buildings used, owned or rented by her Department for each nation and region of the UK, and estimate the average cost per square metre for properties used by her Department as a whole, and by region and nation of the UK. [6861]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The estimated total running costs and average cost per square metre for buildings used, owned and rented by the Department are listed in the table.

£

Region	*Estimated total running costs*	*Estimated cost per sq. metre*
London	20,623,537	513.00
Yorks and Humber	6,926,182	233.00
North West	2,963,460	140.00
North East	1,354,964	192.00
Total	31,868,143	325.00

WALES

Education Policy

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of recent education policy changes in Wales relating to the publication of levels of attainment in schools. [12089]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None. This is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, announced in July that the National Assembly intended to remove the requirement for publication of Secondary School Performance Information in Wales.

This decision does not mean that information on school results will not be available to parents or to the public. Schools will continue to publish their own results in the prospectuses and Governors' Annual Reports.

The 2000–01 results for Wales and for each local education authority in Wales will be released on 12 November.

Subsidies

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total value of *(a)* subsidies and *(b)* other payments made out of public funds was in each of the past five years to (i) farming and (ii) the steel industry in Wales. [12282]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The provision of state aid to the steel industry is governed by the Steel Aid Code of the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty. This Code only permits aid, in limited circumstances, for Research and Development, environmental protection and the permanent closure (not rescue) of a steel company.

Over the past five years no aid has been applied for and none granted under the terms of the Steel Aid Code.

Subsidies from the Common Agricultural Programme, funded by the European Union, total around £200 million per annum. There has been no significant change in the last five years.

Information about other payments is not held centrally in the format requested.

Welsh Assembly

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on devolving further powers to the Welsh Assembly. [12280]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The progress of devolution in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland was discussed at the Cardiff meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee, which was chaired by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 30 October.

While the Welsh devolution settlement is kept under review, the Government have no plans to change the broad mix of Assembly responsibilities.

St. David's Day

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to assist the declaration of St. David's Day as a public holiday in Wales. [12281]

Mr. Paul Murphy: As I told the House on 9 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 358W, the Assembly's request to declare a bank holiday on St. David's Day raises significant issues for business, industry and the public sector. I am continuing to discuss these matters with the First Minister.

Departmental Promotions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [12258]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department runs no publicity campaigns and hence has spent nothing on advertising since its creation in July 1999. Its predecessor Department—the Welsh Office—spent £1,929,000 in 1995–96, £1,795,000 in 1996–97, £2,661,000 in 1997–98, and £2,685,000 in 1998–99. All the individual campaigns are evaluated separately taking into account effectiveness and value for money.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judicial Staff

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many and what percentage of *(a)* High Court judges, *(b)* district judges, *(c)* magistrates, *(d)* recorders and *(e)* adjudicators are (i) black and (ii) Asian. [11392]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The following tables give the recorded breakdown for judicial officers in post at each level of the judiciary requested on the dates indicated.

Table 1: Judiciary as at 1 October 2001

1 October 2001	*Total*	*Black*	*Asian*
High Court Judges	105	0	0
Percentage of total	100	0.0	0.0
Recorders	1,322	17	15
Percentage of total	100	1.3	1.1
District Judges (including Family Division)	407	0	6
Percentage of total	100	0.0	1.5
Deputy District Judges (including Family Division)	802	4	6
Percentage of total	100	0.5	0.8
District Judges (Magistrates' Court)[1]	*95*	*0*	*2*
Percentage of total	*100*	*0.0*	*2.1*
Deputy District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)[1]	*164*	*3*	*4*
Percentage of total	*100*	*1.8*	*2.4*
Immigration Adjudicators (Full time)	72	4	5
Percentage of total	100	5.6	6.9
Immigration Adjudicators (Part time)	398	13	19
Percentage of total	100	3.3	4.8

[1] On 31 August 2000 Stipendiary Magistrates and Acting Stipendiary Magistrates were renamed District Judges (Magistrates' Courts) and Deputy District Judges (Magistrates' Courts) respectively.

Tables 2 and 3: Lay Magistrates as at 1 April 2001

1 April 2001	*Total*	*Black*	*Asian*
Lay Magistrates, England and Wales (excluding Duchy of Lancaster)	24,771	490	598
Percentage of total	100	2.0	2.4

Table 3

1 April 2001	*Total*	*Black*	*Asian*
Lay Magistrates (Duchy of Lancaster)	3,964	52	128
Percentage of total	100	1.3	3.2

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Hackney Council

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with Hackney borough council concerning the administrative failings of the council in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [9127]

Mr. Byers: My Department has been in close contact with members and officials at the London borough of Hackney over the last 12 months and prior to that on occasions.

The council has well chronicled financial and governance problems that have contributed to failures in the delivery of key services. Following an inspection of the whole authority, the Audit Commission advised me in July of this year that the council was not complying with its statutory Best Value responsibilities. It recommended the use of intervention powers under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999.

We consulted the council about the form of the Directions, as required by the statute. Their response was constructive and they have accepted the urgent need to improve their performance.

On 12 October, I gave Hackney five Directions under these provisions. The Directions require the council to produce a strategy for bringing its budget back into balance; and to improve services such as financial management, education, social services, benefit administration and waste management.

The purpose of the Directions is to restore financial accountability and control within the authority, and to protect and improve front-line services. The Directions set a clear timetable for improvements to be made and we expect the council to achieve these with tailored financial and other support. I have placed copies of the Directions in the Library of the House.

Railtrack

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if the proposed cap on the Government loan facility to the company limited by guarantee proposed as a successor to Railtrack will be sufficient to cover Railtrack's published investment programme; [10444]

(2) if he will make a statement on the amount of the cap on expenditure on the loan facility to the company limited by guarantee proposed as a successor to Railtrack. [10446]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 671W.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the minutes of the meeting between executives of Railtrack and his officials on 3 October. [11225]

Mr. Spellar: No.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when Ernst and Young LLP was given a letter of instruction from his Department about the prospective Railway Administration Order concerning Railtrack plc. [11227]

Mr. Spellar: No such letter has been sent.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the supporting evidence in relation to Railtrack's railway administration order required by rule 2.6 of the Railway Administration Order Rules 2001. [11222]

Mr. Spellar: I have placed a copy in the Library of the House.

Airport Car Parks

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what

regulatory approval has been sought by BAA to impose a public transport levy on users of car parks at its airports; [11240]

(2) what regulations govern the car parking charges that BAA impose at their airports; [11242]

(3) what future regulatory approval is required by the BAA to *(a)* vary a public transport levy on users of car parks at their airports and *(b)* ensure the money raised is invested in the most cost-effective way; [11238]

(4) if the imposition of a public transport levy on people using car parks at BAA airports will be part of the regulatory review being undertaken by the CAA; [11228]

(5) what regulatory requirements exist to ensure that there is competition among car park operators at airports owned by BAA; [11241]

(6) what monitoring is conducted by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the CAA to ensure that the revenue from the levy imposed on car park users at south-east airports benefits the users paying the charge. [11239]

Mr. Spellar: Car parking charges at BAA airports are a matter for the BAA and do not require any specific regulatory approval. They are, however, subject to general competition law and are open to investigation by the Office of Fair Trading under the Competition Act 1998. In addition, as part of its periodic review of the BAA London airports, the Competition Commission could investigate whether car parking charges levied by the airports give rise to public interest concerns.

Rail Transport Meetings

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* contracts and *(b)* meetings between Ernst and Young LLP and his Department in relation to rail transport in the last 12 months. [11224]

Mr. Spellar: Ernst and Young were engaged on 24 August to advise on possible options for Railtrack. In the course of that work, there were numerous meetings with the Department.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action his Department took in recognition of Energy Efficiency Week. [11517]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 30 October 2001 *Official Report*, column 592W. Within DTLR we continue to take energy efficiency seriously through implementing our greening operations policy and monitoring and reporting progress against cross-government targets. We raise awareness of energy efficiency, and other greening operations issues, through regular advice and information for our staff. A recent example is the foyer displays of environmental performance at our headquarter buildings in London.

TransPennine Franchise

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the new TransPennine franchise will include investment in new trains. [11553]

Mr. Jamieson: The three short-listed counterparties have been invited to re-submit their proposals for the TransPennine Express franchise. The Strategic Rail Authority anticipates and will encourage investment in new rolling stock as part of these proposals.

Bifuel Vehicles

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reclassify bifuel vehicles representing a manufacturer's standard option, according to their carbon dioxide emissions, for road tax purposes. [11321]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* In the case of new private motor cars registered on or after 1 March this year, vehicles which, in the words of the relevant order are:

"capable of being propelled by

(i) petrol and road fuel gas, or

(ii) electricity and either petrol or diesel",

i.e. so called "bifuelled" cars, are now subject to Vehicle Excise Duty ("road tax") according to their carbon dioxide emissions. All new cars are now subject to VED according to their carbon dioxide emissions and bifuelled cars come into the lowest range of rates—that assigned to "Alternative Fuel Cars".

Vehicle Safety

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in reducing the use of vehicles with non-flexible fronts. [12285]

Mr. Jamieson: The European Commission are proposing to make a negotiated agreement with car manufacturers, which will require new cars to have fronts which are less harmful to pedestrians. This proposal is due to be discussed by Ministers at the Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council on 26 November.

Jo Moore

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what records have been kept of conversations between Ministers and Ms Jo Moore since 11 September; [12237]

(2) what meetings and telephone conversations he has had with Ms Jo Moore since 10 September; [12236]

(3) if he will publish the departmental correspondence, including e-mails, leading to the announcements *(a)* on councillors' allowances and *(b)* on councillors' pensions on 12 September; [12235]

(4) if, before administering a personal reprimand to Ms Jo Moore regarding her e-mail of 11 September, he received other e-mails sent by her after 11 September. [12234]

Mr. Byers: Under paragraph 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the practice to disclose details of internal communication.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who authorised the interview with Sky News given by Ms Jo Moore on 16 October. [12241]

Mr. Byers: The interview was given with my agreement.

Special Advisers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out the process that would be followed in his Department if *(a)* a member of staff other than a special adviser and *(b)* a special adviser applied to leave their job through ill health. [12232]

Mr. Byers: For all staff in DTLR including special advisers, the process for retirement on grounds of ill-health is set out in the DTLR Staff Handbook.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if a personal reprimand from the Secretary of State is a formal part of the disciplinary procedure applying to special advisers in his Department; and if such a reprimand is included on the personnel record of these special advisers. [12231]

Mr. Byers: My personal reprimand was in addition to the formal disciplinary procedure.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes he has made to the selection criteria for special advisers in his Department since 9 October. [12233]

Mr. Byers: None.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Gambia

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the presidential election held in The Gambia on 18 October; and if he will make a statement on relations with The Gambia. [10978]

Mr. Bradshaw: We consider the result of the presidential election of 18 October, in which the incumbent President Jammeh was re-elected with 52.9 per cent. of the vote, to have been a fair reflection of the views of the Gambian people on the day.

The United Kingdom and The Gambia have a long standing relationship and there are close ties between us. While the unwarranted expulsion of the British Deputy High Commissioner in August has caused some tensions, the United Kingdom will continue to work closely with The Gambia to promote democracy, good governance and the rule of law.

UK/China Human Rights Dialogue

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will make a statement regarding the objectives and criteria for evaluation of the UK/China human rights dialogue. [10763]

Mr. MacShane: The Government have identified a set of working objectives towards which we expect the dialogue process to work. They cover issues relating to the rule of law; engagement with UN mechanisms, political and religious rights; economic and social rights and the situation in Tibet.

These objectives, and the achievements of the dialogue process over the past year, are set out in the FCO annual human rights report.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues the Government intends to raise with China regarding Tibet in the UK/China dialogue on 19 November. [10762]

Mr. MacShane: The 7th round of the UK/China human rights dialogue will take place in London from 19–21 November.

The agenda for the dialogue has not yet been finalised. But we will express our concern over human rights conditions in Tibet and will continue to urge the chinese to open a dialogue with the Dalai Lama.

I raised our concerns about human rights and the rule of law in China in discussions with the Chinese Government in Beijing in September and in London last month.

Uranium

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been offered to the Republic of Georgia to further the inquiries into the enriched uranium seized by anti-terrorist police in Batumi, Georgia on 18 July; and if he will make a statement on the destination of the uranium. [11423]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Republic of Georgia has not requested any assistance from either the UK directly, or the International Atomic Energy Authority with respect to the seizure of 1.7 kg of low enriched uranium in Batumi in July. It is not usual for the UK to become involved in these matters unless there is such a request. There is no information available on the intended destination of the low enriched uranium.

Immigration (Ministerial Intervention)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions Ministers have intervened in immigration cases to overturn a decision by an ECO; and at which posts. [11429]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer to the answer my hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) on 22 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 316–17W. Since then seven decisions to refuse entry clearance to the United Kingdom have been overturned following the exercise of ministerial discretion. The posts concerned were: Bombay (2), New Delhi (2), Islamabad (2) and Casablanca (1).

Zimbabwe

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens were living in Zimbabwe on 1 September. [12081]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 1 September 2001 there were 25,223 British nationals registered with the British High Commission in Harare.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make provision for Zimbabwean farmers who have had their land removed from them, and have been forced to leave their home country, to receive compensation for their loss. [12095]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government of Zimbabwe are responsible for land seizures in that country. They remain responsible for meeting their legal obligations in implementing land reform. In Abuja, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reaffirmed our willingness to make a significant contribution to a fair, effective and sustainable land reform programme on the basis of the UNDP proposals of December 2000. He made it clear that our support for land reform depended on action by the Government of Zimbabwe to implement the commitments it made in Abuja. We have so far seen little evidence of such implementation. We understand that UNDP have an assessment mission in Zimbabwe at the moment looking at the prospects for a credible land reform programme. We welcome this. But in the circumstances, it is too soon to speculate on a possible UK financial contribution and the possible arrangements for payment.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Savidge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent changes have been made to export controls in place against the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. [12795]

Mr. MacShane: The EU arms embargo was lifted at the General Affairs Council on 8 October 2001 due to the improved security situation and on-going process of internal reforms undertaken by the FRY authorities. In light of this, the Government have decided to lift the controls imposed in 1996 on exports to the FRY of:

All wheel drive vehicles capable of off-road use that have a ground clearance of greater than 175 millimetres;

Heavy duty recovery vehicles capable of towing a suspended load of more than six tonnes or winching a load of more than 10 tonnes;

Drop-sided trucks that have a load-carrying capacity of more than five tonnes.

An amendment to the Export Control (Goods) Order will be made in due course.

The Government have also decided to lift the policy, as announced to Parliament on 14 March 2000, of presumption of refusal for the export of dual use goods to the FRY which could benefit the armed forces, internal security forces or similar entities of the authorities in Belgrade. Again, with the change to a democratic government in the FRY and on-going improvements in the security structures there, we have no reason to continue doing so. This will bring our export control policy on the FRY in line with that on most other countries. All future applications for dual use goods to the FRY will be judged on a case-by-case basis, on their merits, against the consolidated EU and national export licensing criteria.

Afghanistan

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what access to consular services is available to British citizens serving with the Taliban. [11973]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British Government have no consular representation in Afghanistan, and advise strongly against all travel to Afghanistan.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Flooding

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the recent flooding in mid and north Essex, indicating what help the Government propose to make available to help prevent future flooding in the area. [11770]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The Government sympathises with all those who were affected by the recent flooding in Essex. This followed exceptional rainfall with up to 109 mm of rain falling in a 12 hour period on 21 October. While we can and do take action to reduce the risk of flooding it is not possible to remove that risk altogether when faced with extreme events of this type.

The Government have substantially increased funding for flood and coastal defence in successive spending reviews and total annual expenditure in England now exceeds £400 million. DEFRA funding alone is set to increase from £66 million last year to £114 million in 2003–04.

Flood defences are designed, built and operated by the Environment Agency and other operating authorities. The Agency will be undertaking a study of the flooding from the River Blackwater in the Bocking area of Braintree. Within Essex the Agency is currently undertaking a flood defence scheme at Chadwell Cross in Tilbury and works on two sections of the River Crouch near Battlebridge and at Hullbridge. Works are also planned next year on the River Roach.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on *(a)* flood defence in England and Wales and *(b)* how managed retreat will affect Somerset. [10767]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA has policy responsibility for flood and coastal defences in England, and the National Assembly for Wales has similar responsibilities for Wales. I plan to reduce the risk of flooding by investing in effective flood warning arrangements and in flood defences in the highest risk areas. Funding for the Department's programme is increasing from £66 million in 2000–01 to £114 million in 2003–04.

This Department provides funding to the Environment Agency (EA), local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards for capital flood and coastal defence works that meet certain criteria. DEFRA encourages authorities to take a strategic approach to flood and coastal defences and to draw up shoreline management plans. These consider natural processes; planning pressures; current and future land use; flood and coastal defence needs; and

environmental needs. The Shoreline Management Plan covering Bridgwater Bay to Bideford Bay was produced for a consortium of the EA and local authorities, each of whom have coastal defence responsibilities. It considered a range of options and identified one for each management unit along the coast from Brean Down, Somerset to Hartland Point in Devon. I understand that managed retreat was the preferred strategic option for the shingle ridge at Porlock. For the lengths between Stolford and Fanning Island, and along the west bank of the River Parrett to Combwich, an observe and monitor strategy was proposed, while consideration is given to managed retreat on undeveloped frontages to promote saltmarsh growth for nature conservation and coastal defence purposes.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total expenditure in England and Wales on flood defence has been for each financial year since 1990; and what the projected expenditure on flood defence is for each of the next five years. [11006]

Mr. Morley: Flood defence is a fully devolved function with this Department having policy responsibility for England only. The following table therefore shows expenditure by the Environment Agency in England and by English local authorities. Figures for 1990–91 and 1991–02 are not available separately for English local authorities.

Flood defence is also provided by internal drainage boards but comprehensive information on their expenditure over this period is not available. However, in 1999–2000 expenditure by boards in England was £40.7 million and this is likely to have grown by modest annual amounts over the period.

£ million

Year	*Environment Agency (National Rivers Authority until 1995–96)*	*Local authorities*	*Total*
1990–91	194.3	n/a	n/a
1991–92	217.3	n/a	n/a
1992–93	218.3	12.3	230.6
1993–94	221.4	12.1	233.5
1994–95	232.7	11.4	244.1
1995–96	245.7	13.1	258.8
1996–97	254.2	12.2	266.4
1997–98	255.2	13.0	268.2
1998–99	247.2	15.0	262.2
1999–2000	260.3	15.4	275.7
2000–01	270.4	'20.1	'290.5

' Provisional

Expenditure beyond this period depends on a number of factors including the balance between expenditure on flood defence and coast protection and the availability of funding from sources other than Government. However, the total Government provision for flood defence and coast protection in England is set to increase by some £45 million in 2001–02, a further £16 million in 2002–03 and a further £20 million in 2003–04. Flood defence funding beyond that period will be determined by the Spending Review due to be conducted in 2002.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact the catchment abstraction management strategy proposed by the Environment Agency will have on seasonal flooding. [10734]

Mr. Morley: Catchment abstraction management strategies are the vehicle for ensuring long-term sustainable water abstraction management. As such they will have no direct impact on seasonal flooding.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the implications for council tax payers in north Yorkshire of proposed Government expenditure in 2000–03 on flood defences. [11185]

Mr. Morley: No such assessment is possible at this stage. The Environment Agency is currently considering the proposed flood defence budget for the Yorkshire region for 2002–03 and this will inform consideration of the levy which the Yorkshire Regional Flood Defence Committee will set in January 2002. It will then be for the local authorities to consider how the levy should be funded taking account of the provision made available to them through revenue support grant.

The Yorkshire Regional Flood Defence Committee will also take account of my recent announcement that we will increase DEFRA grant to support capital works undertaken in their area in 2002–03. The figures stands to rise from some £8 million this year to nearly £13 million for 2002–03 and reflects in large measure the need for new capital works in areas affected by the autumn 2000 floods as well as the Humber Estuary.

It is also the case that Yorkshire has been a major beneficiary of DEFRA's special funding of emergency costs and repairs from last year's severe flooding and of design and feasibility costs for accelerated river defences and associated strategies, receiving some £8.5 million.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the economic and flood defence benefits of sustainable urban drainage. [11009]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

My Department contributed to the research carried out for the Construction Industry Research and Information Association that produced design manuals for England and Wales and for Scotland and Northern Ireland (both published in 2000) and a best practice manual on sustainable urban drainage systems (published in 2001). These were based on demonstration projects that clearly showed both the benefits in flood defence, water quality and local amenity.

No formal assessment of the benefits has been made on a national scale since these depend on the local intensity of rainfall for which individual sustainable drainage systems are designed. Such systems can assist in reducing the impact of intense rainfall and they can be as economical as conventional drainage systems. The use of sustainable urban drainage systems is generally encouraged in the new Planning Policy Guidance Note 25 issued in July 2001 but decisions by developers to install them must be based on site-specific assessments of the loads they would need to deal with.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many DEFRA personnel *(a)* are working for all or most of the time in south Cumbria and *(b)* are based there. [7527]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* There are currently 64 DEFRA staff based at the south Cumbria forward station at Milnthorpe consisting of TVIs, lay blood samplers and administrative staff. In addition, there are 12 field staff assigned to a forward station in Appleby. Both the Milnthorpe and Appleby staff work exclusively in south Cumbria.

Other veterinary surgeons and specialist staff are based at Carlisle. They carry out the risk assessments relating to animal movements within the Restricted Infected Area or within 3 km Protection Zones. They are also assigned to other tasks on a daily basis depending on where, in the county, there is a demand for specialist input.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will review the case for sending only locally based DEFRA personnel and vehicles to farms in south Cumbria; and if she will make a statement. [7526]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* Staff involved in the collection of samples that are needed to facilitate movements of sheep in south Cumbria are based at a work allocation station in Milnthorpe. Other specialist work, such as the risk assessment of animal movements, within the Penrith Restricted Infected Area, is carried out by specialists based in Carlisle.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many contractors have waited in excess of three months for payments due to them for work carried out on foot and mouth eradication. [9193]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Between 1 April and 30 September 2001, the Department made payments to 7,257 suppliers of foot and mouth related services, in respect of 91,418 invoices. During this time, 214 suppliers had to wait more than 90 days in respect of 916 invoices. 82 per cent. of all payments were made within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will grant greater autonomy to DEFRA officials dealing with foot and mouth outbreaks and livestock movements in south Cumbria in order to speed up decisions; and if she will make a statement. [7518]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* National and European Community law requires that certain decisions relating to foot and mouth disease must be taken by the Chief Veterinary Officer and, in light of this accountability, it is not possible to delegate all the decision making entirely to the regions.

However, when implementing national and EU policy, full account is taken, where possible, of local circumstances.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs since 7 June how many holdings in Cumbria have had animals slaughtered because of foot and mouth disease, broken down by *(a)* IPs, (c) DCs and (c) other. [5242]

Mr. Morley: Between 7 June and 31 October, animals were slaughtered on 546 premises in Cumbria as a result of the foot and mouth disease outbreak. This figure may be broken down as follows.

	Number
Infected Premises (IPs)	164
Dangerous Contacts (DCs)	374
Other (Slaughter on suspicion)	8
Total	546

Source:
These data were extracted from DEFRA's disease control system (DCS) database on 31 October 2001 at 15.45. The figures may be subject to some change as quality assurance of data on DCS is carried out

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department is putting in place to promote energy efficiency. [9561]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The Department is taking the lead on a range of measures to promote energy efficiency including:

We are consulting on the Energy Efficiency Commitment for 2002–05, which will place an obligation on gas and electricity suppliers to make energy efficiency improvements, through measures provided to their domestic consumers.

The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, a programme costing over £150 million in 2001–02, is targeted on fuel poverty and is designed to improve the energy efficiency of 800,000 homes by 2004.

The Department provides the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust with over £65 million of funding in 2001–02, to support their work of promoting energy efficiency in the domestic and non-domestic sectors of the economy.

The Market Transformation Programme, worth £545,000 in 2001–02, encourages the deployment and take-up of energy efficient domestic appliances.

Common Agricultural Policy

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the joint public statement made on 30 July by the French and German Agriculture Ministers on the future direction of the Common Agricultural Policy; and if she will place an English version of the statement in the Library. [10772]

Mr. Morley: On 30 July, French and German media published an article reporting an agreed statement by the French and German Governments on the Common Agricultural Policy. This is an interesting document which recognises the need for further reform and in many ways covers similar themes to those put forward by the United Kingdom Government. We continue to work closely with the French and German Governments and with other member states in developing ideas for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

I have placed an English translation of this statement in the Library of the House. However as the French and German language texts differ it is not possible to produce a single simple translation.

European Water Framework Directive

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the implications in England and Wales of the European Water Framework Directive; and if she will make a statement. [11008]

Mr. Meacher: The implications of the directive are set out in the regulatory impact assessment (RIA) included in the "First Consultation Paper on the Implementation of the EC Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)", which was published jointly by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the National Assembly for Wales in March this year. A copy of the consultation paper is in the House of Commons Library.

Dogs (Byelaw Applications)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to allow local authorities to determine byelaws banning dogs from public places without reference to her Department; and if she will make a statement. [9669]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities have to apply to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who determines byelaws on the grounds of whether they are reasonable, both to members of the public and to dog owners. A byelaw is a local law, which is made by a statutory body, such as a local authority, under an enabling power established by Act of Parliament. Byelaws create criminal offences and cannot come into effect unless they have been confirmed by a Secretary of State. There are no plans to change this policy.

Biomass Energy

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance and opportunities exist for farmers to diversify their land use towards growing crops for the production of energy from biomass. [9252]

Mr. Meacher: The Energy Crops Scheme, part of the England Rural Development Programme, makes £29 million of assistance available to farmers over seven years. This includes establishment grants for short rotation coppice and miscanthus and up to 50 per cent. of set-up costs for short rotation coppice growers forming producer groups. In addition, farmers may benefit from planting grants under the Woodland Grant Scheme and the Farm Woodlands Premium Scheme, and woodland maintenance grants under the WGS. We are working closely with Government Departments and other bodies to develop market opportunities for biomass in power generation, combined heat and power and heat applications.

London Waste

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to monitor the safety of waste disposed of by London Waste; and if she will make a statement on the toxicity of this waste. [9248]

Mr. Meacher: London Waste produces two ash streams from the Edmonton incinerator: bottom ash which is not classified as hazardous and air pollution control (APC) residues which are classified as hazardous and are disposed of separately and safely to appropriately licensed landfill sites.

The Environment Agency is responsible for the regulation of waste disposal operations, including those undertaken by London Waste, in order to safeguard human health and protect the environment.

As a result of recent concerns about the use of ash from the Edmonton incinerator, the Environment Agency is carrying out a thorough investigation into the destinations of ash from all municipal waste incinerators, the environmental implications of its use and what steps may be needed in the light of these findings. The results of the Environment Agency's investigations will be made public.

Incinerators

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce tougher controls on emissions from existing municipal incinerators; and if she will make a statement. [7751]

Mr. Meacher: The recently adopted Waste Incineration Directive 2000/76/EC sets minimum standards for a variety of plants that burn waste, including municipal solid waste incinerators (MSWIs). The UK Government are committed to transposing the EU Waste Incineration Directive, into UK law by 28 December 2002. Its provisions will apply to all new incinerators by this date, and to existing plant by 28 December 2005. This directive tightens dioxin limits to 0.1 ng/m^3 (0.1 billionth of a gram). This standard will be the maximum amount of dioxin permitted to be emitted from MSWIs.

There is no dioxin limit in the Municipal Waste Incineration Directives (89/429/EEC and 89/369/EEC). In 1996 the Environment Agency chose to implement a 1.0 ng/m^3 emission limit as achievable using the best available technique not entailing excessive cost (BATNEEC). In 2000 the Agency took a similar decision on BATNEEC and MSWIs were required to either (i) reduce dioxin limits to 0.1 ng/m^3 (that is 10 times lower than the earlier limit); or (ii) on plant which could immediately achieve that level, to report on how they would achieve it. As a result, we estimate that dioxin emissions from incinerators in the UK have fallen several hundred-fold.

The Environment Agency intends to review the performance of existing MSWIs before the Waste Incineration Directive applies.

Scrapie

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate her Department has made of the total number of sheep in the national flock possessing the genotype susceptible to scrapie. [11213]

Mr. Morley: There is currently only very limited information available on the distribution in the national flock of the 15 known genotypes that determine levels of susceptibility and resistance to scrapie. It is not therefore possible at this stage to produce reliable estimates. However, the limited data available suggest that about one

quarter of the breeding ram population may be resistant to scrapie, and about two thirds of the slaughter population may be at least semi-resistant. There will be significant variation between different sheep breeds. It should be possible to produce more reliable estimates as an increasing number of breeding sheep come to be genotyped under the national scrapie plan.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department is implementing to eradicate scrapie from the national sheep flock; and if she will list the number of livestock culled by county in each year since May 1997. [11212]

Mr. Morley: The Government launched a national scrapie plan for Great Britain in July. This will breed resistance to scrapie into the national flock.

The plan has initially been targeted at producers of purebred, pedigree breeding sheep registered with a recognised breed society. We are currently consulting about rapid extension of the plan to the remainder of the pure breeding flock, including special action for scrapie-infected flocks. We are considering other ways of speeding up implementation of the plan and on 31 October we published a Bill that would allow the Government to take powers to remove from the breeding flock, on a compulsory basis, sheep with genotypes that make them susceptible to scrapie.

We are also consulting on ways to encourage the reporting of scrapie when it occurs, and next year we will be undertaking a survey to gain more knowledge of the incidence of scrapie, using rapid testing methods.

The figures for the number of confirmed scrapie cases by county in each year since May 1997 are presented in the table provided.

Cases of scrapie confirmed in sheep, by county, since May 1997

	1997[1]	1998	1999	2000	2001[2]
England					
Derbyshire	0	4	13	9	0
Leicestershire and Rutland	3	7	17	5	1
Lincolnshire excluding North	2	1	1	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	5	4	1	2
Nottinghamshire	1	2	6	3	0
Cambridgeshire	0	1	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0	1	0	0
Essex	0	2	3	1	3
Norfolk	7	8	16	5	0
Suffolk	5	13	6	5	1
Cleveland and Darlington	3	23	22	8	0
Durham	3	2	1	1	1
Northumberland	2	2	5	9	3
Cheshire	0	0	0	35	9
Cumbria	26	39	62	40	6
Lancashire	4	13	7	3	1
Buckinghamshire	9	7	6	9	7
East Sussex	0	3	4	0	1
Hampshire	7	10	0	1	0
Isle of Wight	8	5	1	2	2
Kent	4	3	2	3	0
Oxfordshire	58	57	30	17	8
Surrey	0	1	4	3	0
West Sussex	2	4	4	2	1
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2	6	13	23	16
Devon	6	18	71	67	37
Dorset	1	10	4	1	1
Gloucestershire excluding South	0	3	3	3	0
Northern Somerset and South Gloucestershire	1	0	0	2	0
Somerset excluding North	2	23	8	12	1
Wiltshire	7	8	13	17	3
Herefordshire	3	1	0	0	2
Shropshire	2	7	7	8	1
Staffordshire	0	1	1	0	0
Warwickshire	2	10	6	15	4
Worcestershire	0	1	0	1	0
East Riding and Northern Lincoln	0	2	1	1	0
North Yorkshire	15	20	36	46	12
South Yorkshire	0	3	1	0	0
West Yorkshire	1	1	1	0	0
	186	326	380	358	123
Scotland					
Clyde Valley	1	0	0	0	0
Dunfries and Galloway	2	8	0	2	0
Fife	0	0	0	1	0
Highland	0	2	1	6	6
Lothian	0	0	1	1	0
North East Scotland	1	1	3	5	2
Orkney	0	3	7	2	3
Scottish borders	0	0	7	4	0
Shetland	60	90	91	64	37
Tayside	1	1	2	0	0
	65	105	112	85	46
Wales					
Carmarthenshire	20	28	29	40	9
Ceredigion	2	0	1	3	0
North East Wales	11	16	33	51	11
North West Wales	1	6	26	13	2
Pembrokeshire	0	0	0	0	2
Powys	4	17	16	17	0
South Wales	3	1	0	1	0
	41	68	105	125	24
Total	292	499	597	568	195

[1] May to December
[2] January to September
Notes:
Confirmation is by pathological tests (normally at least two types)
Figures for 2001 exclude pending cases awaiting a test result, and will be lower for the same period in the previous year because of the foot and mouth outbreak

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to establish a scheme for the valuation of sheep flocks and the payment of compensation for livestock to be destroyed under her proposed special measures for the elimination of scrapie from the national flock. [11214]

Mr. Morley: The Animal Health Bill was published on 31 October and includes an enabling power allowing Ministers to pay compensation for losses or costs incurred as a result of the provisions relating to scrapie in the Bill. If the scrapie provisions were activated, a decision would need to be taken at the time on whether compensation was appropriate. If a decision to pay compensation were taken, the details would be set out in supplementary regulations.

Beef

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the potential for recovery in the beef export market; and if she will calculate the percentage take-up of British beef exports in individual *(a)* European Union countries and *(b)* countries outside the European Union. [11418]

Mr. Morley: It is not possible to make a realistic assessment because recovery of our beef exports to EU and other countries depends on many factors including the number of plants which seek approval to export under

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the Date-Based Export Scheme (DBES); the conditions of DBES; the results of our testing programme, access to markets in France and other countries which currently ban British beef; consumer confidence in target countries and currency values. The Government will continue to work closely with the industry and others to facilitate exports as far as possible.

British Waterways

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what powers she has to remove the *(a)* Chief Executive and *(b)* Chair of the British Waterways Board from their positions. [11458]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The Chairman of the British Waterways Board is appointed by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, after consultation with Scottish Ministers under section 1 of the Transport Act 1962. The appointment is subject to standard terms and conditions allowing the Secretary of State by written notice to terminate the appointment. The Chief Executive of the British Waterways Board is appointed by, and is responsible to, the Board.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government will draw down the latest available amount of EU agrimonetary compensation for UK arable farmers. [12084]

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will claim the next available tranche of agrimonetary compensation by 31 October; and if she will make a statement. [11300]

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to apply by the end of October for agrimonetary compensation from the European Union to aid arable farmers. [10007]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if it is the policy of her Department to claim the outstanding arable agrimonetary compensation from the European Commission; whether it is her policy to submit a formal request for such moneys before the end of October; and if she will make a statement. [9731]

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will apply for agrimonetary compensation for arable farmers before 31 October; and if she will make a statement; [9842]

(2) what representations she has made to the EU to access agrimonetary compensation for arable farmers; when she made them; and with what results. [9844]

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government have taken to claim the outstanding arable agrimonetary compensation packages for which farmers are eligible before the closing date. [9798]

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what considerations the Government have given to claiming the money available to UK cereal farmers from the EU agrimonetary compensation scheme by 31 October; and if she will make a statement. [7705]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 738W.

Combined Heat and Power

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much CHP capacity has been put out of service since the new electricity trading arrangements commenced. [5768]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1250W.

Pesticides Safety Directorate

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the outcome of the Quinquennial and Better Quality Services Reviews of the Pesticides Safety Directorate. [12796]

Margaret Beckett: After having undertaken both a consultation exercise and detailed reviews of the functions, form and performance of the Pesticides Safety Directorate over the past five years, I have concluded that they should remain an executive agency for another term. The reviews established that the retention of agency status would be the most appropriate means of delivering high quality and cost effective services over the next five years.

The Better Quality Services stage of the reviews has specifically identified measures to ensure continuous improvement in PSD's quality of service and cost effectiveness.

New Forest

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has to introduce legislation requiring the proposed New Forest National Park Authority to use its powers in respect of the commonable lands of the New Forest in consultation with the Verderers of the New Forest; and if she will make a statement. [11562]

Alun Michael: It is too early to make any statement about Government proposals to introduce legislation for a proposed New Forest National Park Authority. We are awaiting the Countryside Agency's recommendation on the designation of a New Forest National Park and expect this early in 2002. Should the Agency submit a designation order to my right hon. Friend (the Secretary of State) for confirmation, it will be accompanied by their advice on administrative arrangements.

The Agency has recently completed a three-month public consultation period on the administrative arrangements for a proposed New Forest National Park, including the need for special guidance for a National Park Authority, the membership of the Authority and its relationship with the Verderers. They are currently considering the responses received.

Urban Bus Challenge

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce the results of the Urban Bus Challenge Competition. [12794]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

We have today announced the 32 projects that have been successful in this year's competition, totalling £15.3 million. The projects are as listed.

Authority	*Title of bid approved*	*Total cost (£)*
Blackpool	Lifestyle line. Bus service for residents of two deprived wards to areas of employment and the hospital	809,225
Bristol	Lawrence Weston Transport Group. Bus service for residents of deprived ward to shops, clinics and other local facilities	63,000
Essex	Harlow Community Transport dial a ride scheme. Reduce social exclusion in deprived area	146,000
Greater Manchester	Wythenshawe demand response service. Improved access to health and employment facilities	682,000
	Call centre for demand responsive bus services. Co-ordination of demand response services	70,000
	Oldham. Bus service access between residential area and employment area	345,500
Halton	Daresbury Park. Provide bus service to areas of employment	122,850
	Accessible Transport. Provide mini bus to employment and training opportunities for disabled people	70,675
Hampshire	Leigh Park Links. Demand response service providing access to areas of employment, leisure and healthcare opportunities, particularly for unemployed young people	460,700
Hartlepool	Improved transport and infrastructure services. Extended bus service to industrial estate and provision of evening and Sunday service	185,650
Lancashire	Skelmersdale demand responsive transit project. Provide access links to areas of employment	619,062
Leicester	Community service for Braunstone. Local estate access to employment an shopping facilities	1,130,000
Merseyside	Atlantic Gateway demand response service. Provide deprived wards access to areas of employment	624,000
	Huyton/Prescot demand response service. Provide access to areas of employment	480,000
	Kirby/Gillmoss demand response service. Provide access to areas of employment	624,000
Norfolk	Lowestoft corridor bus. Provide improved bus and evening taxi-bus service to areas of employment	926,562
Northumberland	Connecting Blyth. Improved linkage of service to provide more direct links to employment opportunities	1,074,000
Nottinghamshire	Mansfield. Provide deprived wards access to employment opportunities	373,495
Plymouth	East/West corridor link. Provide connecting services to deprived residential areas at times required by shift patterns	190,000
South Yorkshire	Parson Cross. Community bus service to stimulate community activity and new interchange facility	335,000
Stoke on Trent	Health. Provide demand response service connecting three wards within Stoke to new healthcentre	733,500
Telford and Wrekin	Integrated Taxi Network. Link residential area with centres of employment and bus interchange sites through provision of shuttle bus to three industrial estates	615,013
Thurrock	Demand response service. Provide service from deprived urban community to integrate with existing community local bus service	263,307
Transport for London	Hammersmith. Provide improved access for staff, patients and visitors to Hammersmith, Queens Charlotte and Charing Cross Hospitals	425,000
Tyne and Wear	West Newcastle. Provide better access to employment opportunities to deprived areas of West Newcastle	431,214
Warwickshire	Camp Hill. Address current shortfall in transport provision to employment opportunities	561,088
West Midlands	Birchfield. Provision of community bus to provide regular day, evening and Sunday service	296,236
	Community transport. Provide prison visitors easier access to prisons in West Midlands	321,750
	Dudley. Provision of school mini bus service for children and particularly disabled children who use taxis	232,104
West Yorkshire	East Leeds. Provide deprived wards access to employment opportunities	633,000
	Leeds Buddying scheme. Provide personal assistance, support and training to elderly and disabled people to enable them to use public transport	240,000
Worcestershire	Provide a new high frequency cross-city bus service and demand responsive orbital minibus to assist four deprived wards	1,224,000
Total		15,307,931

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 373**

SESSION 2001–2002

22nd October—2nd November 2001

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A350
Accidents 386–7w

A449
475w

Abandoned vehicles
(22.10.01) 119–26, 198w, 679–80w, 875–6

Abbott, Ms Diane
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 291
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 159, 169–70, 183, 191, 194
Refugees (29.10.01) 637
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1025, 1079–81

Accident and emergency departments
Leicester Royal Infirmary 306–7w
Solihull Hospital 151–2w

Accidents
A350 386–7w
Fireworks 316w
Insurance 201–2w
Railways 398w
Roads 678w

Adjournment debates
Rulings and statements (31.10.01) 305–7wh

Administration of estates
887w

Administration of justice
864w

Adoption and Children Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R, Programme motion and Money res* (29.10.01) 649–726

Advanced skills teachers
472–3w

Advantage West Midlands
Worcestershire 9w

Advisers Discretionary Fund
845w

Advisory bodies
Agriculture 537w

Advisory Centre for Education
329w

Advisory services
New deal for young people 845–6w
New deal schemes 845–6w
Taxation 207w

Advocacy
Mental health services 556–8w

AEA Technology
Contracts 791–3w

Aer Lingus
386w

Aerials
Planning permission 138–40, 175–6w

Aerospace industry
Government assistance 988–90
Terrorism 581w

Afghanistan
Armed conflict 14–5w, 114w, 257w, 277–8, 508–10w, 600–1w, 607–8w, 621–4, 662–4w, 667w, 749–52, 767w, 871–2, 875, 876w, 877, 877w, 878, 881w
Chemical and biological warfare 663w
Diplomatic service 910w
Females 270, 601–2w
Foreign relations 601w
International assistance 305w, 579–80w, 686w
Ministerial statements (24.10.01) 283–301

Afghanistan—continued
Overseas aid 304–5w
Politics and government 868w
Refugees 452w, 580w, 608–10w
Television 490w
Uranium 241w, 877w

Africa
600w
Armed conflict 295w
HIV infection 300–1w
Overseas aid 295w
Poverty 266–8

After school clubs
37w

Age addition
State retirement pensions 177w

Agenda 21
170w

Aggregates levy
206w, 259w, 587w, 629w, 782w

Agriculture
see also Farmers
360w
Advisory bodies 537w
Diversification 273–4w
Manpower 275w, 549–50w
Pay 548–9w
Student numbers 594w
Wales 903–4w

AIDS
(30.10.01) 183–203wh
Southern Africa 300w

Ainsworth, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 770, 774, 776, 805, 831–2, 843–7
Questions
Cannabis, Decriminalisation 499–500w
Cannabis, Lambeth 500w
Cannabis, Licensing 858w
Communities against drugs initiative 851–2w
Drug prevention schemes 66w
Drugs, Crime 73–4w
Drugs, Misuse 69w, 287w
Drugs, Young people 336–7w
European Police Office, Immunity from prosecution 499w
Extradition 281–2w
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 11–2
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, Tribunals 286–7w
Proceeds of crime 73w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 22–3
Questions
Agriculture, Advisory bodies 537w
Alternative energy, Wastes 536–7w
Climate Change Convention 541w
Crops, Diseases 536w
Environment protection, Inner city areas 543w
Fisheries, Quotas 541w
Flood control 541–2w
Food, Pesticides 543–4w
Food, Safety 543w, 550w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 368w, 538w
Foot and mouth disease, Non-domestic rates 163w
Home energy efficiency scheme 169–70w
Infant foods, Sheep meat 594w
Land drainage 869–70w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter—continued
Organic farming 542w
Planning, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 165w
Plant power 537w
Plutonium, Security 315w
Radioactive wastes, Waste management 543w
Recreation spaces 23w
Recycling, Domestic wastes 534–5w
Sellafield, Mixed oxide fuel 169w
Sheep meat 550–1w
Sheep premiums 536w
Tipping of waste 537w
Wind power 10–1w

Air conditioning
Aircraft 388–9w
London Underground 227–8w

Air force
616–8
Private finance initiative 510w

Air routes
Greater London 235w, (31.10.01) 273–94wh
Inverness 878
Northern Ireland 476w

Air traffic
Gibraltar 813w

Air traffic control
Prestwick 806w

Aircraft
Air conditioning 388–9w
Noise 194w
Pollution control 787w

Aircraft carriers
Procurement 765w, 767w

Airport tax
106–7w

Airports
Landing rights 175w
Parking 906–7w
Security 194w, 235w

Albania
Politics and government 603w
Proscribed organisations 315w

Alcoholic drinks
Bye laws 230–2w
Misuse 143w, 307–8w, (31.10.01) 311–8wh
Smuggling 59w

Alexander, Mr Douglas, Minister for E-commerce and Competitiveness, Dept of Trade and Industry
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Post offices, Putney (23.10.01) 56–60wh
Questions
Broadband 250w
Broadband, Wales 778w
Consignia, Employment tribunals 507w
Consignia, Lost working days 507w
Consignia, Manpower 507–8w
EU Transport and Telecommunications Council 503w
Post offices, Bank services 589–90w
Post offices, Closures 251w, 777w
Post offices, Rural areas 778w
Post offices, Scotland 502w
Post offices, Wales 506w
Postal services, Standards 504–5w
Public telephones, Hearing impaired 502–3w
Radio 250–1w

Algeria
Refugees 73w

Allan, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1035
Questions
Data protection 851w
Data protection, Telecommunications 727–8w
Developing countries, Drugs 265
Further education, Teachers 404–5

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Abandoned vehicles (22.10.01) 121–2, 125–6
Questions
Advisers Discretionary Fund 845w
Civil disorder, Bradford 91w
Common agricultural policy 274w
Council housing, Evictions 233w
Detention and training orders 85w
Drug prevention schemes 66w
Electronic government 45w
Individual learning accounts 327–8w
Jobseeker's allowance 54w
Police, Emergency calls 86w
Prime ministers, Ministerial powers 607w
Prisoners, Rehabilitation 213–4w, 850–1w
Refugees, Immigration rules 85–6w
Royal prerogative, Prime Minister 292w
Tenancy agreements 81w
Young offenders, Custodial treatment 84–5w

Allergies
Extracurricular activities 40–1w

Alternative energy
10–3w, 776w, 990–2
Training 35w
Wastes 536–7w, 585–6w, 704w

Amateur Rowing Association
184–5w

Ambulance services
Hampshire 652–3w
Sussex 651–2w

Amess, Mr David
Questions
Police, South East region 68–9w

Amey Vectra
Contracts 791–3w

Ammunition
Challenger tanks 878w

Amphibious vehicles
Procurement 763–4w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 751–2, 871–2
Government, Annual reports 876–7
Kosovo, Armed conflict 604–5w
Terrorism 749

Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1019, 1029–30, 1041–3

Anglia Polytechnic University
Admissions 529–30w

Angola
Armed conflict 603w

Animal experiments
Crimes of violence 90w

Animal Health Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (30.10.01) 753

Anniversaries
Queen Elizabeth II 4w, 22–3w, 48–9w, 400w, 759–60w, 879–80w

Antenatal care
Screening 892w

Anthrax
Drugs 5w, 114w
Haine Hospital 653w

Antisocial behaviour orders
70w, 282–3w, 450–1w, 716w, 861w
Bromley 715w
North West region 70w
Wales 70w

Apache AH-64 helicopter
4w, 322w, 406w

Arab states
Refugees 278–9w

Argentina
Hemp 691w

Armed conflict
Afghanistan 14–5w, 114w, 257w, 277–8, 508–10w, 600–1w, 607–8w, 621–4, 662–4w, 667w, 749–52, 767w, 871–2, 875, 876w, 877, 877w, 878, 881w
Africa 295w
Angola 603w
Democratic Republic of Congo 808w
Kosovo 604–5w
Sudan 268–9, 434–6w, 603w, 772w, 810–1w

Armed forces
Body armour 768–9w
Cannabis 664w
Commonwealth 515–6w
Deployment 516w, (26.10.01) 549–64, 769w
Driving 321–2w, 661w
Driving instruction 665w
Drugs 663–4w
Ethnic groups 511w
Falkland Islands 518w
Gosport 317w
Health hazards 879w
Health services 5w
Housing 320w, 514w, 563w
Human rights 518–9w
Manpower 4w, 240–1w, 403w, 513w, 519–20w
Meat 517–8w
Medals 4w, 879–80w
Nationality 404–5w
Pensions 113w, 319w, 563w
Racial discrimination 403–4w
Recruitment 659–60w, 662w
Schools 624–5
Telecommunications 513w, 619–20
Young people 512–3w

Armoured fighting vehicles
766w

Arms trade
Democratic Republic of Congo 807–8w
Export controls 590w, 666w, 697w
Serbia 911w
Sri Lanka 135–6w

Army
Israel 134w
Manpower 511w
Northern Ireland 519w

Arrears
Rents 276w

Arrests
Illegal immigrants 615–6w

Arriva
678w

Asperger's syndrome
(23.10.01) 61–8wh

Associated Newspapers
Defamation 502w

Asylum
see Refugees

Atherton, Ms Candy
Debates etc.
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1117, 1120, 1129, 1140–2, 1145

Athletics
20w, 758–9w, 803–4w
Medicine 759w
Picketts Lock 19–20w, 757w
Scotland 758w
Sports Aid Foundation 185w

Atkins, Charlotte
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 336, 372–3
Students (25.10.01) 438, 444
Questions
Better Regulation Task Force 691w
Business questions 420
Class sizes 400
Schools, Finance 251–2w

Atkinson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Firearms (Replica Weapons) Bill, 1R (30.10.01) 754–6
Questions
Ballistic missile defence, USA 620–1

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Food, EC action (25.10.01) 513–5
Hare coursing (29.10.01) 733
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 276–8wh, 286wh

Australia
Refugees 606w

Automated credit transfer
Social security benefits 441–2w

Automatic train protection
190w

Aviation
796w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 27w
Dept of Trade and Industry 14w
EC action 483w
Government assistance 225–6w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 49w
Security (23.10.01) 1–20wh, 226w, 290–1w
Terrorism 81w

Avon and Somerset Constabulary
Finance 69w

Bacon, Richard
Debates etc.
Maiden speech (29.10.01) 685–9
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 685–9

Badgers
see Bovine tuberculosis

Bailey, Mr Adrian
Questions
Armed forces, Ethnic groups 511w
GCE A level 401–2
Regional development agencies 249w

Baird, Vera
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 838
Questions
Prosecutions 370w

Baker, Norman
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 761, 780–5, 824, 846
Refugees (29.10.01) 639
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Railways, East Sussex (31.10.01) 295–300wh
Questions
Administration of justice 864w
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 114w
Antisocial behaviour orders 861w
Building alterations, Cabinet Office 870–1w
Chemical and biological warfare, Research 114w, 320w
Defamation 201w
Double jeopardy 14
Freedom of Information Act 2000 46–8w
Levy, Lord 142–3w
Ministers, Codes of practice 293w
Police, Nature conservation 289w
Police, Reform 864–5w
Prisoners 854w
Public order, Official visits 716w
RAF Menwith Hill, Treaties 114w
Strategic Communications Unit 142w
Terrorism, Finance 848–9w
Tibet, Overseas aid 296w

Baldry, Tony
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 293–4
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 339–43wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Refugees 580w
Africa, Poverty 266–7
Business questions 424
Climate Change Convention 732w
Local government finance 187w
Regional government 137–8
Teachers, Oxfordshire 327w

Ballistic missile defence
875w
USA 272–3, 281–2, 602w, 609–11, 620–1, 766w, 875–6w

Ballots
Grammar schools 324w

Baltic states
433w

Bangladesh
Females 493w

Bank services
Disadvantaged 204w
Post offices 589–90w, 695w

Banks
Turkey 8w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 33
Hare coursing (29.10.01) 727–8, 733–4
Legalisation of Cannabis Bill, 2R adjourned (26.10.01) 598–600
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 592
Questions
Assets, Treasury 521–2w

Banks, Mr Tony—continued
Government art collection 354w
Refugees, Employment 7–8

Barclays Bank Reorganisation Bill (HL) 2000/01
Debates etc.
2R (30.10.01) 735

Barker, Mr Gregory
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 220–3, 227–8
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1031
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Railways, East Sussex (31.10.01) 297wh
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 212–4wh
Questions
Business questions 1013
Further education, Teachers 405
Railway stations, East Sussex 478w
Sussex Police, Manpower 861–2w
Sussex Police, Special constables 717–8w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 910–2, 923, 935, 937, 943–7
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 557
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1017
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 310
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors 868
Small Business Service 987–8
Terrorism 748–9

Baron, Mr John
Questions
Incinerators 163w
Police stations, Essex 92w

Barrett, John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Aviation, Security (23.10.01) 7wh
Questions
Aerospace industry, Terrorism 581w
Consumers, Protection 418–9w
Energy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 867–8w
Energy, Dept for Education and Skills 773w
Energy, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 593w
Energy, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 907w
Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 780w
Energy, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 757w
Energy, Treasury 885w
Indonesia, Human rights 314w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 786–8w
Rescue services, Scotland 477–8w
Tax burden, Pensioners 261w
Trade competitiveness 1001
Transport, Security 788w

Bassetlaw
Children's tax credit 887–8w
Small Business Service 316w
Working families tax credit 887–8w

Battle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 296

Bayley, Hugh
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 236, 239

Bayley, Hugh—continued
Questions
Developing countries, Drugs 265
Foot and mouth disease 869
North Yorkshire Police, Manpower 65–6w

BBC
Ethnic groups 762–3w

Beard, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 892
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 600w
Post offices, Bank services 590w

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret, Secretary of State for Environment Food and the Regions
Debates etc.
Animal Health Bill, 1R (30.10.01) 753
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Ministerial statements (22.10.01) 19–36
Questions
Agriculture, Advisory bodies 537w
Alternative energy, Wastes 536–7w
Climate Change Convention 541w
Crops, Diseases 536w
EC Agriculture Council 365–6w
Environment protection, Inner city areas 543w
Fisheries, Quotas 541w
Flood control 541–2w
Food, Pesticides 543–4w
Food, Safety 543w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 368w, 538w
Foot and mouth disease, Non-domestic rates 163w
Home energy efficiency scheme 169–70w
Organic farming 542w
Pesticides Safety Directorate 922w
Planning, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 165w
Plant power 537w
Radioactive wastes, Waste management 543w
Recycling, Domestic wastes 534–5w
Sellafield, Mixed oxide fuel 169w
Sheep premiums 536w
Tipping of waste 537w

Bed and breakfast accommodation
187w
Children in care 798w

Beef
Exports 920–1w
Imports 551w

Begg, Miss Anne
Questions
Railways, Franchises 189w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Questions
Business questions 422, 1010
Class sizes 401
National insurance 644w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Questions
Arriva 678w
Breast feeding 533–4w
Excise duties, Petrol alternatives 61w
Foot and mouth disease, Hunting 270w
Foot and mouth disease, Northumberland 164w
Further education, Northumberland 328w
Labour Party 873–4
Regional government 128

Belfast City Airport
428–9w

Bell, Mr Stuart, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 554
Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill, 1R (24.10.01) 323–5
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 892–3, 902–3

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 36
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 562
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 533, 541, 543, 574–7
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 162
Questions
Closed circuit television 6
Government Office for the East of England 693w
Kashmir 735–6
Post offices, Closures 777w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benn, Hilary, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for International Development
Questions
Afghanistan, Females 270
Afghanistan, International assistance 579–80w
Afghanistan, Refugees 580w
Developing countries, Maternal mortality 269–70
General Agreement on Trade in Services, India 6w
Nigeria 270–1
North Korea, International assistance 580–1w
Romania, Export controls 6w
Written questions, Administrative delays 770–1w

Bennett, Andrew
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 533–4
Questions
Business questions 413, 1007–8
Council housing, Repairs and maintenance 387w
Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve, Hunting 409w
Proceeds of crime 73w
Recycling, Domestic wastes 535w

Bercow, Mr John
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 339
Treasury, Points of order (29.10.01) 648
Questions
Administration of estates 887w
Better Regulation Task Force 870w, 874w
Business, Regulation 870w
Corporation tax 261w
Double taxation 802w
EC budget 639–40w
Economic and monetary union 520–1w, 640w, 885w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 872w
Electronic government, Treasury 641w
Financial services, EC action 800w
Government departments, Disclosure of information 747w
Government departments, Standards 886w

Bercow, Mr John—continued
Grammar schools, Ballots 324w
Inheritance tax 887w
NHS, Finance 522w
Orders and regulations 872w
Partnerships UK, Shares 626w
Payroll System Review 889w
Public expenditure 643w
Public expenditure, Scotland 445w, 520w
Public private partnerships 62w
Publications, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 866w
Publications, Treasury 885–6w
Railtrack, Finance 61–2w
Regulation 372–3w
Regulation, Costs 372w
Standards, Treasury 888w
Taxation, Companies 800–1w
Wembley Stadium 19w

Best value
228w

Beta-interferon
650w, 831w

Better Regulation Task Force
691w, 870w, 874w

Betts, Mr Clive
Questions
Terrorism 747–8

Bicycles
Railways 797w

Billing
589w
Euro 508w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 493w

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
133w

Biological weapons
664w, 666w, 779w, 812w

Birds
Conservation 26w

Blackman, Mrs Liz
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 669, 671–4
Questions
Bus services 188w

Blair, Rt Hon Tony, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 14–5w, 277–8, 607–8w, 667w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 272–3, 281–2
Central Africa, International assistance 274
Committee on Standards in Public Life, Public appointments 807w
Departmental responsibilities, Industrial health and safety 667w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 292–3w
Drugs, Rationing 273
European Convention on Human Rights, Terrorism 278–9
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 15w
India 527w
Interception of Communications Commissioner, Annual reports 666–7w
International economic relations 276
Levy, Lord 142–3w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 280
Ministerial policy advisors 292w

Blair, Rt Hon Tony—continued
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 314w, 807w
Ministers, Codes of practice 293w
Mixed oxide fuel 292w
Moore, Jo 15w
Muslims 527w
NHS 280
Pakistan, Terrorism 276
Prime ministers, Ministerial powers 607w
Public appointments, Prime Minister 313–4w
Regional government, Departmental responsibilities 143w
Royal prerogative, Prime Minister 292w
Strategic Communications Unit 142w
Terrorism 15–6w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 274–5, 280–1
White papers, Disclosure of information 527w

Blears, Ms Hazel, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Food, EC action (25.10.01) 499–502, 515–8
Kelly, Mary (26.10.01) 604–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
AIDS (30.10.01) 199–203wh
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse (31.10.01) 315–8wh
Asperger's syndrome (23.10.01) 64–8wh
Breast cancer (23.10.01) 39–42wh
Hospitals, Kent (30.10.01) 238–42wh
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 143w
Ambulance services, Hampshire 652–3w
Ambulance services, Sussex 651–2w
Beef, Imports 551w
Beta-interferon 650w, 831w
Breast cancer 827w
Campylobacter 414w
Dentistry, Students 33w
Endometriosis, Dorset 654w
Food, Labelling 419w
Food, Safety 414–5w, 550w
Haine Hospital, Anthrax 653w
Health authorities, Public appointments 420w
Health authorities, Somerset 829–30w
Herceptin 342w
Infant foods, Sheep meat 594w
Interior design, Dept of Health 349w
Maternity services 341–2w
Medical treatments, EC countries 419–20w
Medicines Control Agency, Annual reports 33w
Members, Correspondence 29w
Multiple sclerosis, Drugs 420w
NHS, Classification schemes 421–3w
NHS Appointments Commission, Public appointments 653–4w
NHS trusts, Directors 653w
NHSnet 423–4w
Nutrition 32–3w, 349–50w
Pharmacy, Rural areas 557w
Prescriptions, Incapacity benefit 349w
Press releases, Dept of Health 159w
Sheep meat 550–1w
Spinal injuries 341w
Written questions, Administrative delays 30w

Blenheim High School
Finance 459–60w

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Regional assistance, Fisheries (24.10.01) 131–5wh, 137wh

Blizzard, Mr Bob*—*continued
Questions
Delivery Unit 862–3
Nurses, Pay 310w
Refugees, Misrepresentation 617w

Blood transfusion services
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease 658w

Blue badge scheme
680w

Blunkett, Rt Hon David, Secretary of State for the Home Dept
Debates etc.
Refugees, Ministerial statements (29.10.01) 627–47
Questions
Buildings, Home Office 87–90w, 216–7w
Construction, Home Office 218–9w
Correspondence, Home Office 721–3w
Government departments, Security 849w
Manpower, Home Office 77–81w
Ministerial policy advisors, Home Office 211–2w
Pay, Home Office 215–6w
Press, Home Office 854w
Press releases, Home Office 727w
Refugees 1–2, 4–5
Refugees, Voucher schemes 1–4
Sick leave, Home Office 211–2w
Special constables 12–3
Terrorism, Police interrogation 74w

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 907–10, 920, 925–8, 932–8, 944, 953–6, 959–61, 966–8
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 156–7, 160–1
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 622
Education, Private finance initiative 399
Future large aircraft 512w
Prisons 17–8
Security, Northern Ireland 869w

Blyth Valley
Social security benefits 243–4w

Boateng, Rt Hon Paul, Financial Secretary, Treasury
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 319–24wh, 358–60wh
Questions
Aggregates levy 206w, 629w, 782w
Airport tax 106–7w
Climate change levy 59–60w, 628w, 747w, 802w
Climate change levy, Combined heat and power 521w
Climate change levy, Engineering 628–9w
Climate change levy, Manufacturing industries 443w
Customs and Excise, Complaints 379w
Customs and Excise, Finance 378–9w
Customs and Excise, Information technology 443w
Customs and Excise, Manpower 444w
Customs and Excise, Pornography 444w
Customs and Excise, Property 625w
Customs and Excise, Recruitment 443–4w
Customs and Excise, Shetland 444w
Customs and Excise, Telephone services 443w
Excise duties 210w
Excise duties, Fuels 639w
Excise duties, Motor vehicles 60w, 202w
Excise duties, Petrol alternatives 61w, 890w

Boateng, Rt Hon Paul*—*continued
Foot and mouth disease, Non-domestic rates 445–6w
Gambling Review Body 378w
Landfill tax credit scheme 626w
Members, Correspondence 628w
Productivity 445w
Smuggling 744w
Smuggling, Alcoholic drinks 59w
Smuggling, Motor vehicles 625–6w
Smuggling, Tobacco 380w
Tax allowances, Housing improvement 60w
Tax allowances, Sports 625w
Tax credit, Derelict land 627w
Tax evasion 380w
Taxation, Advisory services 207w
Taxation, EC countries 206w
Taxation, Environment protection 444w
Taxation, Judgments 207w, 379w
Taxation, Local exchange and trading schemes 58–9w
Taxation, Manufacturing industries 627w
VAT 64–5w, 209–10w, 625w
VAT, Energy 206w
VAT, Football 60w
VAT, Housing 61w
VAT, Rescue services 59w
Written questions, Administrative delays 446w

Boats
River Thames 224w

Body armour
Armed forces 768–9w

Bombings
Embassies 434w

Bombs
1–2w, 770w
Export controls 697w

Borrow, Mr David
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1036–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
AIDS (30.10.01) 196–7wh
Questions
Air force 616–7

Boswell, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 158
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 486
Questions
Blue badge scheme 680w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Work and Pensions 749w
Departmental responsibilities, Industrial health and safety 667w
Disabled, Employment 750w
Disabled, Human rights 177w
Further education 394
Motor vehicles, Carbon dioxide 908w
Pensions 848w
Stakeholder pensions 750–1w

Botswana
Ethnic groups 133w
HIV infection 304w

Bottomley, Peter
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 528
Questions
Business questions 414–5
Hospitals, Waiting lists 820–5w
House of Commons Commission 866w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards 6w, 865–6w

Bottomley, Peter*—*continued
Pedestrians, Safety 383–5w, 476w, 574–5w, 679w, 788–90w
Public appointments, Prime Minister 313–4w
Roads, Accidents 678w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 544–6
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 336, 346–9, 352, 380
Questions
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 862

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
Ministerial statements (22.10.01) 19–36
Research 547w, 805w
Sheep (22.10.01) 19–36, 547w, 591–2w

Bovine tuberculosis
Disease control 409w

Bradford
Civil disorder 91w

Bradley, Rt Hon Keith, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Police, Hampshire (02.11.01) 1187–90
Questions
Clark, Sally 210–1w
Closed circuit television 5–7
Criminal injuries compensation 611–5w
Criminal law, Corruption 280w
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, Prosecutions 286w
Double jeopardy 13–4
Extradition 280–1w
Police, Rural areas 69–70w
Trials 217–8w
Victim support schemes 213w

Bradley, Peter
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 201, 204, 212–3
Refugees (29.10.01) 646
Questions
Armed forces, Housing 320w, 514w, 563w
Cannabis, Decriminalisation 499–500w
Kenya, Land 432w
Police, Rural areas 69–70w
Prisoners of war, Compensation 2w, 318w, 748–9w
Railtrack, Finance 670w, 783w
Road works 136–7

Bradshaw, Mr Ben, Parliamentary Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 257w, 601w
Afghanistan, Diplomatic service 910w
Afghanistan, Females 601–2w
Afghanistan, Foreign relations 601w
Africa 600w
Angola, Armed conflict 603w
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention 133w
Botswana, Ethnic groups 133w
Burma, EC external relations 258w
Commonwealth 606w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 808w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Arms trade 807–8w
Diego Garcia 606w
Drugs, Crime 598w
Egypt, Educational visits 812–3w
Embassies, Bombings 434w
Entry clearances 119–33w, 437w

Bradshaw, Mr Ben—continued
Entry clearances, Ministerial powers 910w
Gambia, Elections 909w
Georgia, Uranium 910w
India, Entry clearances 605w
Indian subcontinent, Entry clearances 669w
Indonesia, Human rights 314w, 436–7w
Iraq, Oil 118w
Israel, Army 134w
Kenya, Land 432w
Mediterranean region, EC external relations 602w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 600w
Nigeria 437w
Nuclear weapons 494–5w
Pakistan 603–4w
Pakistan, Civil disorder 257–8w
Pakistan, Entry clearances 602w
Pakistan, Human rights 134–5w
Pakistan, Religious freedom 810w
Palestinians, Females 117w
Premier Oil, Burma 134w
Proscribed organisations 118w
Russia, NATO enlargement 740–2
St Christopher and Nevis, Libyan Arab Republic 118–9w
Saudi Arabia, Entry clearances 496w
Sierra Leone 813–4w
Sri Lanka, Human rights 17–8w
Sudan, Armed conflict 434–6w, 603w, 810–1w
Sudan, Human rights 434–6w
Sudan, International assistance 434–5w
Sudan, Refugees 434w
Sudan, Religious freedom 435w
Terrorism 598–9w
Terrorism, EC action 599w
Terrorism, Registration of births deaths and marriages 400w
Travel information 18–9w
Treaties 812w
UN Development Programme, Indonesia 18w
USA, Ballistic missile defence 602w
Zimbabwe, Land 911w
Zimbabwe, Overseas residence 910–1w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 133–4w, 257w, 599w, 668–9w

Brady, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 317
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 72wh
Questions
Beta-interferon 650w
Brazil 117w, 446–7w, 568–9w
Class sizes 401
Drugs, Crime 598w
Employment, Discrimination 775w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 367–8w
Football banning orders 86w
Literacy, Standards 622w
Local Government Association 529w
Pupils, Contraceptives 459w
Regional government 127–8
Retirement, Dept for Education and Skills 474w
Retirement, Dept for Work and Pensions 338w
Retirement, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 351w
Roads, Noise 189–90w
Schools, Music 528w
Schools, Security 896w
Schools, Wales 903w
Specialist schools, Admissions 895w
Speed limits, Cameras 69w
Teachers, Qualifications 617–8w

Brady, Mr Graham—continued
Teachers, Resignations 461w

Brain
Injuries 37w

Braintree
Floods (30.10.01) 853–60

Brake, Tom
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 285–7wh
Aviation, Security (23.10.01) 1–5wh, 19wh
Fireworks, Retail trade (30.10.01) 228wh
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 214wh, 218–22wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 139–40
Govia, Franchises 234–5w, 478w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 390w
Police, Recruitment 71w
Railtrack, Finance 569w
Railways, Bicycles 797w
Railways, Safety 785w
Regional development agencies 694w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 652, 655, 674–80, 684
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 475
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Hospitals, Kent (30.10.01) 235–7wh, 239–40wh, 242wh
Questions
Emergencies, Planning 870–1

Brazil
117w, 446–7w, 568–9w

Breast cancer
(23.10.01) 21–42wh, 827w

Breast feeding
553–4w

Breed, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Food, EC action (25.10.01) 508–10, 517
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 535–7
Questions
Agriculture, Manpower 549–50w
Agriculture, Student numbers 594w
Foot and mouth disease 539–40w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 733–4w
Radon gas 389w
Written questions, Administrative delays 407w

Brennan, Kevin
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 658, 710–3
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 29
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 160, 164, 168, 171
Questions
Glas Cymru 777w
International Criminal Court 603w

British Council
494w

British Irish Council
693w

British Sky Broadcasting
316w

British Waterways Board
Finance 259w

British Waterways Board—continued
Public appointments 921w

Broadband
250w
Wales 778w

Broadcasting programmes
Television 357w

Bromley
Antisocial behaviour orders 715w
Local child curfew schemes 447w
Social security benefits 248w

Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Questions
Endometriosis, Dorset 654w
GCE A level 403
Manufacturing industries 996
Written questions, Administrative delays 30w

Brown, Rt Hon Gordon, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Questions
EC Finance Council 260–1w

Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas, Minister for Work, Department for Work and Pensions
Debates etc.
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 478
Questions
Advisers Discretionary Fund 845w
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 835–8w
Construction, Dept for Work and Pensions 340w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Work and Pensions 749w
Disadvantaged, Dept for Work and Pensions 337–8w
Forced labour, Treaties 302–3w
Incapacity benefit 338w
"Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take Up in 1999/2000" 524w
Jobcentre Plus 522w
Jobcentre Plus, Working conditions 523–4w
Jobcentres, Rural areas 523w
Manpower, Dept for Work and Pensions 840–3w
New deal for lone parents 844w
New deal for long term unemployed 845w
New deal for young people 524–5w, 845w
New deal for young people, Advisory services 846w
New deal for young people, Costs 846w
New deal schemes 438w
New deal schemes, Advisory services 845–6w
Pay, Dept for Work and Pensions 338–9w
Pension Service, Manpower 526w
Press releases, Dept for Work and Pensions 179w, 522w
Public expenditure, Dept for Work and Pensions 53w, 843–4w
Publicity, Dept for Work and Pensions 525w
Retirement, Dept for Work and Pensions 338w, 847w
Social security benefits, Abuse 438w, 526w
Social security benefits, Disabled 645–6w
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001 643w
Travel to interview scheme 835–6w

Brown, Mr Russell
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 28
Hare coursing (29.10.01) 732–3
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 869–11
Questions
Sheep meat, Scotland 172w
West coast railway line, Repairs and maintenance 100w

Browne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 914, 919–24, 929, 931–3, 940, 952–3, 964–70
Questions
Elections, Northern Ireland 497–8w
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill 2001/02 497w
Human rights, Northern Ireland 498w
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Public appointments 567w

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 475, 481–4, 494
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asperger's syndrome (23.10.01) 61–4wh, 67wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 621–2
Business questions 421
Juries, Smoking 753w

Bruce, Malcolm
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 25
Questions
Combined heat and power 409–10w, 533w
Flood control 736–7w, 913w
Sewers 914w
Water, EC law 917w

Bryant, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1116–7, 1119–20, 1122, 1124, 1151, 1154–63, 1167
Questions
Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Standards 110w
South Wales Police, Manpower 70–1w
Treaty of Nice 604w

BSE
see Bovine spongiform encephalopathy

Buck, Ms Karen
Questions
Immigrants 612w
Police, Greater London 854–5w
Refugees, Voucher schemes 729w
Regulatory impact assessments 804–5w

Building alterations
Cabinet Office 870–1w

Building regulations
681–4w

Burden, Richard
Questions
Fireworks, Import controls 393w
Fireworks, Storage 393w, 418w, 581w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 742–3
Occupational pensions 847–8w
Pension funds, Inquiries 439–40w

Burma
EC external relations 258w
Burma—continued
Premier Oil 134w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 193
Questions
Business questions 423–4
Rural areas, Voluntary organisations 546w
Young offenders, Criminal proceedings 408

Burnham, Andy
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 83wh
Questions
Industrial diseases, Compensation 997–8
Public transport, Greater Manchester 144

Burnley
871

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Food, EC action (25.10.01) 502–6, 515–6
Written questions, Points of order (23.10.01) 145
Sittings in Westminster Hall
AIDS (30.10.01) 196–9wh, 202wh
Questions
Anglia Polytechnic University, Admissions 529–30w
Closed circuit television 5
Floods, Essex 912w
Hospital beds 310–1w
Institutional care 161w
Institutional care, Closures 160–1w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 160–1w
Members, Working hours 488w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 154w
Motorways, Chelmsford 795–6w
NHS 280
NHS, Private sector 654–5w, 827–8w
Road works, East Anglia 795w
School leaving, Chelmsford 710–1w

Burnside, David
Debates etc.
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 311
Questions
Armed forces, Telecommunications 620

Burstow, Mr Paul
Questions
Community care services grant 156–7w, 558–9w
Computers, Dept of Trade and Industry 694–5w
Computers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 755–6w
Criminal injuries compensation 611–5w
Health services, Elderly 155–6w
Health services, Neurology 156w
Health services, Standards 155w
Home care services, Fees and charges 155–6w
Hospital beds 155w
Institutional care 28w, 819–20w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 156w
Institutional care, Income support 752w
Invalid care allowances, Appeals 55–7w
Multiple sclerosis, Drugs 420w
NHS, Classification schemes 421–3w
NHSnet 423–4w

Burt, Alistair
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 431, 440–7, 465–6
Questions
Further education 394–5
Burt, Alistair—continued
Immigration, Administrative delays 616–7w
Individual learning accounts 619–20w
Individual learning accounts, Fraud 618–21w, 895w
Manufacturing industries, Eastern region 985–6
Monetary compensatory amounts 921–2w
Spinal injuries 305–6w, 341w
Students, Finance 325w
Work permits, Overseas students 849w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 615w

Bus services
187–8w
Kent 188w
Working hours 98–9w, 229w

Business
Higher education 775w
Regulation 870w

Business Recovery Fund
141–2w, 251w, 266w, 408w, 733w

Business statements
411–27, 1005–13

Butterfill, Mr John
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 814
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 600w

By-election writs
Ipswich (01.11.01) 985

Byers, Rt Hon Stephen, Secretary of State for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 155–66, 172
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 328–33
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 679–80w
Civil service agencies, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 223w
Council housing, Empty property 223w
Council tax, Greater London 229w
Disclosure of information, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 96–7w
EU Transport and Telecommunications Council 94–6w
Evans, Alun 392w
Hackney Borough Council, Standards 905–6w
Homelessness 223w
Housing, Capital investment 236w
Local government, Elections 475w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 390w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 394w, 909w
Moore, Jo 91–3w, 394–5w, 908–9w
Non-departmental public bodies, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 223–4w
Press releases, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 225w, 394w
Railtrack, Finance 93w, 141–2, 195–7w, 399w, 671–4w
Regional development agencies 427–8w
Regional government 127–9
Regional planning and development, South West region 226w
River Thames, Boats 224w
Standard spending assessments 129–32
Starter home initiative 143–4

Bypasses
Planning permission 389w

Cabinet Office
Building alterations 870–1w
Buildings 293–4w
Press releases 293w

Cable, Mr Vincent
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 705–7
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 300
Cervical cancer (25.10.01) 519–22
Private Members' bills, Points of order (02.11.01) 1113
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Aviation, Security (23.10.01) 7–9wh
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 333–6wh
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 84–6wh
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 989–90
Airports, Landing rights 175w
Cervical cancer, Death rate 30–1w
Cervical cancer, Screening 30w
Construction Industry Training Board 115–6w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 205w
Microsoft, Competition 696w, 871–2w
Parliamentary procedure, Email 221w
Petrol, Retail trade 695w
Port of London Authority 686w
Post offices, Bank services 695w
Proceeds of crime, Nigeria 203w
Publicity, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 904w
Refugees, Employment 7

Caborn, Rt Hon Richard, Minister of State for Sport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Questions
Amateur Rowing Association 184–5w
Athletics 758–9w, 803–4w
Athletics, Medicine 759w
Athletics, Picketts Lock 757w
Athletics, Scotland 758w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 758w
Community Fund, Greater London 761w
English Sports Council, Finance 185w
Football 762w
Football, Scotland 762w
Football, Sportagrounds 21–2w
Gaming machines, Social clubs 763–4w
Olympic Games 760–1w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 759–60w
Select committees, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 182w
Space for sport and arts programme 22w
Sports 761–2w
Sports, Drugs 183–4w
Sports, Sponsorship 21w
Sports Aid Foundation, Athletics 185w
Wembley Stadium 761–2w

Cairns, David
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 200
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Fireworks, Retail trade (30.10.01) 228–9wh
Questions
Nurses 880

Calton, Mrs Patsy
Debates etc.
Cervical cancer (25.10.01) 524

Calton, Mrs Patsy—continued
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 361–3

Cambridgeshire
Family courts 46w

Cameras
Speed limits 69w, 851w, 862–3w

Cameron, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 30
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 562–3
Inland waterways, Cotswold Hills (01.11.01) 1111
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 205
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 820–5
Questions
Postgraduate education 398

Campbell, Mr Alan
Questions
Public expenditure, North East region 259–60w
Retirement, Ministry of Defence 241w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1087–9
Questions
Prosecutions 371–2w
Refugees, Voucher schemes 1–2
Standard spending assessments 132

Campbell, Mr Gregory
Debates etc.
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 319

Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1019, 1052–4
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 744

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 877
Nigeria 271

Campylobacter
414w

Canada
Upholder class submarines 659w

Cannabis
Armed forces 664w
Decriminalisation 499–500w
Lambeth 500w
Licensing 858w

Capital investment
Housing 236w

Carbon dioxide
Motor vehicles 908w
Pollution control 206w

Cardiff Prison
Refugees 76w

Care Direct
South West region 32w

Care Homes Regulations 2001
Questions
144w

Care Standards Act 2000
Questions
159–60w, 181–2w

Career structure
Teachers 39w

Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 817–8, 837, 845
Questions
Alternative energy 990–1

Cars
Theft 730–1w

Cash, Mr William
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 345wh, 355wh
Magistrates' courts, Greater London (31.10.01) 266–8wh, 270wh
Questions
Crime, Victims 409–10

Cellular phone masts
see Aerials

Cellular phones
Driving 194–5w, 863–4w
Health hazards 154w

Census
63–4w, 637–9w

Central Africa
International assistance 274

Central Railway
200w, 383w

Central Trains
Standards 229w

Cereals
East Midlands 360–1w

Cervical cancer
(25.10.01) 519–26
Death rate 30–1w
Screening 30–1w

Challen, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 151
Questions
Agenda 21 170w
Intensive supervision and surveillance programme 16
Magistrates, Leeds 752–3w
Manufacturing industries 778w
Minimum wage, West Yorkshire 629–30w
Terrorism, BC action 599w
Trade, Financial services 417w, 495w, 641w

Challenger tanks
320w
Ammunition 878w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel railway line
97w, 478w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 143w
Learning and skills councils 325w

Chapman, Sir Sydney
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 548, 565
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Magistrates' courts, Greater London (31.10.01) 253wh, 263–4wh
Questions
Armed forces, Telecommunications 620
Rapid deployment forces, EC countries 512w
Road traffic control, Greater London 135
Starter home initiative 685w

Chaytor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 530, 575, 577–9, 582
Students (25.10.01) 430, 437, 443, 448–52, 461–2
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1044
Questions
Afghanistan, Uranium 241w
Alternative energy 991–2
Business questions 422
Learning and skills councils 531w
Nuclear power, Security 6–7w, 501w
Tungsten 518w
UN Development Programme, Indonesia 18w

Chelmsford
Motorways 795–6w
School leaving 710–1w

Cheltenham
Road traffic 677–8w

Chemical and biological warfare
1w, 239–41w, 321w, 519w
Afghanistan 663w
Military aid 113w
Research 112–4w, 320w, 770w
Territorial Army 660w
Vaccination 881w

Chidgey, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 81–2wh
Questions
Future large aircraft 696w
Gaming machines, Social clubs 763–4w
Railways, Franchises 671w
Railways, North West region 674w

Chief of Defence Logistics
see Defence Logistics Organisation

Child Trust Fund
207–8w, 883w, 886w

Childbirth
826–7w

Children
Abuse 854w
Day care 373w, 667–8w
Domestic violence 351w, 649–50w, 723–7w
Homicide 72[illegible]w
Kidnapping 80–3w, 81–2w
Kosovo 298w
Maintenance 46w, 54–5w, 751w
Poverty 644w

Children Act 1989
Questions
649–50w

Children in care
159w
Abuse 370w, 855–8w
Bed and breakfast accommodation 798w
Refugees 830–1w, 853w

Children's tax credit
Bassetlaw 887–8w
Northampton 745w

Chiltern railway line
Franchises 578w

China
HIV infection 689w
Human rights 296w, 909–10w

Chinook helicopters
564–5w
Computer software 769w

Chippenham
Roads 386–7w

Chiropody
Student numbers 144w

Chope, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Equitable Life Assurance Society (31.10.01) 976–82
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 510w
Taxation, Retirement 744–5w

Chorley
Foot and mouth disease 368w
Housing 479–80w
Police custody 276w
Small Business Service 701–2w

Church schools
Disadvantaged 40w

City of London (Ward Elections) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
Motion to proceed in present session (24.10.01) 263, (31.10.01) 861
Questions
1008

Civil Aviation Authority
Public appointments 199–200w

Civil Contingencies Committee
45w

Civil disorder
Bradford 91w
Pakistan 257–8w

Civil servants
Disabled 870
Ethnic groups 861–2
Pay 694w
Pensions 646w

Civil service agencies
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 223w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Questions
Ballistic missile defence, USA 611
Closed circuit television 6–7

Clappison, Mr James
Questions
Housing benefit, Databases 242w
"Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take Up in 1999/2000" 524w
Independent Insurance 442w
National insurance 750w
New deal for lone parents 844w
New deal for long term unemployed 845w
New deal for young people 524–5w, 845w
New deal for young people, Advisory services 846w
New deal for young people, Costs 846w
New deal schemes 438w
New deal schemes, Advisory services 845–6w
Press releases, Dept for Work and Pensions 522w
Refugees, Voucher schemes 3
Social security benefits, Abuse 54w, 526–7w, 847w

Clark, Mrs Helen
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 572–5
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 758
Questions
Combined heat and power 922w
Petrol alternatives, Excise duties 61w, 186w

Clark, Mrs Helen—continued
Primary education, Standards 328–9w
Prisons, Education 213w, 336w

Clark, Paul
Questions
Armed forces, Schools 624–5

Clark, Sally
210–1w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 637
Questions
East Midlands Airport, Night flying 429w

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 294
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 488
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1032–4
Questions
Africa, Poverty 267
British Waterways Board, Public appointments 921w
Civil servants, Disabled 870

Clarke, Mr Tony
Questions
Children's tax credit, Northampton 745w
Closed circuit television, Northampton 863w
Holocaust Memorial Day, Dept for Education and Skills 713–4w
Holocaust Memorial Day, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 814w
Holocaust Memorial Day, Home Office 853w
Local government finance, Northampton 790w
Regional government 138
Schools, Northampton 714–5w
Sure start programme, Northampton 900–1w
Vacant land, Northampton 791w

Class sizes
324w, 399–401
East Riding 711–2w

Classification schemes
NHS 421–3w

Clelland, Mr David
Questions
Regional government 128

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 297
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 39–43, 45, 49, 63, 65–70, 72–3, 75, 80, 85, 93–8, 103, 105, 116–7
Inland waterways, Cotswold Hills (01.11.01) 1109–10
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 893, 900
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 277wh, 287–93wh
Aviation, Security (23.10.01) 12–6wh
Questions
Census 637–9w
Local authorities, Borrowing 429w
Standard spending assessments 131–2

Climate Change Convention
541w, 693w, 732w

Climate change levy
59–60w, 584–5w, 628w, 747w, 802w

Climate change levy—continued
Combined heat and power 521w, 533w
Engineering 585w, 628–9w
Manufacturing industries 443w
Textiles 137–8w

Clinics
Pain 149–50w

Closed circuit television
5–7, 449w
Northampton 863w
Small businesses 501w

Clwyd, Ann
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1038–9
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 623

Clyde naval base
878w

Coaker Mr Vernon
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 643
Questions
Angola, Armed conflict 603w
Beta-interferon 831w
Business questions 1011
Crime prevention, Young people 8
Disadvantaged, Young people 899w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 775w
Kosovo, Children 298w
Railtrack, Finance 671–3w

Coal
8w

Coffee
Developing countries 738w

Coffey, Ms Ann
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 664–7

Cohabitation
Taxation 882w

Cohen, Harry
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 647
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1024, 1097
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 662–3w, 767w
Athletics, Picketts Lock 757w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 609–10
Best value 228w
Children in care, Bed and breakfast accommodation 798w
Colombia 605–6w
Construction, Industrial health and safety 232–3w
Debts, Turkey 378w
Government Office for London, Standards 45–6w
Illegal immigrants, Arrests 615–6w
Incinerators, Edmonton 917–8w
Iraq, Oil 118w
London Underground, Air conditioning 227–8w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 186w
Mayors, Greater London 17w
Metropolitan Police, Housing 284–5w
Metropolitan Police, Parliament 850w
Minimum wage 7w
Pain, Clinics 149–50w
Parliamentary data and video network 487–8w
Proceeds of crime, Nigeria 205w
Refugees, Administrative delays 284w
Refugees, Detainees 284w

Cohen, Harry—continued
Trees, Diseases 362–3w
Turkey, Sanctions 16–7w
Waste management 413w

Colchester
Military bases 616

Cold weather payments
181w

Coleman, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 635

Collins, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 236–40, 243
Questions
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 292–3w
Disclosure of information, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 96–7w
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 15w, 174w, 209w, 268w, 914–5w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 366w
Foot and mouth disease, Non-domestic rates 445–6w
Foot and mouth disease, Tourism 263w
Livestock, Markets 366w
Ministerial policy advisors 292w, 867–8
Moore, Jo 394–5w
Regional government, Departmental responsibilities 143w
Royal Liverpool Hospital, Pancreatic cancer 32w
Small businesses, Finance 7w
Social security benefits, Medical examinations 53w

Colman, Mr Tony
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 354–8wh
Night flying (23.10.01) 49wh
Post offices, Putney (23.10.01) 52–7wh, 60wh
Questions
Education, Standards 395

Colombia
605–6w

Colorectal cancer
882–4w

Combined heat and power
409–10w, 533w, 704w, 922w
Climate change levy 521w, 533w

Commission for the New Towns
Land 99w

Committee on Standards in Public Life
Public appointments 807w

Common agricultural policy
274w, 916w

Commonwealth
606w
Armed forces 515–6w

Commonwealth Games
Manchester 758w, 760w

"Communications White Paper"
263w

Communities against drugs initiative
851–2w

Community care
148w
Mental health services 152w, 828w

Community care services grant
156–7w, 558–9w

Community development
235w
Scotland 476–7w

Community development project
Information technology 773w

Community Fund
Greater London 761w

Community Legal Service
858–9w

Community transport
Excise duties 797w

Companies
Taxation 800–1w

Competition
Legal profession 697w
Microsoft 696w, 871–2w
North West region 777w

Computer software
Chinook helicopters 769w
Ministry of Defence 318–9w

Computers
Dept of Trade and Industry 694–5w
Home Office 729w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 755–6w
Magistrates' courts 753w

Computers within reach programme
713w

Conditions of employment
1002–4
Police 277–8w

Congo (Kinshasa)
see Democratic Republic of Congo

Connarty, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 792, 795

Connexions Service
327w, 405–6

Conservation
Birds 26w
Energy 24w, 171w, 409w, 916w

Consignia
Employment tribunals 507w
Hazardous materials 508w
Lost working days 507w
Manpower 507–8w

Constituencies
430w
Scotland 352–4w, 807w

Construction Industry Training Board
115–6w

Consultants
Ministry of Defence 878w

Consultation papers
Treasury 377–8w

Consumers
Protection 315w, 418–9w, 996–7

Contraceptives
Pupils 459w

Contracting Out of Functions (Tribunal Staff) Order 2001
Debates etc.
(29.10.01) 726

Contracts
AEA Technology 791–3w
Amey Vectra 791–3w

Conway, Derek
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 558–9
Questions
Portcullis House 401w

Cook, Rt Hon Robin, President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Questions
Business statements 411–27, 1005–13
House of Commons, Working families tax credit 401w
Members, Information technology 323w
Members, Working hours 488w
Open government, Internet 322w
Parliamentary procedure, Email 221w
Parliamentary questions, Information technology 322w

Corbyn, Jeremy
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 557–8
Refugees (29.10.01) 642–3
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1016
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 277–8, 601w, 607–8w, 767w, 876w
Afghanistan, Chemical and biological warfare 663w
Afghanistan, Foreign relations 601w
Afghanistan, Refugees 608–10w
Australia, Refugees 606w
Business questions 417–8
Commonwealth 606w
Education, Private finance initiative 398–9
Pakistan 604w
Papua New Guinea, International assistance 686–7w
Prosecutions 371w
Whittington Hospital, Private finance initiative 742w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Political impartiality, Points of order (30.10.01) 753
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1031
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 745
Refugees, Deportation 500–1w

Cornwall
EC grants and loans 877–8
Social security benefits 244w

Coroners
213w

Corporation tax
261w

Corruption
Criminal law 280w
Developing countries 301–2w

Cotswold Hills
Inland waterways (01.11.01) 1106–12

Cotter, Brian
Questions
Business Recovery Fund 141–2w, 251w, 266w, 408w, 733w
Children in care 159w
Haemophilia, Medical treatments 891w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Trade and Industry 581–2w
Payroll System Review 520w
Small Business Service 987

Cotter, Brian—continued
Small businesses, Closed circuit television 501w

Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals
see Regulation of Health Care Professionals Council

Council housing
Empty property 223w
Evictions 233w
Nottingham 233w
Repairs and maintenance 387w

Council of Economic Advisers
Ministerial policy advisors 887w

Council of Ministers
808–10w
Scottish Executive 117w

Council of the Isles
see British Irish Council

Council tax
Greater London 229w
Students 676–7w

Councillors' interests
Planning 103w

Counselling
Schools 460w

Countryside
Access 591–2w

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
Questions
591w

Countryside stewardship scheme
Organic farming 25w

Court Service
754w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Arms trade, Export controls 697w
Bombs, Export controls 697w
Civil servants, Pensions 646w
Colorectal cancer 882–4w
Computers, Home Office 729w
Council tax, Students 676–7w
Debts written off, Public bodies 743w
Economic situation 640–1w
Financial Stability Forum 641w
General certificate of secondary education, Standards 773–4w
Georgia, Uranium 910w
Hospital beds, Newcastle upon Tyne 655–8w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 893w
Partnerships 696–7w
Public expenditure 745–6w
Railtrack, Finance 627w

Coventry
Dementia 157–8w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Flood control, Greater London 736w
Forests 738w
Livestock 739w
Local child curfew schemes, Greater London 850w
London Underground, Standards 677w
Milk 550w
Minimum wage 630w
Museums and galleries, Fees and charges 597w
Museums and galleries, Finance 490–1w
Tate Modern 596w
Zimbabwe, Overseas residence 910–1w

Cranston, Ross
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1083–5
Questions
Education, Trade unions 330w
Extradition 279–80w
Magistrates' courts, Dudley 399–400w
Pyramid selling 315w
West Midlands Police, Special constables 214–5w, 450w

Crausby, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Fireworks, Retail trade (30.10.01) 230wh
Questions
Armed forces, Telecommunications 620
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 511w
Kashmir 735–6

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease
Blood transfusion services 658w

Crime
Drugs 73–4w, 598w
Victims 408–10

Crime and Disorder Act 1998
Questions
852w

Crime and disorder partnerships
72w

Crime prevention
Sports 719–20w
Young people 8–9

Crimes of violence
71–2w
Animal experiments 90w
Emergency services 718–9w

Criminal injuries compensation
611–5w

Criminal law
Corruption 280w

Criminal proceedings
Administrative delays 50w
Young offenders 407–8

Criminal Records Bureau
449–50w
Voluntary organisations 280w

Crops
Diseases 536w
Genetically modified organisms 176–7w, 546–7w

Crossrail line
228w

Crown Estate Commissioners
Dredging 444–5w

Crown Prosecution Service
370–1w
Ethnic groups 798–9w
Racial discrimination 371w

Cryer, Mrs Ann
Questions
Business questions 1012

Cryer, John
Questions
Business questions 421–2, 1008
Retirement, Dept for Work and Pensions 847w

Cullen Inquiry
see Paddington Rail Accident Inquiry

Cultural relations
Islam 19w

Cumbria
Foot and mouth disease 15w, 174w, 209w, 268w, 340w, 914–6w
Small businesses 7w
Social security benefits 53w

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 26

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Data protection (31.10.01) 309–10wh
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 579–80w
Children, Poverty 644w
Coal 8w
Dementia 157–8w
Dementia, Coventry 157–8w
Diego Garcia 606w
Elderly, Voluntary organisations 158–9w
Employment, Discrimination 584w
Enterprise Insight 582–3w
Gurkhas 4–5w
Housing, Construction 484w
Local government services 187w
Microcredit programmes 303–4w
Motor vehicles, Prices 872w
Navy 3w
Offenders, Discrimination 716–7w
Physical education 458–9w
Russia, Overseas aid 304w
Small Business Service 583w
Small businesses, Finance 583–4w
SMART awards 501–2w
Social rented housing 483–4w
Social security benefits, Disabled 645–6w
Terrorism, Finance 521w
Warships 2–3w, 566w

Cunningham, Tony
Questions
Africa, Armed conflict 295w

Curriculum
Sixth form education 326w

Curry, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 27
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep 591–2w

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 69–76wh
Questions
Children in care, Abuse 370w, 855–8w

Custodial treatment
Young offenders 84–5w

Customs and Excise
Complaints 379w
Finance 378–9w
Information technology 443w
Manpower 444w
Pornography 444w
Property 625w
Recruitment 443–4w
Shetland 444w
Telephone services 443w

Cyprus
Military bases 566w

Dairy farming
545w, 548w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 300–1
Armed conflict, Points of order (24.10.01) 320
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 25
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 555–6
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 528–9, 532, 537, 546–8, 591
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 175, 181–3, 205
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 887
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1017, 1064, 1102
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 608w, 876–7w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 273
Business questions 416–7, 1012–3

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991
Questions
285w
Prosecutions 286w

Darling, Rt Hon Alistair, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Debates etc.
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 473, 485–7, 491–5
Questions
Royal prerogative, Dept for Work and Pensions 243w

Data protection
(31.10.01) 304–10wh, 851w
Telecommunications 727–8w

Data Protection Act 1998
Sittings in Westminster Hall
(31.10.01) 304–10wh

Databases
Housing benefit 242w

Davey, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 434
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Magistrates' courts, Greater London (31.10.01) 251–9wh, 267–9wh, 271–2wh

Davey, Mrs Valerie
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 453, 457, 463
Questions
Connexions Service 405–6

David, Mr Wayne
Questions
Industrial diseases, Compensation 775–6w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 763, 771, 790–3, 803, 808
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 330

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1059–61

Davies, Geraint
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1037, 1094, 1098, 1100
Questions
Crime and disorder partnerships 72w
Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate, Annual reports 756w

Davies, Geraint—continued
Road traffic control, Greater London 134–5

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 932–3, 970–1
IRA, Points of order (23.10.01) 177–8
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 304–5

Davis, Rt Hon David
Questions
Class sizes, East Riding 711–2w
Teachers, East Riding 622w
Teachers, Training 621–2w

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 653, 659, 662, 675, 678, 680–5
Refugees (29.10.01) 646–7
Questions
Prisoners 854w

Day care
Children 373w, 667–8w
House of Commons 667–8w

Deaf
see Hearing impaired

Death
Weather 376–7w

Death rate
Cervical cancer 30–1w

Debts
639w
Developing countries 297–9w, (01.11.01) 319–60wh, 868–9w
Turkey 378w

Debts written off
Public bodies 743w

Decriminalisation
Cannabis 499–500w

Defamation
201w
Associated Newspapers 502w

"Defeating International Terrorism"
15–6w

Defence
Finance 565–6w

Defence Aviation Repair Agency
Standards 110w

Defence capabilities initiative
566–7w

Defence equipment
Procurement 406w, 513–4w, 659w, 665w, 880–1w
Scotland 880–1w

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency
RAF St Athan 660w

Defence Intelligence and Security Centre
Reviews 660–1w

Defence Logistics Organisation
874–5w
Finance 405–6w, 661–2w

Defence Procurement Agency
874–5w

Defence Select Committee
(29.10.01) 726

Delivery Unit
862–3

Dementia
157–8w

Dementia—continued
Coventry 157–8w

Democratic Republic of Congo
Armed conflict 808w
Arms trade 807–8w
Overseas aid 690w

Denham, Rt Hon John, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 757–69, 772–3
Questions
Administration of justice 864w
Animal experiments, Crimes of violence 90w
Antisocial behaviour orders 282–3w, 450–1w, 716w, 861w
Antisocial behaviour orders, Bromley 715w
Antisocial behaviour orders, North West region 70w
Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Finance 69w
Children in care, Abuse 855–8w
Civil disorder, Bradford 91w
Closed circuit television 449w
Closed circuit television, Northampton 863w
Crime and disorder partnerships 72w
Crime prevention, Sports 719–20w
Crimes of violence 71–2w
Crimes of violence, Emergency services 718–9w
Criminal Records Bureau 449–50w
Criminal Records Bureau, Voluntary organisations 280w
Data protection 851w
Data protection, Telecommunications 727–8w
Disadvantaged, Young people 899w
Domestic violence, Children 723–7w
Driving, Cellular phones 863–4w
Drugs, Worcestershire 287–8w
Dyfed Powys Police, Disciplinary proceedings 66–7w
Essex Police, Manpower 9–11
Essex Police, Special constables 718w
Fingerprints 288w
Fireworks, Sportsgrounds 450w
Football banning orders 86w
Forensic science, Training 277w
Graffiti, Prosecutions 280w
Homicide, Children 724w
Hooliganism, Sports 757–8w
Kidnapping, Children 81–2w
Lancashire Constabulary 283–4w
Local child curfew schemes 85–6w, 283w
Local child curfew schemes, Bromley 447w
Local child curfew schemes, Greater London 850w
Members, Correspondence 721w
Mercenaries 864w
Metropolitan Police, Housing 284–5w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 75w, 447–8w
Metropolitan Police, Parliament 850w
Metropolitan Police, Recruitment 14–5
Metropolitan Police, Security 448–9w
North Yorkshire Police, Manpower 65–6w
Northamptonshire Police, Manpower 65w
Nottinghamshire Constabulary, Finance 719w
Nuisance, Motorcycles 75–6w
Offenders, Discrimination 716–7w
Police 65w, 861w
Police, Complaints 65w
Police, Conditions of employment 277–8w
Police, Emergency calls 86w

Denham, Rt Hon John—continued
Police, Females 67–8w
Police, Firearms 215w
Police, Gatwick Airport 451w
Police, Greater London 854–5w
Police, Housing 290w
Police, Manpower 72–3w, 280w, 448w
Police, Nature conservation 289w
Police, Pensions 285–6w
Police, Per capita costs 731w
Police, Personnel management 67w
Police, Recruitment 71w
Police, Reform 448w, 864–5w
Police, Scarborough 66w
Police, South East region 68–9w
Police, Standards 720–1w
Police, Vehicles 75w
Police custody, Chorley 276w
Police stations, Essex 92w
Porton Down, Human experiments 86–7w
Proceeds of Crime Bill 2001/02 282w
Public order, Official visits 716w
Racial violence, Prosecutions 853w
Racially aggravated offences 852w
Religiously aggravated offences 447w
Road traffic offences, Fixed penalties 729–30w
Robbery 84w
Security, Regulation 849w
Sexual offences, Mentally incapacitated 739–40w
South Wales Police, Manpower 70–1w
Special constables 278w, 717w
Special constables, Manpower 278w
Speed limits, Cameras 69w, 851w, 862–3w
Sussex Police, Manpower 68w, 728–9w, 861–2w
Sussex Police, Special constables 717–8w
Tenancy agreements 81w
Terrorism 862w
Terrorism, Finance 848–9w
Theft, Cars 730–1w
Trials 87w
Voluntary work, Finance 716w
West Midlands Police, Special constables 214–5w, 450w

Dentistry
Students 33w

Departmental coordination
692w
Rural areas 733w

Departmental responsibilities
Dept for Work and Pensions 749w
Industrial health and safety 667w
Regional government 143w
Regional planning and development 1000
Taxation 378w

Deployment
Armed forces 516w, (26.10.01) 549–64, 769w

Deportation
288w
Refugees 76–7w, 500–1w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Assets 804w
Disadvantaged 866–7w
Energy 867–8w
Information officers 261–2w
Manpower 356w, 359w
Ministerial policy advisors 261–2w
Operating costs 488–90w
Press releases 265w
Public relations 594–5w
Publications 866w
Royal prerogative 357w
Select committees 182w
Terrorism 491w

Dept for Education and Skills
Buildings 462–3w, 903w
Construction 461–2w
Disadvantaged 902w
Energy 773w
Holocaust Memorial Day 713–4w
Press releases 255w
Retirement 474w
Royal prerogative 328w
Select committees 473–4w

Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Aviation 27w
Buildings 26w, 543w
Correspondence 365w
Disadvantaged 359w
Energy 593w
Manpower 26–7w
Parliamentary questions 365w
Pay 25w, 364w
Planning 165w
Press releases 547w
Public expenditure 364w
Royal prerogative 172w
Visits abroad 27w

Dept for International Development
Assets 690w
Press releases 869w
Select committees 771w

Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
292–3w
Assets 680w
Civil service agencies 223w
Disadvantaged 390–2w
Disclosure of information 96–7w
Energy 907w
Ministerial policy advisors 394w, 909w
Non-departmental public bodies 223–4w
Pay 227w
Press releases 198w, 224–5w, 394w
Private finance initiative 227w
Royal prerogative 234w

Dept for Work and Pensions
Buildings 835–8w
Construction 340w
Departmental responsibilities 749w
Disadvantaged 337–8w
Manpower 840–3w
Pay 338–9w
Press releases 179w, 522w
Public expenditure 53w, 843–4w
Publicity 525w
Retirement 338w, 847w
Royal prerogative 243w

Dept of Health
Disadvantaged 350w
Interior design 349w
Press releases 159w

Dept of Trade and Industry
Assets 701w
Aviation 14w
Computers 694–5w
Correspondence 141w
Disadvantaged 415–6w
Energy 780w
Manpower 140–1w
Orders and regulations 581–2w
Parliamentary questions 141w
Pay 138–40w
Press releases 137w
Public expenditure 13–4w
Secondment 415w
Visits abroad 136w

Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Select Committee
(31.10.01) 975

Derelict land
Housing 794–5w
Tax credit 376w, 627w

Detainees
Immigration 81w
Refugees 76w, 284w, 333–6w

Detention and training orders
85w

Developing countries
Coffee 738w
Corruption 301–2w
Debts 297–9w, (01.11.01) 319–60wh, 868–9w
Disease control 296–7w
Drugs 264–6, 705–6w, 771w
EC external trade 495w
Education 300w
Maternal mortality 269–70
Politics and government 301w
Trade agreements 771–2w

Devon
Health authorities 829–30w
Radio 358w

Dhanda, Mr Parmjit
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Television, Sports (24.10.01) 114–8wh, 120wh

Diamonds
811w

Diego Garcia
606w

Diesel fuel
Storage 369w

Dioxins
Incinerators 166w, 918w

Diplomatic service
Afghanistan 910w

Dir96/48/EC
192w

Dir2000/53/EC
992–3

Dir2001/16/EC
192w

Director of Public Prosecutions
see Crown Prosecution Service

Directors
Disabled 653w
NHS trusts 653w
Pay 374w

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Questions
179w

Disabled
Civil servants 870
Directors 653w
Employment 179w, 750w
Human rights 177w
Social security benefits 645–6w
Teachers 460w

Disabled person's tax credit
206w

Disadvantaged
Bank services 204w
Church schools 40w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 866–7w
Dept for Education and Skills 902w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 359w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 390–2w
Dept for Work and Pensions 337–8w
Dept of Health 350w

Disadvantaged—continued
Dept of Trade and Industry 415–6w
Ministry of Defence 515–6w
Young people 709–10w, 899w

Disciplinary proceedings
Dyfed Powys Police 66–7w

Discipline
Schools 329w

Discrimination
Employment 584w, 775w
Offenders 716–7w

Disease control
Bovine tuberculosis 409w
Developing countries 296–7w
Foot and mouth disease 163–4w, 167w, 265–70w, 366–9w, 538–9w, 733–5w, 805–6w, 915w
Infectious diseases 892w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 342–3w

Diseases
Crops 536w
Trees 362–3w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Divorce (Religious Marriages) Bill, 1R (23.10.01) 146–8
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 559
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1126, 1129, 1141, 1144, 1147–8, 1150–4, 1171–5
Legalisation of Cannabis Bill, 2R adjourned (26.10.01) 600
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 580, 592
Private Members' bills, Points of order (02.11.01) 1114
Questions
Banks, Turkey 8w
Crown Prosecution Service, Racial discrimination 371w
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 285w
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, Prosecutions 286w
Extradition 282w
Immigrants 285w
Insurance, Accidents 201–2w
Judges, Official cars 528w
Legal profession, Competition 697w
Northern Cyprus, Proceeds of crime 314w
Northern line 191w
Planning permission 222w
Portcullis House 401w
Proscribed organisations 118w, 616w
Terrorism 862w
Terrorism, Finance 205w, 377w
Thameslink railway line 222–3w

Distributive trade
Newspaper press 779w

Divorce (Religious Marriages) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (23.10.01) 146–8
2R* (26.10.01) 600

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 563
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 542, 584–7
Questions
Army, Manpower 511w
Higher education, Student numbers 252w
Police, Manpower 72w
Refugees, Voucher schemes 3–4

Doctors
Retirement 551–2w

Dodds, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 974–5
Questions
Maghaberry Prison 807w

Dogs
Bye laws 411–2w, 917w

Domestic violence
410
Children 351w, 649–50w, 723–7w

Domestic wastes
Recycling 167–9w, 364w, 534–5w

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey M
Questions
Bombs 770w
Surgery, Waiting lists 894w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Data protection (31.10.01) 304–6wh, 308–10wh

Dorset
Endometriosis 654w
Schools 872–3

Double jeopardy
13–4

Double taxation
802w

Doughty, Sue
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 455
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1085–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 209–12wh, 215wh, 222wh
Questions
Livestock, Exports 735–6w

Dredging
Crown Estate Commissioners 444–5w

Drew, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 28
Food, EC action (25.10.01) 500, 506–8, 515
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1125, 1133–7, 1141
Inland waterways, Cotswold Hills (01.11.01) 1106–9, 1112
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 71wh
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 198w
Audit 63w
British Waterways Board, Finance 259w
Care Direct, South West region 32w
Countryside stewardship scheme, Organic farming 25w
Debts 639w
Dentistry, Students 33w
Driving, Cellular phones 194–5w, 863–4w
Embassies, Bombings 434w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 538w
Genetics, Insurance 162–3w
Health visitors, Professional organisations 150w
Home care services, Fees and charges 32w
Home improvement agencies 104w, 387w
Housing, Rural areas 426–7w
Indonesia, Human rights 436–7w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 33w

Drew, Mr David—continued
Magnetic resonance imagers, Gloucestershire 150w
Monetary compensatory amounts 270w
NHS, Private sector 32w
Nigeria 437w
Paddington Rail Accident Inquiry 707w
Pakistan, Religious freedom 810w
Personal injury 707–8w
Planning, Councillors' interests 103w
Planning permission, Stroud 102–3w
Plant power 170w
Primary care trusts 152w
Railtrack, Finance 93w
Rural areas, Housing 272w
SERCO, Ministry of Defence 109–12w
Sudan, Armed conflict 434–6w
Sudan, Human rights 434–6w
Sudan, International assistance 434–5w
Sudan, Refugees 434w
Sudan, Religious freedom 435w
Supported housing 104–5w
Taxation, Local exchange and trading schemes 58–9w
Travel to interview scheme 835–6w
VAT, Rescue services 59w
Victim support schemes 213w

Driving
Armed forces 321–2w, 661w
Cellular phones 194–5w, 863–4w

Driving instruction
Armed forces 665w

Driving Standards Agency
429w

Drown, Ms Julia
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1101
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 330–3wh, 338wh
Questions
Common agricultural policy 916w
Developing countries, Maternal mortality 269
Maternity services 341–2w

Drug Abstinence Order (Responsible Officer) (No 2) Order 2001
Debates etc.
(23.10.01) 253

Drug prevention schemes
66w

Drugs
Anthrax 5w, 114w
Armed forces 663–4w
Crime 73–4w, 598w
Developing countries 264–6, 705–6w, 771w
Misuse 69w, 287w, 308w
Multiple sclerosis 420w
Prisons 730w
Rationing 273
Sports 183–4w
Trade agreements 317w
Worcestershire 287–8w
Young people 336–7w

Dudley
Magistrates' courts 399–400w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 158–9, 161
Questions
Business questions 1008
Extradition 281–2w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 745–6

Duncan, Mr Peter
Questions
Business questions 415–6
Customs and Excise, Shetland 444w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 269–70w
Merchant shipping, Training 680w
Zimbabwe, Land 911w

Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Questions
European Convention on Human Rights, Terrorism 278–9
Weapons, Northern Ireland 274–5

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Questions
Aer Lingus 386w
Air routes, Northern Ireland 476w
Airport tax 106–7w
Aviation, Government assistance 225–6w
Aviation, Security 226w
Belfast City Airport 428–9w
Business questions 1010
Heathrow Airport, Night flying 385–6w
Heathrow Airport, Planning permission 233w
National Air Traffic Services 428w
Regional airports 385w, 428w
Regional airports, Landing rights 476w

Dyfed Powys Police
Disciplinary proceedings 66–7w

Dystonia
Research 28–9w

Eagle, Angela, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Refugees (24.10.01) 100wh, 102wh, 104wh, 107–13wh
Questions
Aviation, Security 290–1w
Computers, Home Office 729w
Deportation 288w
Detention and training orders 85w
Entry clearances 499w
Entry clearances, Pakistan 75w
Extradition 279–80w
Holocaust Memorial Day, Home Office 853w
Illegal immigrants, Arrests 615–6w
Immigrants 285w, 612w
Immigrants, Vetting 277w
Immigration, Administrative delays 616–7w
Immigration, Detainees 81w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Passports 72–3w, 276–7w
Members, Correspondence 75w, 213w, 721w
Passports 90–1w
Proscribed organisations 616w
Race Relations Act 1976 291w
Refugees 279w, 501w
Refugees, Administrative delays 284w
Refugees, Afghanistan 452w, 608–10w
Refugees, Algeria 73w
Refugees, Appeals 335w
Refugees, Arab states 278–9w
Refugees, Children in care 853w
Refugees, Deportation 76–7w, 500–1w
Refugees, Detainees 76w, 284w, 333–6w
Refugees, Employment 7–8, 333w
Refugees, Finance 334w
Refugees, HIV infection 611–2w
Refugees, Immigration rules 85–6w
Refugees, Legal opinion 76w
Refugees, Liverpool 611w
Refugees, Misrepresentation 617w
Refugees, Palestinians 74w

Eagle, Angela—continued
Refugees, Qualifications 216w
Refugees, Spelthorne 611w
Refugees, Voucher schemes 333–5w, 729w
Work permits 331–2w
Work permits, Information technology 332w
Work permits, Overseas students 849w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 615w

Eagle, Maria, Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions
Questions
Disabled, Employment 179w, 750w
Disabled, Human rights 177w
Invalid care allowances 440w
Invalid care allowances, Appeals 55–7w
Mobility allowance 178–9w
Motability Finance 524w
Social security benefits, Medical examinations 53w

Ear tagging
Sheep 545–6w

Early retirement
Home Office 211–2w

Earthquakes
India 296w

East Anglia
Road works 795w

East coast railway line
571w, 573w
Franchises 100w
Standards 191–2w

East Lothian
Social security benefits 246–7w

East Midlands
Cereals 360–1w

East Midlands Airport
Night flying 429w

East Riding
Class sizes 711–2w
Teachers 622w

East Sussex
Education 41w
Empty property 482w
Flood control 362w, 542w
Railway stations 478w
Railways (31.10.01) 295–303wh

Eastern region
Manufacturing industries 985–6

EC action
Aviation 483w
Financial services 800w
Food (25.10.01) 499–518
Industrial health and safety 430–1w
Taxation 745w
Terrorism 599w

EC Agriculture Council
365–6w

EC aid
Natural disasters 118w, 205w

EC budget
639–40w

EC common foreign and security policy
Parliamentary scrutiny 604w

EC countries
Medical treatments 419–20w, 894–5w
Rapid deployment forces 512w
Taxation 206w

EC enlargement
746–7

EC external relations
Burma 258w
Mediterranean region 602w

EC external trade
Developing countries 495w

EC Finance Council
260–1w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
432–3w

EC grants and loans
Cornwall 877–8

EC law
Motor vehicles 137w, 587–8w, 992–3
Packaging 176w, 413–4w
Railways 192w, 684w
Temporary employment 774w
Water 917w

EC transport policy
97w

Economic and monetary union
373w, 520–1w, 640w, 885w

Economic situation
640–1w
Wales 492w

Edmonton
Incinerators 593w, 917–8w

Education
327w
Developing countries 300w
East Sussex 41w
Finance 328–30w, 456w
Prisons 213w, 336w
Private finance initiative 398–9
Standards 395–7
Trade unions 330w
Worcestershire 464w, 531w

Educational visits
Egypt 812–3w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Schools, Transport (30.10.01) 243–8wh
Questions
Veterinary medicine 34w

Efford, Clive
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 34
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 622–3
Further education 393–4

Egypt
Educational visits 812–3w

EH101 helicopters
109–10w

Elderly
Health services 155–6w
Voluntary organisations 158–9w

Elections
Gambia 689w, 909w
Local government 475w
Mayors 97–8w, 393–4w
Northern Ireland 497–8w

Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 907–75
Questions
497w

Electric cables
13w, 795w

Electricity
411w

Electricity generation
873w
Markets 704–5w, 780–1w

Electronic equipment
Waste disposal 872w

Electronic government
45w
Treasury 641w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 645
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1053, 1075–7
Questions
East coast railway line 573w
Police, Firearms 215w
Railtrack, Finance 141
Refugees, Liverpool 611w
Terrorism 740

Email
Parliamentary procedure 221w

Embassies
Bombings 434w

Embedded Generation Working Group
778–9w

Emergencies
Planning 692w, 863–5, 870–1

Emergency calls
Police 86w

Emergency services
Crimes of violence 718–9w

Employee share ownership schemes
Privatisation 802w

Employment
Disabled 179w, 750w
Discrimination 584w, 775w
Lancashire 590–1w
Mentally ill 554w
Refugees 7–8, 333w

Employment tribunals
781w
Consignia 507w

Empty property
Council housing 223w
East Sussex 482w
NHS 308w

Endometriosis
Dorset 654w

Energy
Conservation 24w, 171w, 409w, 916w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 867–8w
Dept for Education and Skills 773w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 593w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 907w
Dept of Trade and Industry 780w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 757w
Treasury 885w
VAT 206w

Energy Policy Review
774w, 868–9

Energy supply
315w, 587w

Engineering
Climate change levy 585w, 628–9w

English Partnerships
Land 479–80w

English Sports Council
Finance 185w

English Tourism Council
265w

Ennis, Jeff
Questions
Fire services, South Yorkshire 676w

Enterprise Insight
582–3w

Entry clearances
119–33w, 437w, 499w
Appeals 337w
India 605w
Indian subcontinent 669w
Ministerial powers 910w
Pakistan 75w, 602w
Saudi Arabia 496w

Environment Agency
Somerset 738w

Environment Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee
(29.10.01) 726

Environment protection
Inner city areas 543w
Nuclear power 544–5w
Road works 576w
Taxation 444w

Equal pay
774–5w
Nottinghamshire 588w

Equitable Life Assurance Society
882w, (31.10.01) 976–84

Equitable Life Independent Inquiry
205w, 210w, 642w

Essex
Floods 912w
Police stations 92w

Essex Police
Manpower 9–11
Special constables 718w

Ethical trading initiative
263–4

Ethnic groups
Armed forces 511w
BBC 762–3w
Botswana 133w
Civil servants 861–2
Crown Prosecution Service 798–9w
Judiciary 905w
Mental health services 554–5w
Millennium Commission 598w
Small Business Service 8–9w
Treasury Solicitor's Dept 799w

EU Transport and Telecommunications Council
94–6w, 503w

Euro
Billing 508w

European Communities
see EC and EU headings

European Convention on Human Rights
Terrorism 278–9

European economic area
Surgery 309w

European fighter aircraft
Training 769w

European Police Office
Immunity from prosecution 499w

Evans, Alun
91–3w, 392w, 395w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders, North West region 70w
Local child curfew schemes 85–6w
Refugees, Detainees 76w
Special constables, Manpower 278w

Evictions
Council housing 233w

Ewing, Annabelle
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 277
Aviation, Lord Chancellor's Dept 49w
Broadband 250w
Buildings, Dept for Education and Skills 903w
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 835–8w
Buildings, Home Office 216–7w
Community development, Scotland 476–7w
Correspondence, Home Office 721–3w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 210w
Excise duties 210w
Manpower, Dept for Work and Pensions 840–3w
Manpower, Home Office 77–81w
National Bus Company, Pension funds 442–3w
Pay, Dept for Work and Pensions 338–9w
Pay, Home Office 215–6w
Police, Manpower 280w
Post offices, Scotland 502w
Public expenditure, Dept for Work and Pensions 53w, 843–4w
Public houses, Licensing 264–5w
Public houses, Noise 23w
Refugees, Qualifications 216w
Scottish Transport Group, Pension funds 210w, 442w
Select committees, Dept for Education and Skills 473–4w
Social security benefits 180w
Social security benefits, Abuse 526w
Social security benefits, Scotland 836–8w

Exchange rates
639w

Excise duties
210w
Community transport 797w
Fuels 639w
Motor vehicles 60w, 202w, 479w, 786–8w
Petrol alternatives 61w, 186w, 890w

Exercise Saif Sareea 2
511w, 876w
Food supply 766w
Ministerial statements (26.10.01) 549–64

Export controls
Arms trade 590w, 666w, 697w
Bombs 697w
Romania 6w

Export credit guarantees
774w

Exports
Beef 920–1w
Livestock 735–6w

Exservicemen
509–10w, 564w, 664w

Extracurricular activities
Allergies 40–1w

Extradition
279–82w
Northern Ireland 496w
Terrorism 753–4w

Fabricant, Michael
Questions
Air force 617
Developing countries, Drugs 265–6
Drugs, Rationing 273
EC enlargement 746–7
Ministerial policy advisors 865–6
Parliamentary data and video network 487–8w
Special constables 12
Terrorism 598–9w
Trade competitiveness 1001–2

Falkland Islands
Armed forces 518w

Fallon, Mr Michael
Questions
Bus services, Kent 188w
Crimes of violence 71–2w
Criminal proceedings, Administrative delays 50w
Health services, Refugees 143–4w
Regional assemblies, South East region 677w
Regional planning and development, Departmental responsibilities 1000
Terrorism, Registration of births deaths and marriages 400w

Family courts
Cambridgeshire 46w

Fareham
Housing (23.10.01) 254–62

Farmers
see also Agriculture
Income 367w
Supermarkets 165–6w

Farms
Plant power 917w

Females
Afghanistan 270, 601–2w
Bangladesh 493w
Mental health services 147–8w, 817–9w
Palestinians 117w
Police 67–8w
Small Business Service 8–9w

Ferries
Concessions 578w

Field, Rt Hon Frank
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 942, 955
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 484–5, 493
Questions
HMS Thetis 202w
Homicide, Children 724w
House of Commons, Working families tax credit 401w
Housing benefit, Abuse 752w
Retirement 624–5w
Stakeholder pensions 847w
Teachers, Retirement 618w

Field, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 799–803
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Magistrates' courts, Greater London (31.10.01) 259–60wh
Questions
Armed forces, Manpower 519–20w
Local government services, Fees and charges 98w, 573w
Mayors, Elections 97–8w, 393–4w
Mayors, Greater London 192w
NHS, Finance 551w

Field, Mr Mark—continued
Police, Housing 290w

Fifteen minutes rule
Rulings and statements (30.10.01) 767

Film
491w
Finance 354–5w

Financial services
EC action 800w
Trade 417w, 495w, 641w

Financial Stability Forum
641w

Fines
Taxation 746–7w

Fingerprints
288w

Fire prevention
Housing 793–4w, 796w

Fire services
South Yorkshire 676w

Firearms
Licensing 567–8w
Police 215w

Firearms (Replica Weapons) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (30.10.01) 754–6

Fires
Warehouses 105–6w, 174–5w, 388w

Fireworks
Accidents 316w
Import controls 393w
Petitions (30.10.01) 852
Retail trade (30.10.01) 228–34wh
Sportsgrounds 450w
Storage 393w, 418w, 581w, 874w

Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997
Sittings in Westminster Hall
(30.10.01) 228–34wh

Firing ranges
Otterburn 241w

Fisheries
Compensation 316w, 505–6w, 706–7w, 781w
Quotas 541w
Regional assistance (24.10.01) 131–8wh

Fitzsimons, Lorna
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 348–9, 353–4
Questions
Advisory Centre for Education 329w
Further education 394
Race Relations Act 1976 291w

Fixed penalties
Road traffic offences 729–30w

Flight, Mr Howard
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 793–7
Questions
Child Trust Fund 207–8w, 883w, 886w
Income tax 208w
Income tax, Self-assessment 208–9w
Individual savings accounts, Take-up 378w
Pension credit 525w
Pension funds 207w
Personal income 641w
Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman, Fees and charges 63w, 375w
Personal savings 380w
Railtrack, Finance 425w

Flight, Mr Howard—continued
Taxation, Departmental responsibilities 378w
Taxation, Fines 746–7w

Flint, Caroline
Debates etc.
Motorcycles, Skelmersdale (24.10.01) 387, 392
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 354–7
Students (25.10.01) 439, 451–4, 460
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 290wh
Questions
GCE A level 402–3
House of Commons, Day care 667–8w
Nuisance, Motorcycles 75–6w

Flood control
541–2w, 736–7w, 912–3w
East Sussex 362w, 542w
Greater London 736w
Heathrow Airport 199w
Housing 270w
North Yorkshire 270–1w, 914w
Water abstraction 913–4w

Floods
Braintree (30.10.01) 853–60
Essex 912w

Flook, Mr Adrian
Questions
Schools, Discipline 329w

Flynn, Paul
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1021
Questions
Agriculture, Wales 903–4w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 609–10
Business questions 425
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 11
National Assembly for Wales 904w
Pedestrians, Safety 908w
St David's Day 904w

Follett, Barbara
Debates etc.
Abandoned vehicles (22.10.01) 119–21, 126
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 679–80w
Children, Day care 373w
Monetary compensatory amounts 921–2w
Office for National Statistics, Standards 746w
Regulation of Health Care Professionals Council 891w
Southern Africa, AIDS 300w
Terrorism 611–2
Young offenders 71w

Food
EC action (25.10.01) 499–518
Labelling 419w
Pesticides 543–4w
Production 737–8w
Safety 414–5w, 543w, 550w
Terrorism 273–4w

Food Labelling Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1115–82

Food supply
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 766w

Foot and mouth disease
268–9w, 408–9w, 539–40w, 735w, 869
Chorley 368w
Compensation 269w, 272–3w, 366w, 369w, 538w, 540–1w

Foot and mouth disease—continued
Cumbria 15w, 174w, 209w, 268w, 540w, 914–6w
Disease control 163–4w, 167w, 266–70w, 366–9w, 538–9w, 733–5w, 805–6w, 915w
Herefordshire 362w
Hunting 164–5w, 270w, 737w, 805w
Inquiries 806w
Longtown 163w
Non-domestic rates 163w, 445–6w
Northumberland 164w
Somerset 735w
Throckmorton airfield 272–3w
Tourism 262–3w, 266w
Waste disposal 25w, 361w

Football
762w
Scotland 762w
Sportsgrounds 21–2w
Tax yields 627w
Television 263w
VAT 60w
World Cup 602w, 804w

Football banning orders
86w

Football Spectators Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (02.11.01) 1182

Forced labour
Treaties 302–3w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Buildings 256w
Holocaust Memorial Day 814w
Press releases 493–4w

Foreign investment in UK
417w, 698–701w, 802w

Foreign relations
Afghanistan 601w

Foreign workers
Teachers 473w
Yeovil Hospital 560–1w

Forensic science
Training 277w

Forests
738w

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (25.10.01) 419–20, 426
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1115
Football Spectators Bill, 2R order read (02.11.01) 1182
Questions
Business statements 411–3, 1005–6

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Questions
Business questions 416

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 39, 52–3, 70–3, 76, 79–86, 89, 91–3, 107–8, 114–5
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 167–73, 212–4, 234
Students (25.10.01) 434
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Aviation, Security (23.10.01) 9–12wh, 17wh, 19wh
Questions
AEA Technology, Contracts 791–3w
Airports, Security 235w
Road works 575–8w

Foster, Mr Don—continued
Road works, Environment protection 576w
Standard spending assessments 130–1

Foster, Mr Michael Jabez, (Hastings and Rye)
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 208
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 904, 906
Questions
Exservicemen 509w

Foster, Mr Michael John, (Worcester)
Questions
Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy 307w
Standard spending assessments 129–30
Sudden adult death syndrome 204–5w
Sudden adult death syndrome, Screening 307w

Foulkes, Mr George, Minister of State, Scotland Office
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 768, 774, 781, 807, 817

Fox, Dr Liam
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 657, 660–4

Franchises
Chiltern railway line 578w
East coast railway line 100w
Govia 234–5w, 478w
Railways 189w, 669w, 671w, 784w, 908w

Francois, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 945
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 177, 208, 216–8, 227
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 211wh, 215wh
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 742–3

Fraud
Individual learning accounts 618–21w, 895w

Free school meals
38–9w, 116w

Freedom of Information Act 2000
Questions
46–8w

Freight
Railways 784w

Frigates
Romania 770w

Fuels
Excise duties 639w

Further education
326w, 393–5
Finance 623w
Non-teaching staff 36w
Northumberland 328w
Pay 34–5w
Student numbers 715w
Teachers 404–5

Future large aircraft
512w, 696w

Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve
Hunting 409w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 641

Gale, Mr Roger—continued
Questions
Haine Hospital, Anthrax 653w

Galloway, Mr George
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1070–3, 1085

Gambia
Elections 689w, 909w

Gambling Review Body
378w, 407w

Gaming machines
Social clubs 763–4w

Gapes, Mike
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 298–9
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1018
Questions
Air force 617
EC enlargement 746

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1115, 1120–1, 1126–31
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 537–8, 580–4, 592
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 149
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 156–61wh, 163–4wh, 168–9wh, 175wh, 178wh
Questions
India, Earthquakes 296w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 762, 772
Refugees (29.10.01) 636

Gas supply
see Natural gas

Gatwick Airport
Police 451w

GCE A level
325w, 401–3, 709w, 896w

GCE AS level
41w

General Agreement on Trade in Services
9w, 299w
India 6w

General certificate of secondary education
Standards 773–4w

General elections
Rulings and statements (23.10.01) 145

General practitioners
Leicestershire 152–3w
Retirement 557–8w

Genetically modified organisms
Crops 176–7w, 546–7w
Maize 552–3w

Genetics
Insurance (25.10.01) 139–82wh, 162–3w

George, Andrew
Questions
Developing countries, Debts 298–9w
EC grants and loans, Cornwall 877–8
Education, Finance 328w
Incapacity benefit 178w

George, Rt Hon Bruce
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1054–6
Questions
Terrorism 612–3

Georgia
Uranium 910w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 636
Sittings in Westminster Hall
AIDS (30.10.01) 188–91wh
Questions
Racial violence, Prosecutions 606–7w
Refugees, Afghanistan 452w
Refugees, HIV infection 611–2w
Refugees, Voucher schemes 2–3

Gibb, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 195–9
Questions
Manufacturing industries 986
Refugees, Employment 8

Gibraltar
Air traffic 813w
Spain 737–9

Gibson, Dr Ian
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 715
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Breast cancer (23.10.01) 25wh, 31–2wh
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 148–51wh, 166–7wh, 174–5wh
Questions
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention 133w
Biological weapons 664w, 666w, 779w
Chemical and biological warfare 1w, 241w
Chemical and biological warfare, Military aid 113w
Developing countries, Drugs 264
GCE A level 709w
General Agreement on Trade in Services, India 6w
Human embryo experiments 416–7w
Mental health services, Standards 144–5w
Multiple sclerosis, Drugs 420w
Swaziland, Sugar 304w
Visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 136w

Gidley, Sandra
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Breast cancer (23.10.01) 26–7wh, 32–5wh, 40wh
Questions
Albania, Politics and government 603w
Antenatal care, Screening 892w
Emergencies, Planning 863–4
Hospital beds 741–2w
Interior design, Dept of Health 349w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 343–4w
Press releases, Cabinet Office 293w
Press releases, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 265w
Press releases, Dept for Education and Skills 255w
Press releases, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 547w
Press releases, Dept for International Development 869w
Press releases, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 198w
Press releases, Dept for Work and Pensions 179w
Press releases, Dept of Health 159w
Press releases, Dept of Trade and Industry 137w
Press releases, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 493–4w

Gidley, Sandra—continued
Press releases, Home Office 727w
Press releases, Lord Chancellor's Dept 201w
Press releases, Northern Ireland Office 739w
Press releases, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 182w
Press releases, Treasury 258–9w
Radiography, Vacancies 344–7w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Questions
Business questions 1009–10
National Insurance Contributions Office 882w

Gilroy, Linda
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 561
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 536–44, 583–4, 586
Questions
Africa 600w
Climate Change Convention 693w
Energy, Conservation 409w
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 511w
Joint strike fighter aircraft 514w
Nigeria 270–1
Small Business Service, Females 8–9w
Young offenders, Criminal proceedings 407

Glas Cymru
777w

Gloucestershire
M5 785–6w
Magnetic resonance imagers 150w
Social rented housing 427w

Godsiff, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Football Spectators Bill, 2R order read (02.11.01) 1182
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1067–8

GO-East
see Government Office for the East of England

Goggins, Paul
Questions
Bed and breakfast accommodation 187w

Goodman, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1059, 1087–8
Questions
Business questions 422–3
Embedded Generation Working Group 778–9w

Gosport
Armed forces 317w

Government
Annual reports 876–7

Government art collection
354w

Government departments
Disclosure of information 747w
Security 849w
Standards 373–4w, 886w

Government Office for London
Standards 45–6w

Government Office for the East Midlands
693w

Government Office for the East of England
693w

Government Office for the North West
692w

"Government Opportunities"
294w

Govia
Franchises 234–5w, 478w

Grace and favour housing
355w

Graduates
Local government 230w
Pay 532w, 890–1w

Graffiti
Prosecutions 280w

Grammar schools
Ballots 324w

Gray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Inland waterways, Cotswold Hills (01.11.01) 1106
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 157
Questions
Air force 618
Armed forces, Body armour 768–9w
Armed forces, Meat 517–8w
EH101 helicopters 109–10w
European fighter aircraft, Training 769w
Foot and mouth disease, Hunting 805w
Graffiti, Prosecutions 280w
Hawk aircraft, Procurement 767–8w
Roads, Chippenham 386–7w
Tax yields 375w
Teachers, Recruitment 44w
Work permits, Information technology 332w

Grayling, Chris
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 208, 213, 215, 234, 243
Students (25.10.01) 436, 452–6
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1043, 1050, 1062, 1086
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 204–8wh, 210wh, 212wh, 218wh, 220wh
Questions
Blenheim High School, Finance 459–60w
Central Railway 383w
Clark, Sally 210–1w
Crossrail line 228w
Diesel fuel, Storage 369w
EC enlargement 747
Education, Finance 456w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 642w
GCE AS level 41w
Greenbelt 275w
Heathrow Airport 786w
Motor vehicles, EC law 993
National Air Traffic Services 685w
Non-teaching staff, Manpower 621w
Packaging, EC law 176w
Pensions 203w
Primary education, Non-teaching staff 471w
Railtrack, Finance 222w, 396w, 425w, 670w, 782–4w
Railways, EC law 192w, 684w
Railways, Finance 229w, 475w, 784w
Railways, Freight 784w
Romania, Export controls 6w
Schools, Per capita costs 456–8w
Sexual offences, Mentally incapacitated 739–40w
Sixth form education 404
Sixth form education, Finance 903w
Special education 712–3w
Speed limits 193w

Grayling, Chris—continued
Students, Finance 900w
Teachers, Recruitment 469–70w
Teachers, Resignations 44w, 621w
Teachers, Vacancies 44w
Transport, Safety 670w

Greater London
Air routes 235w, (31.10.01) 273–94wh
Community Fund 761w
Council tax 229w
Flood control 736w
Hearing impaired 573w
Local child curfew schemes 850w
Magistrates' courts (31.10.01) 251–72wh
Mayors 17w, 192w
Mental health services 647w
Police 280w, 854–5w
Road traffic control 133–6
Water supply 176w

Greater London Authority (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No 2) Order 2001
Debates etc.
(29.10.01) 726

Greater Manchester
Public transport 144

Green, Mr Damian
Questions
Education, Finance 329–30w
Education, Standards 395–7
Further education, Student numbers 715w
Individual learning accounts 708–9w
Learning and skills councils 900w
Literacy, Standards 472w
Schools, Finance 471w
Special education 468–9w
Students, Finance 41–2w, 116–7w
Teachers, Recruitment 469–70w

Green, Matthew
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 233
Students (25.10.01) 456

Greenbelt
275w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 33–4
Questions
Amateur Rowing Association 184–5w
English Sports Council, Finance 185w
Space for sport and arts programme 22w
Television, Football 263w

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 783, 790–2, 797–9, 805, 808, 820, 823, 831, 834–6, 838–44
Sovereignty, Petitions (23.10.01) 253
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Refugees (24.10.01) 106–7wh
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders 282–3w, 450–1w, 861w
Closed circuit television 6
Criminal law, Corruption 280w
Extradition 280–1w
Fireworks, Sportsgrounds 450w
Home detention curfews 283w, 332–3w
Local child curfew schemes 283w
Ministerial policy advisors, Home Office 211–2w
Prisoners, Rehabilitation 212–3w
Probation officers, Manpower 853–4w
Proceeds of Crime Bill 2001/02 282w

Griffiths, Jane
Debates etc.
Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill, 1R (24.10.01) 321–3
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 14–5w
Armed forces, Telecommunications 619–20
Police, Females 67–8w
Police, Pensions 285–6w
Sports, Mass media 185w

Griffiths, Nigel, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 89–92wh
Questions
Arms trade, Export controls 590w, 697w
Arms trade, Sri Lanka 135–6w
Billing 589w
Billing, Euro 508w
Bombs, Export controls 697w
Drugs, Developing countries 705–6w
Enterprise Insight 582–3w
Export credit guarantees 774w
Fisheries, Compensation 316w, 505–6w, 706–7w
Foreign investment in UK 698–701w
General Agreement on Trade in Services 9w
Multinational companies 779w
Overseas trade 779–80w
Small Business Service 583w, 986–8
Small Business Service, Bassetlaw 316w
Small Business Service, Chorley 701–2w
Small Business Service, Females 8–9w
Small businesses 777w
Small businesses, Closed circuit television 501w
Small businesses, Finance 7w, 583–4w
SMART awards 501–2w
Sole traders 775w
Trade competitiveness 1001–2
Uranium, Import controls 588w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 473
Questions
Housing, Fire prevention 796w
Peace keeping operations 513w

Grogan, Mr John
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 562
Questions
Football, World Cup 804w
Railways, Franchises 908w

Guardianship
648w

Gulf War
see Iraq-Kuwait conflict

Gurkhas
4–5w, 510–1w

Hackney Borough Council
Standards 905–6w

Haemophilia
Medical treatments 891w

Hague, Rt Hon William
Questions
Armed forces, Human rights 518–9w
Armed forces, Racial discrimination 403–4w
Military bases, Cyprus 566w

Hain, Rt Hon Peter, Minister for Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 600w
Baltic states 433w
Council of Ministers 808–10w
Council of Ministers, Scottish Executive 117w
Developing countries, EC external trade 495w
Diamonds 811w
EC common foreign and security policy, Parliamentary scrutiny 604w
EC enlargement 746–7
EC Foreign Affairs Council 432–3w
Gibraltar, Air traffic 813w
Gibraltar, Spain 737–9
Holocaust Memorial Day, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 814w
International Criminal Court 603w
Natural disasters, EC aid 118w
Northern Cyprus, Proceeds of crime 314w
Racial discrimination, Conferences 811–2w
Republic of Ireland, Terrorism 135w
Terrorism 747–9
Trade, Financial services 495w
Treaty of Nice 604w
Turkey, Sanctions 16–7w
UN Security Council 256–7w

Haine Hospital
Anthrax 653w

Hall, Mr Mike
Questions
Transport 189w

Hall, Patrick
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 277
Developing countries, Corruption 301–2w

Hammond, Mr Philip
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 71–4wh, 78wh, 86–9wh
Questions
Aggregates levy 629w
Climate change levy 584w
Foreign investment in UK 698w, 700–1w
NHS, Empty property 308w
Small Business Service 988

Hampshire
Ambulance services 652–3w
Police (02.11.01) 1183–90
Rapid transit systems 487w

Hancock, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 40–1, 44–5, 54, 57–9, 62–3, 65
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1018, 1068–70
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 623, 876w
Aviation, Security 290–1w
Chinook helicopters, Computer software 769w
Frigates, Romania 770w
HMS Ocean 661w
Immigration, Detainees 81w
Institutional care 144w
Institutional care, Standards 814w
Kidnapping, Children 50–3w, 81–2w
Railtrack, Finance 424–5w
Schools, Standards 901–2w
Upholder class submarines, Canada 659w

Harbours Act 1964
Questions
686w

Hare coursing
(29.10.01) 727–34

Haringey
Social security benefits 247–8w

Harman, Rt Hon Harriet, Solicitor-General
Questions
Brazil 446–7w
Children in care, Abuse 370w
Crime, Victims 408–10
Crown Prosecution Service 370–1w
Crown Prosecution Service, Ethnic groups 798–9w
Crown Prosecution Service, Racial discrimination 371w
Domestic violence 410
Ethnic groups, Treasury Solicitor's Dept 799w
Paddington Rail Accident Inquiry 707w
Prosecutions 370–2w
Racial violence, Prosecutions 491–2w, 606–7w
Young offenders, Criminal proceedings 407–8

Harrier aircraft
Manpower 405w

Harris, Dr Evan
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 657, 667–71
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 353, 368, 377
Sittings in Westminster Hall
AIDS (30.10.01) 191–6wh, 198wh
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 141wh, 147wh, 158wh, 160wh, 165–73wh, 181–2wh
Questions
Business questions 426
Medical treatments, EC countries 894–5w
Students, Finance 895–6w

Harris, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 766, 807, 832–5

Harvey, Nick
Questions
"Communications White Paper" 263w
Public expenditure 62–3w
Radio 250–1w, 407w

Haskins Task Force
see Better Regulation Task Force

Havard, Mr Dai
Questions
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Blood transfusion services 658w

Hawk aircraft
India 626
Procurement 767–8w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 825–6
Questions
Drugs, Crime 73–4w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 272

Hazardous materials
Consignia 508w

Heald, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 158

Heald, Mr Oliver*—*continued
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 141wh, 150wh, 158wh, 163wh, 173–6wh, 179wh, 181wh
Questions
Guardianship 648w
Hospital beds 349w
Independent Case Examiner for the Child Support Agency, Standards 180–1w
Maintenance, Children 46w
Mental health 647–8w
Mental health, NHS Direct 555–6w
Mental health services 555–6w, 647w, 819w
Mental health services, Community care 152w, 828w
Mental health services, Ethnic groups 554–5w
Mental health services, Expenditure 558w
Mental health services, Females 147–8w, 817–9w
Mental health services, Greater London 647w
Mental health services, Recruitment 742w
Mental health services, Standards 146w
Mental health services, Vacancies 816–7w
Mental health services, Young people 146–8w
Mental patients 146–7w
Mentally ill, Employment 554w
Mentally ill, Hospital beds 146w, 556w
Mentally ill, Prisoners 828–9w
National Institute for Mental Health, Finance 150w
NHS, Finance 741w
NHS, Secretarial staff 159w
Schizophrenia, Medical treatments 308–9w
Suicide 147w

Healey, John, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Education and Skills
Questions
Advisory Centre for Education 329w
Community development project, Information technology 773w
Computers within reach programme 713w
Construction Industry Training Board 115–6w
Education, Private finance initiative 398–9
Education, Trade unions 330w
Further education 326w, 393–5
Individual learning accounts 619–20w, 708–9w, 772w
Individual learning accounts, Fraud 618–21w, 895w
Literacy 38w, 473w
Primary education, Standards 328–9w

Health (Air Travellers) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (31.10.01) 881–3

Health authorities
29w
Devon 829–30w
Public appointments 420w
Somerset 829–30w

Health education
Sex 153–4w

Health hazards
Armed forces 879w
Cellular phones 154w

Health services
Armed forces 5w
Elderly 155–6w
Neurology 156w
Refugees 143–4w
Standards 155w

Health visitors
33w
Professional organisations 150w

Hearing aids
138w, 559–60w, 649w

Hearing impaired
Greater London 573w
Legal profession 424w
Local government services 572w
Public telephones 502–3w

Heart diseases
Jarrow 740–1w
Medical treatments 553w

Heath, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 29
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 210–1
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 793
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 149wh, 159–60wh
Questions
Business questions 420
Chemical and biological warfare 519w
Foot and mouth disease, Somerset 735w
Russia, NATO enlargement 741–2

Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 179–81
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 890–7
Questions
Associated Newspapers, Defamation 502w
European Police Office, Immunity from prosecution 499w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 267–8w
Racial violence, Prosecutions 491–2w

Heathrow Airport
786–7w
Flood control 199w
Landing rights 175w
Night flying 385–6w
Planning permission 233w

Hedges and ditches
103w

Helicopters
Sierra Leone 567w

Hemel Hempstead Hospital
Maternity services 648–9w

Hemp
Argentina 691w

Henderson, Mr Ivan
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 166

Hendrick, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1082
Questions
Developing countries, Disease control 296–7w
Railtrack, Finance 195–7w

Hendry, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 45–6, 54–7, 67
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Railways, East Sussex (31.10.01) 296–7wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 138–9

Hendry, Mr Charles—continued
Ambulance services, Sussex 651–2w
Business questions 420–1
Education, East Sussex 41w
Empty property, East Sussex 482w
Flood control, East Sussex 362w, 542w
Gatwick Airport, Police 451w
Members, Correspondence 537–8w
National income 632–5w
Post offices, Closures 251w
Speed limits 685w
Sussex Police, Manpower 728w

Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Questions
Ballistic missile defence, USA 876w
Closed circuit television 5–6
Developing countries, Debts 868–9w
Heart diseases, Jarrow 740–1w
Hooliganism, Sports 757–8w
Institutional care, South Tyneside 891–2w
Nuclear power, Terrorism 665–6w
Teenage pregnancy 62w

Herceptin
342w

Herefordshire
Foot and mouth disease 362w

Hermon, Lady
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 365–7
Questions
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Public appointments 567w

Hertfordshire
Housing 132–3, 579w
Social security benefits 245–6w

Hexford, Stephen
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 773, 797–800, 814
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 333, 337, 359, 367–9
Questions
RAF Training Group, Standards 237w

Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 988–90
Assets, Dept of Trade and Industry 701w
Associated Newspapers, Defamation 502w
Aviation, Dept of Trade and Industry 14w
Better Regulation Task Force 874w
Biological weapons 779w
Business, Higher education 775w
Competition, North West region 777w
Computers, Dept of Trade and Industry 694–5w
Consignia, Hazardous materials 508w
Correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 141w
Disadvantaged, Dept of Trade and Industry 415–6w
Electricity generation 873w
Employment, Discrimination 775w
Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 780w
Energy supply 587w
Equal pay 774–5w
Fisheries, Compensation 706–7w, 781w
Foreign investment in UK 417w
Glas Cymru 777w
Human embryo experiments 416–7w
Ilisu dam 10w, 251w
Ineos Chlor 872–3w
Institute of Management 416w

Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia—continued
Manpower, Dept of Trade and Industry 140–1w
Manufacturing industries 776w, 778w, 986
Manufacturing industries, Eastern region 985–6
Motor vehicles, EC law 137w, 587–8w
Newspaper press, Distributive trade 779w
Orders and regulations 872w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Trade and Industry 581–2w
Pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 138–40w
Post offices, Bank services 695w
Post offices, Closures 706w
Press releases, Dept of Trade and Industry 137w
Public expenditure, Dept of Trade and Industry 13–4w
Railtrack, Finance 9w
Regional development agencies 694w
Regional planning and development, Departmental responsibilities 1000
Secondment, Dept of Trade and Industry 415w
Textiles 777w
Textiles, Climate change levy 137–8w
Trade, Financial services 417w
Visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 136w
Waste management, Construction 414w
Wind power 507w

Higher education
Business 775w
Research 42–3w, 326w, 530–1w
Student numbers 252–3w, 900w
Student wastage 253–4w
Teachers 404–5

Highlands of Scotland
Social security benefits 749w

Hijacking
Stansted Airport 452w

Hill farming
548w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Questions
NHS trusts, Directors 653w

Hip replacements
Leicestershire 309w

HIV infection
Africa 300–1w
Botswana 304w
China 689w
Namibia 304w
Refugees 611–2w

HM Chief Inspector of Schools
see Office for Standards in Education

HM Customs and Excise
see Customs and Excise

HM Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate
see Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate

HMS Ocean
661w, 879w

HMS Thetis
202w

Hoban, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 944, 949–50
Housing, Fareham (23.10.01) 254–7, 259–60

Hoban, Mr Mark—continued
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 347–9wh
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 211wh
Questions
Business questions 425–6
Railtrack, Finance 9w, 93–4w, 195w, 398w, 426w, 572w, 574w
Railways, Standards 398w
Schools 623w
Schools, Admissions 623w
Schools, Finance 623w
Teachers, Working hours 324w

Hodge, Margaret, Minister of State for Universities, Dept for Education and Skills
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 433–40, 442–3, 465–8
Questions
Agriculture, Student numbers 594w
Alternative energy, Training 35w
Anglia Polytechnic University, Admissions 529–30w
Further education 326w
Further education, Non-teaching staff 36w
Further education, Northumberland 328w
Further education, Pay 34–5w
Further education, Teachers 404–5
Graduates, Pay 532w
Higher education, Research 42–3w, 326w, 530–1w
Higher education, Student numbers 252–3w, 900w
Higher education, Student wastage 253–4w
Learning and Skills Council for England 35w
Learning and skills councils 254–5w, 325w, 531w
Sixth form education 403–4
Sixth form education, Finance 41w
Students, Fees and charges 255w, 529w
Students, Finance 41–2w, 116–7w, 324–5w, 895–6w, 900w
Veterinary medicine 34w

Hoey, Miss Kate
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 638
Questions
Hearing impaired, Greater London 573w
Legal profession, Hearing impaired 424w
Local government services, Hearing impaired 572w
Public telephones, Hearing impaired 502–3w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 295
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 760
Questions
Business questions 1011
Terrorism 748

Holocaust Memorial Day
Dept for Education and Skills 713–4w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 814w
Home Office 853w

Home care services
Fees and charges 32w, 155–6w

Home detention curfews
82–4w, 283w, 332–3w

Home energy efficiency scheme
169–70w

Home improvement agencies
104w, 387w

Home Office
Buildings 87–90w, 216–7w
Computers 729w
Construction 218–9w
Correspondence 721–3w
Early retirement 211–2w
Holocaust Memorial Day 853w
Manpower 77–81w
Ministerial policy advisors 211–2w
Parliamentary questions 721–3w
Pay 215–6w
Press 854w
Press releases 727w
Private finance initiative 288–9w
Sick leave 211–2w

Homelessness
100w, 223w

Homelessness Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 39–118

Homicide
Children 724w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Questions
EC Agriculture Council 365–6w
EC Finance Council 260–1w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 432–3w
EU Transport and Telecommunications Council 94–6w, 503w

Hooliganism
Sports 757–8w

Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey, Secretary of State for Defence
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1014–25, 1027, 1029
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 114w, 508–10w, 621–4, 662–4w, 767w, 876–7w
Afghanistan, Chemical and biological warfare 663w
Afghanistan, Uranium 241w, 877w
Air force 616–8
Armed forces, Deployment 769w
Armed forces, Health services 5w
Armed forces, Pensions 113w
Ballistic missile defence 875w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 609–11, 620–1, 766w, 875–6w
Bombs 770w
Chemical and biological warfare 1w, 241w
Chemical and biological warfare, Military aid 113w
Chemical and biological warfare, Vaccination 881w
Defence capabilities initiative 566–7w
Defence equipment, Procurement 513–4w
Defence Logistics Organisation 874–5w
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 511w
Exercise Saif Sareea 2, Food supply 766w
Joint strike fighter aircraft 514w, 662w
National security, USA 242w, 875w
Peace keeping operations 513w
Rapid deployment forces, EC countries 512w
Technology readiness and risk assessment programme 663w, 766w
Terrorism 509w, 511w, 611–5
Tungsten 518w

Hope, Phil
Questions
Prisons, Jobclubs 74w

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 457–60

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin—continued
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 76–80wh, 86wh

Horam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1043–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Magistrates' courts, Greater London (31.10.01) 254wh, 260wh, 265wh
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 208–9wh
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders, Bromley 715w
Local child curfew schemes, Bromley 447w
Metropolitan Police, Recruitment 15

Hospital beds
155w, 310–1w, 349w, 741–2w, 893w
Mentally ill 146w, 556w
Newcastle upon Tyne 655–8w
Suffolk 875
Worcestershire 814–5w

Hospitals
Kent (30.10.01) 235–42wh
Private finance initiative 558w
Waiting lists 562w, 650–1w, 820–5w
Wales 402w

House of Commons
Day care 667–8w
Working families tax credit 401w

House of Commons Commission
866w

Housing
Armed forces 320w, 514w, 563w
Capital investment 236w
Chorley 479–80w
Construction 484w
Derelict land 794–5w
Fareham (23.10.01) 254–62
Fire prevention 793–4w, 796w
Flood control 270w
Hertfordshire 132–3, 579w
Lancashire 234w
Metropolitan Police 284–5w
Police 290w
Rural areas 272w, 426–7w
Standards 794w
Stoke on Trent 871w
VAT 61w

Housing benefit
Abuse 752w
Databases 242w
Young people 440w

Housing improvement
Tax allowances 60w

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Questions
Personal savings 642w
Productivity 445w, 642w
Public expenditure 641w
Tax yields 445w
Trade competitiveness 642w
Unemployment 642w

Howarth, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 153–4

Howarth, Mr George
Debates etc.
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 313
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 878
Regional government 128–9

Howarth, Mr George—continued
Terrorism 740

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 557
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 903–6
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1017, 1042, 1056–9
Questions
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 879w
Terrorism 612

Howells, Dr Kim, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Television, Sports (24.10.01) 115wh, 117–21wh
Questions
Assets, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 804w
BBC, Ethnic groups 762–3w
"Communications White Paper" 263w
Disadvantaged, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 866–7w
Energy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 867–8w
English Tourism Council 265w
Film 491w
Film, Finance 354–5w
Foot and mouth disease, Tourism 262–3w, 266w
Football, World Cup 804w
Gambling Review Body 407w
Government art collection 354w
Grace and favour housing 355w
Listed buildings 597–8w
Local broadcasting 264w
Manpower, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 356w, 359w
Millennium Commission, Ethnic groups 598w
Millennium Exhibition 407w
Museums and galleries, Attendance 760w
Museums and galleries, Fees and charges 597w
Museums and galleries, Finance 490–1w
National Lottery, Scotland 358w
National Lottery, Stoke on Trent 597w
Premier Christian Radio 866w
Press releases, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 265w
Public houses, Licensing 264–5w
Public libraries, Internet 357w
Publications, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 866w
Radio 407w
Radio, Devon 358w
Royal prerogative, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 357w
S4C, Finance 264w
Sportsmatch 357–8w
Tate Modern 596w
Television, Broadcasting programmes 357w
Television, Football 263w
Television, Licensing 358–9w, 597w
Theatre, Terrorism 356–7w
Tourism 595–6w
Written questions, Administrative delays 407w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 990
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 508–9w
Agriculture 360w
Agriculture, Diversification 273–4w
Air force 618

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay—continued
Aircraft carriers, Procurement 765w
Armed forces, Commonwealth 515–6w
Armed forces, Manpower 4w, 240–1w
Bus services, Working hours 98w
Closed circuit television 6, 449w
Commission for the New Towns, Land 99w
Employment, Lancashire 590–1w
English Partnerships, Land 479–80w
Food, Labelling 419w
Foot and mouth disease 408–9w
Foot and mouth disease, Chorley 368w
Foot and mouth disease, Tourism 262w
Gibraltar, Spain 738
Institute of Management 416w
Lancashire Constabulary 283–4w
Manufacturing industries 631–2w
Manufacturing industries, Manpower 635–7w
Nursery schools, Finance 40w
Nursery schools, Lancashire 40w
Police custody, Chorley 276w
Railways, Finance 221w
Schools, Transport 460w
Small Business Service, Chorley 701–2w
Small businesses, Finance 583w
Special constables 278w
Sports, Sponsorship 21w
Wembley Stadium 761w

Hughes, Beverley, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders 70w
Coroners 213w
Crime prevention, Young people 8–9
Home detention curfews 82–4w, 283w, 332–3w
Intensive supervision and surveillance programme 16
Metropolitan Police, Training 15–6
Parole 732w
Prisoners 854w
Prisoners, Rehabilitation 212–4w, 850–1w
Prisoners, Suicide 330–1w
Prisons 17–8, 330–1w
Prisons, Drugs 730w
Prisons, Education 213w, 336w
Prisons, Jobclubs 74w
Prisons, Manufactured goods 719w
Private finance initiative, Home Office 288–9w
Probation officers, Manpower 853–4w
Written questions, Administrative delays 331w
Young offenders 71w
Young offenders, Custodial treatment 84–5w

Hughes, Mr Kevin Michael
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1016
Questions
Industrial diseases, Compensation 999

Hughes, Simon
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 782
Refugees (29.10.01) 632–3
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Refugees (24.10.01) 96wh, 99–106wh, 111–2wh
Questions
Nuclear weapons 494–5w
Refugees, Legal opinion 76w
Religiously aggravated offences 447w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 297w
Special constables 13

Human embryo experiments
416–7w

Human experiments
Porton Down 86–7w

Human rights
Armed forces 518–9w
China 296w, 909–10w
Disabled 177w
Indonesia 314w, 436–7w
Northern Ireland 498w
Pakistan 134–5w
Sri Lanka 17–8w
Sudan 434–6w
Tibet 135w, 910w

Human Rights Act 1998
Questions
371–2w

Humble, Mrs Joan
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 653, 677, 689–92
Questions
Paddington Rail Accident Inquiry 707w

Hunting
172w
Foot and mouth disease 164–5w, 270w, 737w, 805w
Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve 409w

Hurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Floods, Braintree (30.10.01) 853–6

Hutton, Rt Hon John, Minister of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1164, 1169, 1175–82
Questions
Chiropody, Student numbers 144w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Blood transfusion services 658w
Disadvantaged, Dept of Health 350w
Doctors, Retirement 551–2w
Drugs, Misuse 308w
Dystonia, Research 28–9w
General practitioners, Leicestershire 152–3w
General practitioners, Retirement 557–8w
Health authorities 29w
Health services, Refugees 143–4w
Health visitors 33w
Health visitors, Professional organisations 150w
Heart diseases, Medical treatments 553w
Hip replacements, Leicestershire 309w
Hospital beds 349w, 741–2w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 558w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 562w, 650–1w, 820–5w
Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy 307w
Kington Hospital 309–10w
Knee replacements 832w
Leicester Royal Infirmary, Accident and emergency departments 306–7w
Leicestershire Health Authority, Finance 153w
Magnetic resonance imagers, Gloucestershire 150w
Medical treatments, EC countries 894–5w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 343–4w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, Disease control 342–3w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 154w
Midwives, Personation 553w
NHS, Empty property 308w
NHS, Finance 150–1w, 522w, 561–2w, 741w, 829–30w

Hutton, Rt Hon John—continued
NHS, Pay 893w
NHS, Private sector 32w
NHS, Secretarial staff 159w
Nottingham Health Authority, Finance 828w
Nurses, Pay 310w
Pain, Clinics 149–50w
Pharmacy, Pay 29w
Primary care trusts 152w
Radiography, Vacancies 344–7w
Regulation of Health Care Professionals Council 891w
Smallpox, Vaccination 895w
Solihull Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 151–2w
Spinal injuries 305–6w
Surgery 830w
Surgery, European economic area 309w
Surgery, Waiting lists 29w, 149w, 832–5w, 894w
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust 559w
Whittington Hospital, Private finance initiative 742w
Written questions, Administrative delays 350w
Yeovil Hospital, Foreign workers 560–1w

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy
307w

Iddon, Dr Brian
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 32
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 41, 43, 45
Legalisation of Cannabis Bill, 2R adjourned (26.10.01) 599
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 531
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 152–6wh, 166wh
Questions
Building regulations 681–4w
Gambling Review Body 407w
Kashmir 736–7
Ministerial policy advisors 866–7
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 12
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, Tribunals 286–7w

Ilisu dam
10w, 251w, 301w

Illegal immigrants
Arrests 615–6w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Questions
Industrial diseases, Compensation 999–1000

Immigrants
285w, 612w
Vetting 277w

Immigration
Administrative delays 616–7w
Detainees 81w

Immigration and Nationality Directorate
Passports 72–3w, 276–7w

Immigration rules
Refugees 85–6w

Immunity from prosecution
European Police Office 499w

Import controls
Fireworks 393w
Uranium 588w

Imports
Beef 551w
Meat 171–2w, 271–2w
Natural gas 586w

Incapacity benefit
57–8w, 178w, 338w, 440–1w
Prescriptions 349w

Incinerators
163w, 412w
Dioxins 166w, 918w
Edmonton 593w, 917–8w

Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988
Questions
744–5w

"Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take Up in 1999/2000"
524w

Income support
Institutional care 752w

Income tax
208w, 743–4w
Self-assessment 208–9w, 446w

Independent Case Examiner for the Child Support Agency
Standards 180–1w

Independent Commission on the Voting System
see Voting System Independent Commission

Independent Insurance
375–6w, 442w

India
527w
Earthquakes 296w
Entry clearances 605w
General Agreement on Trade in Services 6w
Hawk aircraft 626
Overseas aid 295–6w

Indian subcontinent
Entry clearances 669w
Work permits 332w

Individual learning accounts
327–8w, 619–20w, 708–9w, 772w
Fraud 618–21w, 895w

Individual savings accounts
Take-up 378w

Indonesia
Human rights 314w, 436–7w
UN Development Programme 18w

Industrial diseases
Compensation 775–6w, 997–1000

Industrial health and safety
Construction 232–3w
Departmental responsibilities 667w
EC action 430–1w

Industrial Training Act 1982
Questions
115w

Industrial Training (Construction Board) Order 1984 (Amendment) Order 1992
Questions
115w

Industrial wastes
Recycling 535w

Ineos Chlor
872–3w

Infant foods
Sheep meat 594w

Infectious diseases
Disease control 892w

Information officers
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 261–2w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 352w

Information technology
Community development project 773w
Customs and Excise 443w
Members 323w
Parliamentary questions 322w
Work permits 332w

Ingram, Rt Hon Adam, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2, Ministerial statements (26.10.01) 549–64
Questions
Apache AH-64 helicopter 322w, 406w
Armed forces, Cannabis 664w
Armed forces, Commonwealth 515–6w
Armed forces, Deployment 516w
Armed forces, Driving 321–2w, 661w
Armed forces, Driving instruction 665w
Armed forces, Drugs 663–4w
Armed forces, Ethnic groups 511w
Armed forces, Gosport 317w
Armed forces, Human rights 518–9w
Armed forces, Manpower 4w, 240–1w, 403w, 513w, 519–20w
Armed forces, Nationality 404–5w
Armed forces, Pensions 319w, 563w
Armed forces, Racial discrimination 403–4w
Armed forces, Recruitment 659–60w, 662w
Armed forces, Young people 512–3w
Army, Manpower 511w
Army, Northern Ireland 519w
Bombs 1–2w
Chemical and biological warfare 321w
Chinook helicopters 564–5w
Chinook helicopters, Computer software 769w
Defence, Finance 565–6w
Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Standards 110w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, RAF St Athan 660w
Defence Intelligence and Security Centre, Reviews 660–1w
Defence Logistics Organisation, Finance 405–6w, 661–2w
EH101 helicopters 109–10w
Firing ranges, Otterburn 241w
Gurkhas 4–5w, 510–1w
Harrier aircraft, Manpower 405w
HMS Ocean 661w
Macedonia, Peace keeping operations 512w
Military bases, Colchester 616
Military bases, Cyprus 566w
Navy 3w, 625–6
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 615–6
Nuclear power, Terrorism 665–6w
Plutonium 318w
Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 113w
RAF Menwith Hill, Treaties 114w
RAF Personnel Management Agency, Standards 236–7w
RAF Training Group, Standards 237w
SERCO, Ministry of Defence 109–12w
Sierra Leone, Helicopters 567w
Terrorism, Postal services 405w
Warships 2–3w, 566w
Weapons 3w

Inheritance tax
258w, 887w

Injuries
Brain 37w

Inland waterways
Cotswold Hills (01.11.01) 1106–12

Inner city areas
Environment protection 543w

Institute of Directors
416w

Institute of Management
416w

Institutional care
28w, 144w, 159–61w, 819–20w, 874–5
Closures 160–1w, 181–2w
Fees and charges 33w, 156w, 160–1w, 560w, 893w
Income support 752w
South Tyneside 891–2w
Standards 814w
Wales 350–1w

Insurance
Accidents 201–2w
Genetics (25.10.01) 139–82wh, 162–3w
Ministry of Defence 113–4w

Intensive supervision and surveillance programme
16

Interception of Communications Commissioner
Annual reports 666–7w

Interest rates
376w

Interior design
Dept of Health 349w

International Criminal Court
603w

International economic relations
276

International Monetary Fund
203–4w

Internet
Open government 322w
Public libraries 357w

Intervention Board For Agricultural Produce (Abolition) Regulations 2001
Debates etc.
(30.10.01) 852

Invalid care allowances
440w
Appeals 55–7w

Inverness
Air routes 878

Investment trusts
373w

Ipswich
By-election writs (01.11.01) 985

Iraq
Oil 118w

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
War pensions 406w

Iron and steel
Wales 903–4w

Islam
Cultural relations 19w
Registration of births deaths and marriages 528w

Isle of Wight
Roads 487w

Israel
Army 134w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 28–9
Road traffic control, Points of order (22.10.01) 38
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1039–41
Questions
Hawk aircraft, India 626

Jackson, Ms Glenda
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 292–3
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 50–1, 54, 66, 86–7
Refugees (29.10.01) 639–40
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 336, 338–40
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 336–9wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 140
Ballistic missile defence, USA 621
Refugees, Voucher schemes 3

Jackson, Helen
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 335, 344–6
Questions
Bus services, Working hours 99w, 229w
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 861–2
Medical treatments, EC countries 419–20w
Natural gas, Prices 871w
Sixth form education 403–4

Jackson, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Hare coursing (29.10.01) 727–9

Jamieson, Mr David, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Debates etc.
Motorcycles, Skelmersdale (24.10.01) 389–92
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 291–4wh
Aviation, Security (23.10.01) 16–20wh
Night flying (23.10.01) 47–51wh
Railways, East Sussex (31.10.01) 299–303wh
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 211wh, 219wh, 222wh, 224–7wh
Questions
A449 475w
Abandoned vehicles 198w
Aggregates levy 259w
Air routes, Greater London 235w
Aircraft, Air conditioning 388–9w
Aircraft, Noise 194w
Aircraft, Pollution control 787w
Airports, Landing rights 175w
Airports, Security 194w, 235w
Automatic train protection 190w
Aviation 796w
Aviation, EC action 483w
Bus services, Working hours 229w
Bypasses, Planning permission 389w
Central Railway 200w, 383w
Central Trains, Standards 229w
Channel tunnel railway line 97w, 478w
Chiltern railway line, Franchises 578w
Crossrail line 228w
Driving, Cellular phones 194–5w
East coast railway line 571w, 573w

Jamieson, Mr David—continued
East coast railway line, Franchises 100w
East coast railway line, Standards 191–2w
EC transport policy 97w
Govia, Franchises 234–5w, 478w
Heathrow Airport 786–7w
Liquefied petroleum gas 684–5w
London and Continental Railways 197–8w
London Underground, Air conditioning 227–8w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 390w
London Underground, Standards 677w
M5, Gloucestershire 785–6w
Merchant shipping, Training 680w
Motor vehicles, Carbon dioxide 908w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 479w, 786–8w
Motorways, Chelmsford 795–6w
National Air Traffic Services 477w, 685w
Northern line 191w
Nuclear fuels, Transport 669w
Pedestrians, Safety 383–5w, 476w, 480–2w, 574–5w, 679w, 788–90w, 908w
Petrol alternatives, Excise duties 186w
Port of London Authority 686w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 227w
Public transport 381–3w
Radar, Scotland 104w
Railtrack 396–7w
Railtrack, Finance 93–4w, 195w, 222w, 225w, 396–8w, 424–6w, 569w, 571–2w, 574w, 670w, 782–4w
Railway signals 380–1w
Railway stations, East Sussex 478w
Railways, Bicycles 797w
Railways, EC law 192w, 684w
Railways, Finance 221w, 226w, 229w, 475w, 568w, 784w
Railways, Franchises 189w, 671w, 908w
Railways, Freight 784w
Railways, Milton Keynes 482w
Railways, North West region 674w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 671w
Railways, Safety 483w, 571w, 785w
Railways, Standards 398w
Railways, Wales 190w, 224w, 383w
Railways, Worcester 233–4w
Rescue services, Scotland 477–8w
River Thames, Water sports 101–2w
Road traffic, Cheltenham 677–8w
Road works 136–7, 575–9w
Road works, East Anglia 795w
Road works, Environment protection 576w
Road works, North Yorkshire 193w, 369–70w
Roads, Accidents 678w
Roads, Chippenham 386–7w
Roads, Isle of Wight 487w
Roads, Noise 189–90w
Roads, Private finance initiative 193–4w
Roads, Safety 188–9w
Speed limits 188w, 193w, 477w, 685w
Strategic Rail Authority, Public appointments 200w
Thameslink railway line 222–3w
Transport, Safety 670w
Transport, Security 788w
West coast railway line, Repairs and maintenance 100w

Jarrow
Heart diseases 740–1w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 551–2
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1025–32

Jenkin, Mr Bernard*—*continued
Questions
Aircraft carriers, Procurement 767w
Armed forces, Driving instruction 665w
Armed forces, Manpower 403w
Defence capabilities initiative 566–7w
Defence equipment, Procurement 665w
Defence Intelligence and Security Centre, Reviews 660–1w
Defence Logistics Organisation, Finance 405–6w, 661–2w
Driving Standards Agency 429w
Harrier aircraft, Manpower 405w
Joint strike fighter aircraft 662w
Sierra Leone, Helicopters 567w
Technology readiness and risk assessment programme 663w
Terrorism 613–5
Terrorism, Postal services 405w

Jenkins, Mr Brian
Questions
Industrial diseases, Compensation 776w
NHS, Finance 150–1w
Nutrition 349–50w

Jenkins of Hillhead Commission
see Voting System Independent Commission

Jobcentre Plus
522w
Working conditions 523–4w

Jobcentres
Rural areas 523w

Jobclubs
Prisons 74w

Jobseeker's allowance
54w

Johnson, Alan, Minister of State for Employment Relations and Regions, Dept of Trade and Industry
Questions
Advantage West Midlands, Worcestershire 9w
Banks, Turkey 8w
Employment, Discrimination 584w
Employment tribunals 781w
Independent Insurance 442w
Manufacturing industries, Worcestershire 9w
Minimum wage 7w
Regional development agencies 137w, 249w
Regional development agencies, Manpower 418w
Regional development agencies, Public appointments 250w

Johnson, Miss Melanie, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Fireworks, Retail trade (30.10.01) 232–4wh
Questions
British Sky Broadcasting 316w
Conditions of employment 1002–4
Consumers, Protection 418–9w, 996–7
Energy supply 315w
Fireworks, Accidents 316w
Fireworks, Storage 418w, 581w
Hearing aids 138w
Legal profession, Competition 697w
Microsoft, Competition 696w, 871–2w
Motor vehicles, EC law 992–3
Motor vehicles, Prices 872w
Partnerships 696–7w
Pyramid selling 315w
Temporary employment, EC law 774w
Trade agreements, Drugs 317w

Johnson, Miss Melanie*—*continued
Trade marks, Royal family 780w, 803w

Joint strike fighter aircraft
514w, 662w

Jones, Helen M
Debates etc.
Kelly, Mary (26.10.01) 601–4, 606
Questions
Childbirth 826–7w
Court Service 754w
Employment tribunals 781w
Government Office for the North West 692w
Mental health services, Advocacy 556–8w
Mentally ill, Suicide 825–6w
Warehouses, Fires 105–6w, 174–5w, 388w

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Debates etc.
Legalisation of Cannabis Bill, 2R adjourned (26.10.01) 595–8
Students (25.10.01) 431–4
Questions
Cannabis, Lambeth 500w
Drugs, Misuse 287w
Drugs, Young people 336–7w

Jones, Mr Kevan
Questions
Amphibious vehicles, Procurement 763–4w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Arms trade 807–8w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 776w
Terrorism 511w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 165
Refugees (29.10.01) 640
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 489–91
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1096
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 139–44wh, 150wh, 157wh, 159wh
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 305w, 686w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 766w, 875w
General Agreement on Trade in Services 299w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 615
Occupational pensions 58w
Repossession orders, Rented housing 50w
Tax allowances, Housing improvement 60w
Technology readiness and risk assessment programme 766w
Treaties 812w
VAT, Housing 61w
Voting System Independent Commission 99w

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Research 805w
Food, Production 737–8w

Jones, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 461
Questions
Aviation, EC action 483w
Egypt, Educational visits 812–3w
Gambia, Elections 689w, 909w
Gibraltar, Air traffic 813w
M5, Gloucestershire 785–6w
Road traffic, Cheltenham 677–8w

Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport
Questions
Athletics 20w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 261–2w
Operating costs, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 488–90w
Public houses, Noise 23w
Public relations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 594–5w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 22–3w
Recreation spaces 23w
Sports, Mass media 185w
Television, Afghanistan 490w
Terrorism, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 491w
Wembley Stadium 19–21w

Judges
Official cars 528w

Judgments
Taxation 207w, 379w

Judiciary
Ethnic groups 905w
Public appointments 754w

Juries
Smoking 753w

Kashmir
735–7

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 156, 161, 173–9
Refugees (29.10.01) 634
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1018, 1028, 1045–7

Keeble, Ms Sally, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 43–8, 63–6, 68, 87–91, 102–9
Housing, Fareham (23.10.01) 258–62
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Regional assistance, Fisheries (24.10.01) 135–8wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 138–40, 175–6w
Bed and breakfast accommodation 187w
Blue badge scheme 680w
Bus services 187–8w
Bus services, Kent 188w
Bus services, Working hours 98–9w
Commission for the New Towns, Land 99w
Community development 235w
Community development, Scotland 476–7w
Community transport, Excise duties 797w
Council housing, Evictions 233w
Council housing, Repairs and maintenance 387w
Disadvantaged, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 390–2w
Electric cables 795w
Empty property, East Sussex 482w
English Partnerships, Land 479–80w
Ferries, Concessions 578w
Greenbelt 275w
Heathrow Airport 786w
Heathrow Airport, Flood control 199w
Heathrow Airport, Planning permission 233w
Hedges and ditches 103w
Home improvement agencies 104w, 387w
Homelessness 100w

Keeble, Ms Sally—continued
Housing, Construction 484w
Housing, Derelict land 794–5w
Housing, Hertfordshire 132–3, 579w
Housing, Lancashire 234w
Housing, Rural areas 426–7w
Housing, Standards 794w
Millennium Exhibition, Operating costs 431w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 431w
Mobile homes 103w
Multiple occupation 229–30w
Planning, Councillors' interests 103w
Planning permission 102w, 222w, 791w
Planning permission, Stroud 102–3w
Private roads 381w
Radon gas 389w
Rapid transit systems, Hampshire 487w
Regional planning and development, Yorkshire and Humberside 680–1w
Rents 189w
Right to buy 430w
Road traffic control, Southampton 236w
Road works 275–6w
Sewers 914w
Social rented housing 483–4w
Social rented housing, Gloucestershire 427w
Starter home initiative 190–1w, 484–7w, 685w, 797–8w
Supported housing 104–5w
Transport 189w
Travel, Pensioners 578w
Urban areas 101w
Urban Bus Challenge 923w
Urban Task Force 101w
Vacant land, Northampton 791w

Keetch, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 553–4
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1034–8
Questions
Air force 617–8
Armed forces, Deployment 516w
Armed forces, Pensions 113w
Baltic states 433w
Independent Insurance 375–6w
Monetary compensatory amounts 879–80
Territorial Army, Manpower 403w

Kelly, Mary
(26.10.01) 601–8

Kelly, Ruth, Economic Secretary, Treasury
Questions
Assets, Treasury 521–2w
Bank services, Disadvantaged 204w
Census 63–4w, 637–9w
Child Trust Fund 207–8w, 883w, 886w
Colorectal cancer 882–4w
Consultation papers, Treasury 377–8w
Council of Economic Advisers, Ministerial policy advisors 887w
Death, Weather 376–7w
Debts 639w
Debts, Turkey 378w
EC budget 639–40w
Economic and monetary union 373w, 520–1w, 640w, 885w
Economic situation 640–1w
Electronic government, Treasury 641w
Employment, Lancashire 590–1w
Energy, Treasury 885w
Equitable Life Assurance Society 882w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 205w, 210w, 642w
Exchange rates 639w
Financial services, EC action 800w

Kelly, Ruth—continued
Financial Stability Forum 641w
Foreign investment in UK 802w
Government departments, Disclosure of information 747w
Income tax 208w
Income tax, Self-assessment 208–9w
Independent Insurance 375–6w
Individual savings accounts, Take-up 378w
Interest rates 376w
International Monetary Fund 203–4w
Investment trusts 373w
Manufacturing industries 631–2w
Manufacturing industries, Manpower 635–7w
Manufacturing industries, Redundancy 630–1w
Minimum wage 630w
Minimum wage, West Yorkshire 629–30w
Ministerial policy advisors, Treasury 743w
Ministers, Codes of practice 747w
National income 632–5w
Natural disasters, EC aid 205w
Office for National Statistics, Standards 746w
Pay, Graduates 890–1w
Pension funds 207w
Pensioners 743w
Pensions 203w
Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman, Fees and charges 63w, 375w
Personal savings 380w, 642w
Press releases, Treasury 258–9w
Proceeds of crime 203w
Proceeds of crime, Nigeria 203w, 205w
Productivity 642w
Publications, Treasury 885–6w
Redundancy, South West region 637w
Registration of births deaths and marriages 888w
Retirement 624–5w
Royal prerogative, Treasury 207w
Secondment, Treasury 888–9w
Stocks and shares, Property 202w
Sudden adult death syndrome 204–5w
Tax credit, Derelict land 376w
Tax yields 375w
Taxation 374w
Taxation, Departmental responsibilities 378w
Teenage pregnancy 62w
Terrorism, Finance 205w, 377w, 521w
Trade, Financial services 641w
Trade competitiveness 642w
Unemployment 642w
Working families tax credit, Mortgages 376w
Working hours 204w

Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
Questions
Pakistan, Terrorism 276

Kennedy, Jane, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Extradition, Northern Ireland 496w
Firearms, Licensing 567–8w
Maghaberry Prison 807w
Press releases, Northern Ireland Office 739w
Prisoners' release, Northern Ireland 496–7w
Private finance initiative, Northern Ireland Office 340–1w
Written questions, Administrative delays 339w

Kensington and Chelsea
Social security benefits 244–5w

Kent
Bus services 188w
Hospitals (30.10.01) 235–42wh

Kenya
Land 432w

Key, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 176–7
Questions
Aggregates levy 587w, 629w, 782w
Alternative energy, Training 35w
Alternative energy, Wastes 585–6w
Arms trade, Export controls 666w
Chinook helicopters 564–5w
Climate change levy 584–5w, 628w
Climate change levy, Engineering 585w, 628–9w
Combined heat and power 704w
Electricity generation, Markets 704–5w
Energy supply 587w
Foreign investment in UK 698–700w, 802w
Natural gas, Imports 586w
Porton Down, Human experiments 86–7w
Taxation, Manufacturing industries 627w
Tidal power 702–3w
Wind power 703w

Kidnapping
Children 50–3w, 81–2w

Kidney, Mr David
Debates etc.
Health (Air Travellers) Bill, 1R (31.10.01) 881–3
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 96, 99–101
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 759–60, 776, 789
Questions
Chiropody, Student numbers 144w
Dystonia, Research 28–9w
Members, Training 221w
Pedestrians, Safety 385w, 480–2w
Prisons 18
Students, Finance 324w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 164
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1022, 1028

King, Andy
Debates etc.
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 318
Questions
Africa, Overseas aid 295w

King, Ms Oona
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 77
Refugees (29.10.01) 644
Questions
Central Africa, International assistance 274
Deportation 288w
Fingerprints 288w
Forced labour, Treaties 302–3w
Immigrants, Vetting 277w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Passports 72–3w, 276–7w
Palestinians, Females 117w
Refugees, Algeria 73w
Rents 189w
Young offenders, Criminal proceedings 407–8

Kington Hospital
309–10w

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 829–32
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 893
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Schools, Worcestershire (24.10.01) 125wh
Questions
Hearing aids 559w, 649w
Motor vehicles, EC law 137w, 587–8w, 992
USA, Ballistic missile defence 602w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Questions
Africa, HIV infection 300–1w
Business questions 1012
House of Commons, Day care 667–8w
House of Commons Commission 866w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards 6w, 865–6w

Knee replacements
832w

Knight, Rt Hon Greg
Debates etc.
Select committees, Points of order (24.10.01) 320
Questions
Government departments, Security 849w

Knight, Jim
Questions
Schools, Dorset 872–3

Kosovo
Armed conflict 604–5w
Children 298w

Labelling
Food 419w

Labour Party
873–4

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Questions
Business questions 424
Double jeopardy 13–4

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Questions
Armed forces, Manpower 513w

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 337
Questions
Air traffic control, Prestwick 806w
Automatic train protection 190w
Constituencies, Scotland 352–3w
Local broadcasting 264w
Local broadcasting, Scotland 354w
National Air Traffic Services 685w
Railtrack, Finance 670w

Lamb, Norman
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 209–11
Questions
Crown Estate Commissioners, Dredging 444–5w
Temporary employment, EC law 774w

Lambeth
Cannabis 500w

Lammy, David
Questions
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 297w
Starter home initiative 143
Waste disposal 878–9

Lancashire
Employment 590–1w
Housing 234w
Nursery schools 40w

Lancashire Constabulary
283–4w

Land
Commission for the New Towns 99w
English Partnerships 479–80w
Kenya 432w
Zimbabwe 911w

Land drainage
869–70w

Landfill tax credit scheme
626w

Landing rights
Airports 175w
Heathrow Airport 175w
Regional airports 476w

Languages
Specialist schools 896–7w

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 654, 693–6
Refugees (29.10.01) 635
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 332, 357–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Refugees (24.10.01) 93–9wh, 103wh, 105wh, 108–9wh
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 742–3

Late Payments of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998
Questions
670w

Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Questions
Committee on Standards in Public Life, Public appointments 807w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 546–7w
Monetary compensatory amounts 921–2w
Radioactive wastes, Waste management 24w

Laws, Mr David
Debates etc.
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 479
Students (25.10.01) 436, 439
Questions
Assets, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 804w
Assets, Dept for International Development 690w
Assets, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 680w
Assets, Dept of Trade and Industry 701w
Assets, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 756w
Assets, Scotland Office 691w
Assets, Treasury 521–2w
Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Finance 69w
Defence, Finance 565–6w
Disadvantaged, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 866–7w
Disadvantaged, Dept for Education and Skills 902w
Disadvantaged, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 359w
Disadvantaged, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 390–2w

Laws, Mr David—continued
Disadvantaged, Dept for Work and Pensions 337–8w
Disadvantaged, Dept of Health 350w
Disadvantaged, Dept of Trade and Industry 415–6w
Disadvantaged, Ministry of Defence 515–6w
Economic and monetary union 373w
GCE A level 896w
Government departments, Standards 373–4w
Health authorities, Somerset 829–30w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 562w, 650–1w
Investment trusts 373w
Monetary compensatory amounts 921–2w
National insurance contributions 743–4w
NHS, Finance 520w, 561–2w, 829–30w
NHS, Pay 893w
Pensioners 743w
Press, Home Office 854w
Private finance initiative, Home Office 288–9w
Private finance initiative, Northern Ireland Office 340–1w
Public finance 374w
Railtrack, Finance 399w
Roads, Standard spending assessments 198–9w
Schools, Finance 530w
Specialist schools 772–3w
Surgery 830w
Surgery, Waiting lists 832–5w
Taxation 374w
Taxation, NHS 744w
Uranium 519w
Uranium, Import controls 588w
Written questions, Administrative delays 331w, 339w, 350w, 365w, 446w, 770–1w
Yeovil Hospital, Foreign workers 560–1w

Laxton, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Fireworks, Petitions (30.10.01) 852
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Fireworks, Retail trade (30.10.01) 231wh
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 600w

Lazarowicz, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 218–20
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 835–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Fireworks, Retail trade (30.10.01) 229wh
Questions
Athletics, Scotland 758w
East coast railway line, Standards 191–2w
Energy supply 315w
Excise duties, Fuels 639w
Fireworks, Storage 874w
Mediterranean region, EC external relations 602w
Tax allowances, Training 889w

Learning and Skills Council for England
35w

Learning and skills councils
254–5w, 325w, 531w, 900w

Leeds
Magistrates 752–3w

Legal opinion
Refugees 76w

Legal profession
Competition 697w
Complaints 799–800w
Hearing impaired 424w

Legalisation of Cannabis Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R adjourned (26.10.01) 595–600

Leicester
Mayors 795w

Leicester Royal Infirmary
Accident and emergency departments 306–7w

Leicestershire
General practitioners 152–3w
Hip replacements 309w
Pre-school education 453w
Surgery 149w

Leicestershire Health Authority
Finance 153w

Lepper, Mr David
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 650
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 98, 115–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Railways, East Sussex (31.10.01) 297–8wh
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Bye laws 230–2w
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 307–8w
Office for Standards in Education, Manpower 621w

Leslie, Mr Christopher, Parliamentary Secretary Cabinet Office
Debates etc.
Equitable Life Assurance Society (31.10.01) 980–4
Questions
Better Regulation Task Force 691w, 870w
Building alterations, Cabinet Office 870–1w
Buildings, Cabinet Office 293–4w
Business, Regulation 870w
Civil Contingencies Committee 45w
Civil servants, Disabled 870
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 861–2
Civil servants, Pay 694w
Civil servants, Pensions 646w
Electronic government 45w
Emergencies, Planning 692w, 863–5
"Government Opportunities" 294w
Land drainage 869–70w
Modernising government programme 693–4w
Press releases, Cabinet Office 293w
Regulation 692w
Regulatory impact assessments 804–5w

Letwin, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 763–4, 767–77, 843
Refugees (29.10.01) 630–1
Questions
Foot and mouth disease, Hunting 737w
Refugees 4–5

Levitt, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 192–3
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 896–7, 900
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 474, 483
Questions
Bus services 188w
Farms, Plant power 917w
Hedges and ditches 103w
Local government, Ombudsman 233w
Plant power 410w

Levy, Lord
142–3w

Lewis, Mr Ivan, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Education and Skills
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Schools, Worcestershire (24.10.01) 126–30wh
Questions
Brazil 117w
Buildings, Dept for Education and Skills 462–3w, 903w
Connexions Service 327w, 405–6
Construction, Dept for Education and Skills 461–2w
Disadvantaged, Young people 709–10w
Energy, Dept for Education and Skills 773w
Free school meals 116w
Further education, Student numbers 715w
GCE A level 325w, 401–3, 709w, 896w
GCE AS level 41w
General certificate of secondary education, Standards 773–4w
Press releases, Dept for Education and Skills 255w
Retirement, Dept for Education and Skills 474w
School leaving, Chelmsford 710–1w
Schools, Security 896w
Select committees, Dept for Education and Skills 473–4w
Sixth form education, Curriculum 326w
Sixth form education, Finance 36w, 463w, 773w, 903w
Sixth form education, Worcestershire 711w

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 560–1
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1128
Police, Hampshire (02.11.01) 1183–6, 1189–90
Refugees (29.10.01) 643
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 894
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1020–3
Questions
Ballistic missile defence, USA 272–3
Business questions 419
Class sizes 399–400
Foot and mouth disease 268–9w
Ministerial policy advisors 865–6
Starter home initiative 143–4
Terrorism 611–2

Libyan Arab Republic
St Christopher and Nevis 118–9w

Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen, Secretary of State for Scotland
Questions
Air traffic control, Prestwick 806w
Assets, Scotland Office 691w
Constituencies, Scotland 352–4w, 807w
Local broadcasting, Scotland 354w

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Questions
Chemical and biological warfare 321w
Defence equipment, Procurement 659w
Environment Agency, Somerset 738w
Firing ranges, Otterburn 241w
Flood control 912–3w
Natural disasters, EC aid 118w, 205w

Lidington, Mr David
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 645

Lidington, Mr David—continued
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 325–30wh
Questions
Aggregates levy 206w, 259w
Central Railway 200w
Chiltern railway line, Franchises 578w
Climate change levy, Manufacturing industries 443w
Constituencies, Scotland 353–4w
Consultation papers, Treasury 377–8w
Customs and Excise, Complaints 379w
Customs and Excise, Finance 378–9w
Customs and Excise, Information technology 443w
Customs and Excise, Manpower 444w
Customs and Excise, Pornography 444w
Customs and Excise, Property 625w
Customs and Excise, Recruitment 443–4w
Customs and Excise, Telephone services 443w
Foot and mouth disease, Hunting 164–5w
Smuggling 744w
Smuggling, Motor vehicles 625–6w
Smuggling, Tobacco 380w
Tax allowances, Sports 625w
Tax evasion 380w
Taxation, Advisory services 207w
Taxation, EC countries 206w
Taxation, Judgments 207w, 379w
Taxation, Research 748w
VAT 64–5w, 209–10w, 625w
VAT, Energy 206w
VAT, Football 60w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 642
Questions
Hemel Hempstead Hospital, Maternity services 648–9w
Housing, Hertfordshire 133
Railtrack, Finance 571w
Stakeholder pensions 179–80w
Thameslink railway line 568w
Trials 87w, 217–8w

Linton, Martin
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 646

Liquefied petroleum gas
684–5w

Listed buildings
597–8w

Literacy
38w, 473w
Standards 472w, 622w

Litter
363w

Liverpool
Refugees 611w

Livestock
739w
Exports 735–6w
Markets 366w
Transport 547–8w
Veterinary services 545w
Worcestershire 544w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 278–9wh, 289wh
Questions
Bus services 187–8w
Business questions 421
Middle East, Peace negotiations 280
Saudi Arabia, Entry clearances 496w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 699–701
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 296
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1017, 1061–3
Questions
British Irish Council 693w
Petrol, Storage 674–6w
Sri Lanka, Arms trade 135–6w
Sri Lanka, Human rights 17–8w

Local authorities
Borrowing 429w

Local broadcasting
264w
Scotland 354w

Local child curfew schemes
85–6w, 283w
Bromley 447w
Greater London 850w

Local education authorities
Assets 468w
Standards 255–6w

Local exchange and trading schemes
Taxation 58–9w

Local government
Elections 475w
Graduates 230w
Ombudsman 233w
Recruitment 230w

Local Government Association
529w

Local government finance
187w, 193w, 227w, 574w, (29.10.01) 726
Northampton 790w

Local government services
187w
Fees and charges 98w, 573w
Hearing impaired 572w

London
see Greater London

London and Continental Railways
197–8w

London Underground
Air conditioning 227–8w
Public private partnerships 186w, 390w, 394w
Standards 677w

Longtown
Foot and mouth disease 163w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Aviation 49w
Computers 755–6w
Manpower 50w
Press releases 201w
Select committees 49w

Lost working days
Consignia 507w

Loughton, Tim
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 680–1, 714–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Breast cancer (23.10.01) 33wh, 35–9wh
Questions
Breast cancer 827w
China, Human rights 296w
Doctors, Retirement 551–2w
Hospital beds 893w
Knee replacements 832w
Starter home initiative 484–7w
Surgery, Waiting lists 29w

Loughton, Tim—continued
Sussex Police, Manpower 68w, 728–9w

Love, Mr Andrew
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 323wh

Low flying
321w

Lucas, Ian
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 775–6, 819–21

Luff, Mr Peter
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Schools, Worcestershire (24.10.01) 122–8wh
Television, Sports (24.10.01) 120wh
Questions
A449 475w
Advantage West Midlands, Worcestershire 9w
Central Trains, Standards 229w
Developing countries, Politics and government 301w
Drugs, Misuse 308w
Drugs, Worcestershire 287–8w
Education, Worcestershire 464w, 531w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 272–3w
Health authorities 29w
Health authorities, Public appointments 420w
Heart diseases, Medical treatments 553w
Hospital beds, Worcestershire 814–5w
Hunting 172w
Learning and skills councils 254–5w
Livestock, Worcestershire 544w
Manufacturing industries, Worcestershire 9w
Meat, Imports 271–2w
Milk, Publicity 170w
Mobile homes 103w
Moore, Jo 15w
Railways, Worcester 233–4w
Regional development agencies 137w
Regional development agencies, Manpower 418w
Sixth form education, Finance 36–7w, 463w
Sixth form education, Worcestershire 711w
Such, Barrie 151w
Supermarkets, Farmers 165–6w
Terrorism 599w
Veterinary medicine 549w

Luke, Mr Iain
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 281–3wh
Questions
Conditions of employment 1002–4

Lyons, Mr John
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 742–4

M5
Gloucestershire 785–6w

McCabe, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 152
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 769, 783, 803–5
Questions
Export credit guarantees 774w

McCartney, Rt Hon Ian, Minister for Pensions, Department for Work and Pensions
Questions
Institutional care, Income support 752w
Occupational pensions 58w, 847–8w
Pension credit 525w
Pension funds, Inquiries 439–40w
Pensions 242–3w, 337w, 438w, 848w
Pensions, Publicity 53w
Pensions, Self-employed 752w
Social security benefits, Scotland 836–8w
Stakeholder pensions 179–80w, 750–1w, 847w
State earnings related pension scheme 643–4w
State retirement pensions, Age addition 177w
Winter fuel payments 846w

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Debates etc.
Abandoned vehicles (22.10.01) 119, 123–4
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 199–202
Questions
Consumers, Protection 996–7
Herceptin 342w

McDonnell, John
Debates etc.
Motorcycles, Skelmersdale (24.10.01) 391
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 482
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1105
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 317
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Aviation, Security (23.10.01) 5–7wh, 18–9wh
Questions
Aviation 796w
Firearms, Licensing 567–8w

MacDougall, John
Debates etc.
Maiden speech (30.10.01) 785–7
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 785–7

Macedonia
Peace keeping operations 512w
Proscribed organisations 315w

McFall, Mr John
Questions
Russia, NATO enlargement 741

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 913–4, 928, 938–9, 954, 961–2, 967–8, 974
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 308–9

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 35–6
Questions
British Council 494w
Business questions 416
Crown Prosecution Service 370–1w
East coast railway line 571w
East coast railway line, Franchises 100w
Electric cables 795w
Farmers, Income 367w
Film 491w
Film, Finance 354–5w
Flood control, North Yorkshire 270–1w, 914w
Flood control, Water abstraction 913–4w

McIntosh, Miss Anne—continued
Foot and mouth disease 408w, 869
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 268w, 367–8w, 734w
"Government Opportunities" 294w
Hearing aids 560w
HMS Ocean 879w
Jobcentres, Rural areas 523w
Learning and Skills Council for England 35w
Learning and skills councils 254w
Museums and galleries, Attendance 760w
Olympic Games 760–1w
Post offices, Rural areas 778w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 759–60w
Railtrack, Finance 571w
Railways, Safety 571w
Refugees, Arab states 278–9w
Road works, North Yorkshire 193w, 369–70w
Television, Afghanistan 490w
Television, Broadcasting programmes 357w
Theatre, Terrorism 356–7w
Voluntary work, Finance 716w

McIsaac, Shona
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 941
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1141, 1143–53, 1156, 1165–6, 1168
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 906
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Regional assistance, Fisheries (24.10.01) 138wh
Questions
Queen Elizabeth II, Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 400w

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 161
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 897–900
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 316
Questions
Business questions 1011–2

McKechin, Ann
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 349–51wh
Questions
General Agreement on Trade in Services 9w
Terrorism 598w

McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Questions
Regional government 127

Mackinlay, Andrew
Questions
Business questions 415
Crime, Victims 408–9
Essex Police, Manpower 10
Grace and favour housing 355w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 390w
Members, Information technology 323w
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 314w, 807w
Ministry of Defence Police, Termination of employment 769w
Moore, Jo 91–3w, 395w
Royal family, Marriage 858w
Royal family, Trade marks 780w, 803w
Schools, Standards 328w

Mackinlay, Andrew—continued
UN agencies 302w

Maclean, Rt Hon David
Questions
Foot and mouth disease 539w
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 540w, 915–6w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 539w
Foot and mouth disease, Longtown 163w
Foot and mouth disease, Waste disposal 25w
Sick leave, Home Office 211–2w

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 651, 713–4
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 34
Questions
Members, Correspondence 29w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 311–2
Questions
Elections, Northern Ireland 497–8w
European Convention on Human Rights, Terrorism 279
Fisheries, Compensation 316w
Forensic science, Training 277w
Higher education, Student numbers 252–3w
Higher education, Student wastage 253–4w
Human rights, Northern Ireland 498w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, War pensions 406w
Pupil exclusions 710w
Racial discrimination, Conferences 811–2w
Refugees, Palestinians 74w
Schools 463–4w
Teachers, Training 465w
Weapons 3w

MacShane, Mr Denis, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Questions
Albania, Politics and government 603w
Albania, Proscribed organisations 315w
Australia, Refugees 606w
British Council 494w
Buildings, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 256w
China, Human rights 909–10w
Colombia 605–6w
Football, World Cup 602w
Islam, Cultural relations 19w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 604–5w
Macedonia, Proscribed organisations 315w
Serbia, Arms trade 911w
Terrorism 598w, 739–40
Tibet, Human rights 135w

Mactaggart, Fiona
Debates etc.
Abandoned vehicles (22.10.01) 121–2
Refugees (29.10.01) 642
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 363–5
Questions
Civil servants, Pay 694w
Developing countries, Education 300w
Entry clearances, Pakistan 75w
Pakistan 603–4w
Postal services, Standards 504–5w
Schools, Music 34w

McWalter, Mr Tony
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 157wh, 172wh

Maghaberry Prison
807w

Magistrates
Leeds 752–3w

Magistrates' courts
Computers 753w
Dudley 399–400w
Greater London (31.10.01) 251–72wh
Trials 755w

Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate
Annual reports 756w

Magnetic resonance imagers
Gloucestershire 150w

Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Television, Sports (24.10.01) 118–9wh
Questions
Ethical trading initiative 263–4
Further education, Teachers 405
Social security benefits, Abuse 749w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Breast cancer (23.10.01) 28–9wh
Questions
Equal pay 774–5w

Maiden speeches
Bacon, Richard (29.10.01) 685–9
MacDougall, John (30.10.01) 785–7

Maintenance
Children 46w, 54–5w, 751w

Maize
Genetically modified organisms 552–3w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Questions
Crime prevention, Young people 8–9
Entry clearances, Appeals 337w
Racial violence, Prosecutions 853w
Racially aggravated offences 852w
Refugees 501w
Refugees, Appeals 335w, 399w
Refugees, Children in care 853w
Refugees, Detainees 284w, 333–6w
Refugees, Employment 333w
Refugees, Finance 334w
Refugees, Voucher schemes 333–5w
Work permits 331–2w
Work permits, Information technology 332w

Mallaber, Judy
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 331
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders 70w
Government Office for the East Midlands 693w
Manufacturing industries 995–6

Manchester
Commonwealth Games 758w, 760w

Mann, John
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 223–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 280–1wh
Questions
Cereals, East Midlands 360–1w
Defence equipment, Procurement 513–4w

Mann, John—continued
Equal pay, Nottinghamshire 588w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 760w
Small Business Service, Bassetlaw 316w
Special education, Nottinghamshire 458w
Working families tax credit, Bassetlaw 887–8w

Manufactured goods
Prisons 719w

Manufacturing industries
(24.10.01) 69–92wh, 631–2w, 776w, 778w, 986, 994–6
Climate change levy 443w
Eastern region 985–6
Manpower 635–7w
Redundancy 630–1w
Taxation 627w
Worcestershire 9w

Maples, Mr John
Questions
Community transport, Excise duties 797w
Extradition, Terrorism 753–4w

Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R (26.10.01) 527–48, 565–94
Questions
413, 1007–8

Markets
Electricity generation 704–5w, 780–1w
Livestock 366w

Marriage
Royal family 858w

Married people
Taxation 882w

Married personal allowance
259w

Marris, Rob
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 234

Marsden, Mr Gordon
Questions
Higher education, Research 326w
Regional government 137
Road works 578–9w

Marsden, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 206–8, 244
Questions
Radioactive wastes, Waste management 24w
Terrorism, Police interrogation 74w

Marshall-Andrews, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 295
Hare coursing (29.10.01) 728
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1015, 1036

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 27
Questions
Roads, Safety 188–9w

Mass media
Sports 185w

Maternal mortality
Developing countries 269–70

Maternity services
341–2w
Hemel Hempstead Hospital 648–9w

Mates, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 312

May, Mrs Theresa
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 109–11
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 149–57, 162–3
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 333–8, 368–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 218–9wh, 221–4wh
Questions
Buildings, Dept for Education and Skills 462–3w
Buildings, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 543w
Buildings, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 256w
Buildings, Home Office 87–90w
Civil service agencies, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 223w
Council housing, Empty property 223w
Council tax, Greater London 229w
Disclosure of information, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 96–7w
Hackney Borough Council, Standards 905–6w
Homelessness 223w
Housing, Capital investment 236w
Local government, Elections 475w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 909w
Moore, Jo 395w, 908–9w
Non-departmental public bodies, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 223–4w
Press releases, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 225w, 394w
Railtrack, Finance 141–2
Regional development agencies 427–8w
Regional planning and development, South West region 226w
River Thames, Boats 224w

Mayors
Elections 97–8w, 393–4w
Greater London 17w, 192w
Leicester 795w

Meacher, Rt Hon Michael, Minister of State for the Environment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Debates etc.
Abandoned vehicles (22.10.01) 122–6
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 588–94
Questions
Agenda 21 170w
British Waterways Board, Public appointments 921w
Climate Change Convention 732w
Combined heat and power 409–10w, 533w, 922w
Combined heat and power, Climate change levy 533w
Dogs, Bye laws 411–2w, 917w
Electricity 411w
Energy, Conservation 24w, 171w, 409w, 916w
Energy, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 593w
Farms, Plant power 917w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 176–7w, 546–7w

Meacher, Rt Hon Michael—continued
Genetically modified organisms, Maize 552–3w
Incinerators 163w, 412w
Incinerators, Dioxins 166w, 918w
Incinerators, Edmonton 593w, 917–8w
Litter 363w
Nuclear power, Environment protection 544–5w
Packaging, EC law 176w, 413–4w
Plant power 410w
Plastics, Recycling 361–2w
Radioactive wastes, Waste management 24w, 275w
Recycling 533–4w
Recycling, Domestic wastes 167–9w, 364w, 535w
Recycling, Industrial wastes 535w
Sewers 169w
Tipping of waste 167w, 591w
Tipping of waste, Methane 410–1w
Warehouses, Fires 174–5w
Waste disposal 166w
Waste disposal, Tyres 23–4w
Waste management 412–3w
Water, EC law 917w
Water supply, Greater London 176w

Meat
Armed forces 517–8w
Imports 171–2w, 271–2w

Medals
Armed forces 4w, 879–80w

Medical examinations
Social security benefits 53w

Medical records
Fees and charges 754–5w

Medical treatments
EC countries 419–20w, 894–5w
Haemophilia 891w
Heart diseases 553w
Schizophrenia 308–9w

Medicine
Athletics 759w

Medicines Control Agency
Annual reports 33w

Mediterranean region
EC external relations 602w

Members
Correspondence 29w, 75w, 213w, 257w, 275w, 537–8w, 628w, 721w
Information technology 323w
Training 221w
Working hours 488w

Members' suspension
Robinson, Geoffrey (31.10.01) 885–906

Mental health
647–8w
NHS Direct 555–6w

Mental Health Act 1983
Questions
647–8w

Mental health services
555–6w, 647w, 819w
Advocacy 556–8w
Community care 152w, 828w
Ethnic groups 554–5w
Expenditure 558w
Females 147–8w, 817–9w
Greater London 647w
Recruitment 742w
Standards 144–6w
Vacancies 816–7w
Young people 146–8w

Mental patients
146–7w

Mentally ill
Employment 554w
Hospital beds 146w, 556w
Prisoners 828–9w
Suicide 825–6w

Mentally incapacitated
Sexual offences 739–40w

Mercenaries
864w

Mercer, Patrick
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 918–9
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1018, 1036, 1081–3
Questions
Armed forces, Schools 625

Merchant shipping
Training 680w

Merron, Ms Gillian
Questions
Armed forces, Young people 512–3w
Emergencies, Planning 692w

Methane
Tipping of waste 410–1w

Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus
343–4w
Disease control 342–3w

Metropolitan Police
Housing 284–5w
Manpower 75w, 447–8w
Parliament 850w
Recruitment 14–5
Security 448–9w
Training 15–6

Michael, Rt Hon Alun, Minister of State, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Debates etc.
Hare coursing (29.10.01) 729–34
Questions
Agriculture, Diversification 273–4w
Agriculture, Manpower 275w
Birds, Conservation 26w
Business Recovery Fund 141–2w, 251w, 266w, 408w, 733w
Countryside, Access 591–2w
Food, Production 737–8w
Foot and mouth disease 539–40w
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 174w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 805–6w
Foot and mouth disease, Hunting 164–5w, 270w, 737w, 805w
Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve, Hunting 409w
Hunting 172w
New Forest 922w
Rural areas, Departmental coordination 733w
Rural areas, Housing 272w
Rural areas, Voluntary organisations 546w

Microcredit programmes
303–4w

Microsoft
Competition 696w, 871–2w

Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust
Waiting lists 154w

Middle East
Peace negotiations 280, 600w, 742–6

Midwives
Personation 553w

Milburn, Rt Hon Alan, Secretary of State for Health
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 649–60
Questions
NHS, Finance 551w
NHS, Private sector 654–5w, 827–8w

Millband, Mr David
Questions
Further education 326w

Military aid
Chemical and biological warfare 113w

Military aircraft
see Low flying

Military bases
Colchester 616
Cyprus 566w
Scotland 880w

Milk
176w, 413–4w, 550w
Publicity 170w

Milk Task Force
737w

Millennium Commission
Ethnic groups 598w
Grants 598w

Millennium Exhibition
407w
Operating costs 431w
Property transfer 431w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 154, 176, 178
Questions
Emergencies, Planning 692w, 864
Incinerators, Edmonton 593w
Medicines Control Agency, Annual reports 33w

Milton Keynes
Railways 482w

Minimum wage
7w, 630w
West Yorkshire 629–30w

Mining
Subsidence 871w

Ministerial policy advisors
292w, 691w, 865–8
Council of Economic Advisers 887w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 261–2w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 394w, 909w
Home Office 211–2w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 352w
Opposition days (23.10.01) 149–252
Pay 314w, 807w
Treasury 743w

Ministerial powers
Entry clearances 910w
Prime ministers 607w

Ministerial statements
Afghanistan (24.10.01) 283–301
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (22.10.01) 19–36
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 549–64
Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 302–19
Refugees (29.10.01) 627–47
Rulings and statements (22.10.01) 37

Ministers
Codes of practice 293w, 747w

Ministry of Defence
Computer software 318–9w
Consultants 878w
Disadvantaged 515–6w
Insurance 113–4w
Manpower 769–70w
Retirement 241w
Scotland 881w
Select committees 765w
SERCO 109–12w
Trading funds 881w

Ministry of Defence Police
Termination of employment 769w

Misrepresentation
Refugees 617w

Misuse
Alcoholic drinks 143w, 307–8w, (31.10.01) 311–8wh
Drugs 69w, 287w, 308w

Misuse of Drugs Act 1971
Questions
11–2
Tribunals 286–7w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 787–90
Questions
Privatisation, Employee share ownership schemes 802w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Regional assistance, Fisheries (24.10.01) 134–6wh
Questions
Economic and monetary union 640w
Exchange rates 639w
Fisheries, Compensation 505–6w

Mixed oxide fuel
292w
Sellafield 169w

Mobile homes
103w

Mobile phones
see Cellular phones

Mobility allowance
178–9w

Modernising government programme
693–4w

Moffatt, Laura
Questions
Further education 326w
Sixth form education 404
Starter home initiative 190–1w

Monetary compensatory amounts
270w, 739w, 879–80, 919–22w
Scotland 548w, 805w

Moonie, Dr Lewis, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Ministry of Defence
Questions
Air force, Private finance initiative 510w
Aircraft carriers, Procurement 765w, 767w
Amphibious vehicles, Procurement 763–4w
Anthrax, Drugs 5w, 114w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 4w
Armed forces, Body armour 768–9w
Armed forces, Health hazards 879w
Armed forces, Housing 320w, 514w, 563w
Armed forces, Meat 517–8w
Armed forces, Schools 624–5

Moonie, Dr Lewis—continued
Armed forces, Telecommunications 513w, 619–20
Armoured fighting vehicles 766w
Arms trade, Export controls 666w
Challenger tanks 320w
Challenger tanks, Ammunition 878w
Chemical and biological warfare 239–40w, 519w
Chemical and biological warfare, Research 112–4w, 320w, 770w
Chemical and biological warfare, Vaccination 881w
Clyde naval base 878w
Computer software, Ministry of Defence 318–9w
Defence equipment, Procurement 406w, 659w, 665w, 880–1w
Disadvantaged, Ministry of Defence 515–6w
European fighter aircraft, Training 769w
Exservicemen 509–10w, 564w, 664w
Frigates, Romania 770w
Future large aircraft 512w
Hawk aircraft, India 626
Hawk aircraft, Procurement 767–8w
HMS Ocean 879w
Insurance, Ministry of Defence 113–4w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, War pensions 406w
Low flying 321w
Manpower, Ministry of Defence 769–70w
Military bases, Scotland 880w
Ministry of Defence, Consultants 878w
Ministry of Defence Police, Termination of employment 769w
Prisoners of war, Compensation 2w, 318w, 748–9w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 4w, 879–80w
Radiation exposure 618–9
Radioactive wastes 239w
Retirement, Ministry of Defence 241w
Satellite communications, Procurement 317–8w
Scotland, Ministry of Defence 881w
Security, Northern Ireland 869w
Select committees, Ministry of Defence 765w
Tactical reconnaissance armoured combat equipment requirement 321w, 878w
Territorial Army 320w, 663w
Territorial Army, Chemical and biological warfare 660w
Territorial Army, Manpower 240w, 403w
Territorial Army, Pensions 240w
Trading funds, Ministry of Defence 881w
Upholder class submarines, Canada 659w
Uranium 519w

Moore, Jo
15w, 91–3w, 394–5w, 908–9w

Moran, Margaret
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 701–5
Questions
Africa, Poverty 266
Children, Domestic violence 351w, 649–50w
Communities against drugs initiative 851–2w
Community development project, Information technology 773w
Computers within reach programme 713w
Domestic violence, Children 723–7w
Gibraltar, Spain 738–9
Open government, Internet 322w
Parliamentary questions, Information technology 322w
Public libraries, Internet 357w

Moran, Margaret—continued
Registration of births deaths and marriages 888w

Morgan, Julie
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 344, 359–61
Questions
Business questions 424–5
Domestic violence 410

Morley, Mr Elliot, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Debates etc.
Floods, Braintree (30.10.01) 856–60
Inland waterways, Cotswold Hills (01.11.01) 1110–2
Ministerial statement intervention (22.10.01) 31
Questions
Agriculture 360w
Agriculture, Manpower 549–50w
Agriculture, Pay 548–9w
Aviation, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 27w
Beef, Exports 920–1w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Research 547w, 805w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep 547w, 591–2w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 409w
Buildings, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 26w, 543w
Cereals, East Midlands 360–1w
Coffee, Developing countries 738w
Common agricultural policy 274w, 916w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 365w
Countryside stewardship scheme, Organic farming 25w
Dairy farming 545w
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 285w
Disadvantaged, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 359w
Environment Agency, Somerset 738w
Farmers, Income 367w
Flood control 736–7w, 912–3w
Flood control, East Sussex 362w, 542w
Flood control, Greater London 736w
Flood control, Housing 270w
Flood control, North Yorkshire 270–1w, 914w
Flood control, Water abstraction 913–4w
Floods, Essex 912w
Food, Terrorism 273–4w
Foot and mouth disease 268–9w, 408–9w, 539–40w, 735w
Foot and mouth disease, Chorley 368w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 269w, 272–3w, 366w, 369w, 538w, 540–1w
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 268w, 540w, 914–6w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 163–4w, 167w, 266–70w, 366–9w, 538–9w, 733–5w, 915w
Foot and mouth disease, Herefordshire 362w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 806w
Foot and mouth disease, Longtown 163w
Foot and mouth disease, Northumberland 164w
Foot and mouth disease, Somerset 735w
Foot and mouth disease, Waste disposal 25w, 361w
Forests 738w
Hill farming 548w
Livestock 739w
Livestock, Exports 735–6w

Morley, Mr Elliot—continued
Livestock, Markets 366w
Livestock, Transport 547–8w
Livestock, Veterinary services 545w
Livestock, Worcestershire 544w
Manpower, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 26–7w
Meat, Imports 171–2w, 271–2w
Members, Correspondence 275w, 537–8w
Milk 550w
Milk, Publicity 170w
Milk Task Force 737w
Monetary compensatory amounts 270w, 739w, 919–22w
Monetary compensatory amounts, Scotland 548w, 805w
Nature conservation 173w
Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 174w
Organic farming 359w, 592w
Organic farming, Subsidies 360w
Pay, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 25w, 364w
Plant power 170w
Press releases, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 547w
Public expenditure, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 364w
Royal prerogative, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 172w
Scrapie 918–20w
Sheep 165w
Sheep, Ear tagging 545–6w
Sheep meat, Scotland 172w
Supermarkets, Farmers 165–6w
Trees, Diseases 362–3w
Veterinary medicine 549w
Veterinary Medicines Directorate 806w
Written questions, Administrative delays 365w

Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle, Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Questions
Disadvantaged, Dept for Education and Skills 902w
Education, Finance 329–30w
Education, Standards 395–7
Individual learning accounts 327–8w
Postgraduate education 397–8
Royal prerogative, Dept for Education and Skills 328w

Mortgages
Working families tax credit 376w

Most, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Regional government 129

Motability Finance
524w

Motor vehicles
Carbon dioxide 908w
EC law 137w, 587–8w, 992–3
Excise duties 60w, 202w, 479w, 786–8w
Prices 872w
Smuggling 625–6w

Motorcycles
Nuisance 75–6w
Skelmersdale (24.10.01) 386–92

Motorways
Chelmsford 795–6w

Mountford, Kali
Questions
Veterinary Medicines Directorate 806w

Mudie, Mr George
Questions
Countryside, Access 591w
Football, World Cup 602w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 632
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 749–50

Multinational companies
779w

Multiple occupation
229–30w

Multiple sclerosis
Drugs 420w

Munn, Meg
Debates etc.
Abandoned vehicles (22.10.01) 120
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 669, 675, 696–9
Questions
Disadvantaged, Young people 709–10w
Police, Complaints 65w
Sole traders 775w

Murphy, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1019, 1091–2
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 744–5
Trade competitiveness 1001

Murphy, Rt Hon Paul, Secretary of State for Wales
Questions
Agriculture, Wales 903–4w
Assets, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 756w
Billing, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 493w
Buildings, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 402–3w
Construction, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 351–2w
Economic situation, Wales 492w
Manpower, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 27–8w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 352w
National Assembly for Wales 904w
Pay, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 351w
Press releases, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 182w
Publicity, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 904w
Retirement, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 351w
Royal prerogative, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 182w
St David's Day 904w
Schools, Wales 903w
Secondment, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 492–3w
Select committees, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 27w

Murrison, Dr Andrew
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Breast cancer (23.10.01) 29–31wh
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 151–2wh
Questions
Campylobacter 414w
General practitioners, Retirement 557–8w
Hospital beds 349w
Infectious diseases, Disease control 892w
Pharmacy, Rural areas 557w
Pupil exclusions 323w
Television, Licensing 597w

Museums and galleries
Attendance 760w
Fees and charges 597w

Museums and galleries—continued
Finance 490–1w

Music
Schools 34w, 528w, 532w

Muslims
527w

Namibia
HIV infection 304w

National Air Traffic Services
428w, 477w, 685w

National Assembly for Wales
904w

National Assembly For Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001
Debates etc.
(30.10.01) 852

National Australia Group Europe Bill (HL) 2000/01
Debates etc.
2R (30.10.01) 735

National Bus Company
Pension funds 442–3w

National income
632–5w

National Institute for Mental Health
Finance 150w

National insurance
644w, 750w

National insurance contributions
743–4w

National Insurance Contributions Office
882w

National Lottery
Scotland 358w
Stoke on Trent 597w

National Minimum Wage Act 1998
Questions
7w

National security
USA 242w, 875w

National Statistics
see Office for National Statistics

Nationality
Armed forces 404–5w

NATO enlargement
Russia 740–2

Natural disasters
EC aid 118w, 205w

Natural gas
Imports 586w
Norway 586w
Prices 871w

Nature conservation
173w
Police 289w

Navy
3w, 625–6

Neill Committee
see Committee on Standards in Public Life

Neurology
Health services 156w

New deal for lone parents
844w

New deal for long term unemployed
845w

New deal for young people
524–5w, 845w

New deal for young people—continued
Advisory services 845–6w
Costs 846w

New deal schemes
438w
Advisory services 845–6w

New Forest
922w

New Scotland Yard
see Metropolitan Police

Newcastle upon Tyne
Hospital beds 655–8w

Newspaper press
Distributive trade 779w

NHS
280
Classification schemes 421–3w
Empty property 308w
Finance 150–1w, 520w, 522w, 551w, 561–2w, 741w, 829–30w
Pay 893w
Private sector 32w, 654–5w, 827–8w
Secretarial staff 159w
Taxation 744w

NHS Appointments Commission
Public appointments 653–4w

NHS Direct
Mental health 555–6w

NHS trusts
Directors 653w

NHSnet
423–4w
Pharmacy 816w

Nigeria
270–1, 437w
Proceeds of crime 203w, 205w

Night flying
(23.10.01) 43–51wh
East Midlands Airport 429w
Heathrow Airport 385–6w

Noise
Aircraft 194w
Public houses 23w
Roads 189–90w

Nolan Committee
see Committee on Standards in Public Life

Non-departmental public bodies
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 223–4w
Public appointments 174w

Non-domestic rates
Foot and mouth disease 163w, 445–6w

Non-teaching staff
Further education 36w
Manpower 621w
Primary education 471w

Norman, Mr Archie
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Transport, South East region (30.10.01) 214–8wh
Questions
Channel tunnel railway line 97w, 478w
London and Continental Railways 197–8w
Railtrack, Finance 93w, 426w
Strategic Rail Authority, Public appointments 200w

North East region
Public expenditure 259–60w

North Korea
International assistance 580–1w

North West region
Antisocial behaviour orders 70w
Competition 777w
Railways 674w, 908w

North Yorkshire
Flood control 270–1w, 914w
Road works 193w, 369–70w

North Yorkshire Police
Manpower 65–6w

Northampton
Children's tax credit 745w
Closed circuit television 863w
Local government finance 790w
Schools 714–5w
Sure start programme 900–1w
Vacant land 791w

Northamptonshire Police
Manpower 65w

Northern Cyprus
Proceeds of crime 314w

Northern Ireland
Air routes 476w
Army 519w
Elections 497–8w
Extradition 496w
Human rights 498w
Ministerial statements (24.10.01) 302–19
Population 496w
Prisoners' release 496–7w
Security 869w
Surgery 894w
Weapons 274–5, 280–1, 567–8w

Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001
Debates etc.
(30.10.01) 852

Northern Ireland government
874

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
Public appointments 567w

Northern Ireland Office
Press releases 739w
Private finance initiative 340–1w

Northern line
191w

Northumberland
Foot and mouth disease 164w
Further education 328w

Norway
Natural gas 586w

Nottingham
Council housing 233w

Nottingham Health Authority
Finance 828w

Nottinghamshire
Equal pay 588w
Special education 458w

Nottinghamshire Constabulary
Finance 719w

Nuclear fuels
Transport 669w

Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty
615–6

Nuclear power
593–4w
Environment protection 544–5w
Security 6–7w, 501w
Terrorism 665–6w

Nuclear weapons
494–5w

Nuisance
Motorcycles 75–6w

Numeracy
473w
Standards 472w, 622w

Nursery schools
Finance 40w
Lancashire 40w

Nurses
880
Pay 310w

Nutrition
32–3w, 349–50w

Oaten, Mr Mark
Questions
Civil Contingencies Committee 45w
Delivery Unit 863
Evans, Alun 392w
Homelessness 100w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 394w
Ministerial policy advisors, Treasury 743w
Multiple occupation 229–30w
Railtrack, Finance 93w

O'Brien, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 299–300
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 152–3, 188–95
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1030
Questions
Albania, Proscribed organisations 315w
Macedonia, Proscribed organisations 315w
Pay, Directors 374w
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust 559w

O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1118, 1121, 1125, 1127–30, 1134–6, 1145, 1147, 1151–2, 1157, 1159, 1163–72, 1177, 1180–1
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 171
Questions
Africa, Poverty 267–8
Climate change levy 802w
Developing countries, Debts 298w
Ministerial policy advisors 691w
Regional government 186w

O'Brien, Mr William
Questions
Gurkhas 510–1w
Special constables 12–3

Occupational pensions
58w, 847–8w

Offenders
Discrimination 716–7w

Office for National Statistics
Standards 746w

Office for Standards in Education
Manpower 621w

Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Assets 756w
Billing 493w
Buildings 402–3w
Construction 351–2w
Energy 757w
Information officers 352w
Manpower 27–8w
Ministerial policy advisors 352w
Pay 351w
Press releases 182w

Office of the Secretary of State for Wales—continued
Publicity 904w
Retirement 351w
Royal prerogative 182w
Secondment 492–3w
Select committees 27w

Official cars
Judges 528w

Official visits
Public order 716w

Offshore industry
Tax allowances 889w

Oil
588–9w
Iraq 118w

Olympic Games
760–1w

Ombudsman
Local government 233w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Questions
Motor vehicles, EC law 992–3

Open government
Internet 322w

Opik, Lembit
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 912–3, 920–1, 925, 928, 939–41, 946, 953, 955, 962–6, 973–4
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 183
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1022
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 309–10
Questions
Railways, Wales 383w, 401w
Speed limits 477w
Students, Fees and charges 255w
Students, Finance 402w
Terrorism, Republic of Ireland 5–6w, 16w, 135w

Opposition days
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 149–252
Students (25.10.01) 428–71

Organ, Diana
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 431–2, 435

Organic farming
359w, 542w, 592w
Countryside stewardship scheme 25w
Subsidies 360w

Osborne, Mr George
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 27
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1120, 1131–3, 1137, 1155
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 811–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Night flying (23.10.01) 43–5wh
Questions
Ballistic missile defence 875w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 610
Business questions 426–7

Osborne, Sandra
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 337, 375–6
Questions
National Air Traffic Services 477w

Ottaway, Richard
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Magistrates' courts, Greater London (31.10.01) 252wh, 264–6wh, 270wh
Questions
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 75w
Road traffic control, Greater London 133–4

Otterburn
Firing ranges 241w

Overpayments
Social security benefits 642–3w

Overseas aid
Afghanistan 304–5w
Africa 295w
Democratic Republic of Congo 690w
India 295–6w
Russia 304w
Sierra Leone 297w
Tibet 296w

Overseas residence
Social security benefits 439w
Zimbabwe 910–1w

Overseas students
Work permits 849w

Overseas trade
779–80w

Owen, Albert
Questions
Macedonia, Peace keeping operations 512w

Oxfordshire
Teachers 327w

Packaging
EC law 176w, 413–4w

Paddington Rail Accident Inquiry
478–9w, 707w

Page, Mr Richard
Questions
Afghanistan, Diplomatic service 910w
Mercenaries 864w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 31–2
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 159
Questions
Essex Police, Manpower 10–1
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 447–8w
Metropolitan Police, Security 448–9w
Police, Conditions of employment 277–8w
Police, Manpower 448w
Police, Reform 448w

Pain
Clinics 149–50w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 313–4

Pakistan
603–4w
Civil disorder 257–8w
Entry clearances 75w, 602w
Human rights 134–5w
Religious freedom 810w
Terrorism 276

Palestinians
Females 117w
Poverty 294w
Refugees 74w

Palmer, Dr Nick
Questions
Alternative energy 991
Judiciary, Public appointments 754w
Speed limits 188w

Pancreatic cancer
Royal Liverpool Hospital 32w

Papua New Guinea
International assistance 686–7w

Parental responsibility
201w

Parking
Airports 906–7w

Parliament
Metropolitan Police 850w

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards
6w, 865–6w

Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986
Questions
352w

Parliamentary data and video network
487–8w

Parliamentary privilege
(31.10.01) 304–10wh

Parliamentary procedure
Email 221w

Parliamentary questions
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 365w
Dept of Trade and Industry 141w
Home Office 721–3w
Information technology 322w

Parliamentary scrutiny
EC common foreign and security policy 604w

Parole
732w

Partnerships
696–7w

Partnerships UK
Shares 626w

Passports
90–1w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 72–3w, 276–7w

Patents Act 1977 (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Conduct of proceedings (02.11.01) 1113

Payroll System Review
520w, 889w

Peace keeping operations
513w
Macedonia 512w

Peace negotiations
Middle East 280, 600w, 742–6

Pedestrians
Safety 383–5w, 476w, 480–2w, 574–5w, 679w, 788–90w, 908w

Penrose Inquiry
see Equitable Life Independent Inquiry

Pension credit
525w

Pension funds
207w
Inquiries 439–40w
National Bus Company 442–3w
Scottish Transport Group 210w, 442w

Pension Service
Manpower 526w

Pensioners
743w
Tax burden 261w
Travel 578w

Pensions
203w, 242–3w, 337w, 438w, 848w
Armed forces 113w, 319w, 563w
Civil servants 646w
Police 285–6w
Publicity 53w
Self-employed 752w
Territorial Army 240w

Pensions Act 1995
Questions
847–8w

Perham, Linda
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Magistrates' courts, Greater London (31.10.01) 255wh, 260–3wh
Questions
Class sizes 324w
India, Overseas aid 295–6w
Small businesses 777w

Personal income
641w

Personal injury
707–8w

Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman
Fees and charges 63w, 375w

Personal records
Social services 148w

Personal savings
380w, 642w

Personal statements
Robinson, Geoffrey (31.10.01) 884

Personation
Midwives 553w

Personnel management
Police 67w

Pesticides
Food 543–4w

Pesticides Safety Directorate
922w

Petitions
Fireworks (30.10.01) 852
Sovereignty (23.10.01) 253

Petrol
Retail trade 695w
Storage 674–6w

Petrol alternatives
Excise duties 61w, 186w, 890w

Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928
Questions
675–6w

Pharmacy
306w
NHSnet 816w
Pay 29w
Rural areas 557w

Physical education
458–9w

Picketts Lock
Athletics 19–20w, 757w

Pickles, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1115–27, 1129–30, 1134,

Pickles, Mr Eric—continued
1139, 1146–8, 1150–3, 1156–62, 1168–9, 1172–4, 1176
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 192
Questions
Airports, Parking 906–7w
EC transport policy 97w
Paddington Rail Accident Inquiry 478–9w
Railtrack, Finance 399w, 569–70w, 670–1w, 782–3w, 906–7w
Railway signals 380–1w
Railways, Finance 479w, 570–1w
Railways, Franchises 669w, 784w
Railways, Safety 569–71w, 573w, 671w, 781w
Road traffic control, Greater London 135–6
Speed limits, Cameras 862–3w
Strategic Rail Authority 670w

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Motorcycles, Skelmersdale (24.10.01) 386–9
Questions
Maintenance, Children 751w
Plastics, Recycling 361–2w
Prescriptions, Incapacity benefit 349w
Regional development agencies, Public appointments 250w
Waste disposal, Tyres 23–4w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 988–9
Burnley 871
Business questions 419–20
Regulation 692w
Standard spending assessments 130

Planning
Councillors' interests 103w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 165w
Emergencies 692w, 863–5, 870–1

Planning permission
102w, 222w, 791w
Aerials 138–40, 175–6w
Bypasses 389w
Heathrow Airport 233w
Stroud 102–3w

Plant power
170w, 410w, 537w
Farms 917w

Plastics
Recycling 361–2w

Plutonium
10w, 318w
Security 315w

Pneumoconiosis Etc (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 2001
Debates etc.
(22.10.01) 118

Police
65w, 861w
Complaints 65w
Conditions of employment 277–8w
Emergency calls 86w
Females 67–8w
Firearms 215w
Gatwick Airport 451w
Greater London 280w, 854–5w
Hampshire (02.11.01) 1183–90
Housing 290w
Manpower 72–3w, 280w, 448w
Nature conservation 289w
Pensions 285–6w

Police—continued
Per capita costs 731w
Personnel management 67w
Recruitment 71w
Reform 448w, 864–5w
Rural areas 69–70w
Scarborough 66w
South East region 68–9w
Standards 720–1w
Vehicles 75w

Police custody
Chorley 276w

Police interrogation
Terrorism 74w

Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000
Debates etc.
(24.10.01) 302–19

Police stations
Essex 92w

Political impartiality
Rulings and statements (30.10.01) 753

Political refugees
see Refugees

Politics and government
Afghanistan 868w
Albania 603w
Developing countries 301w
Zimbabwe 133–4w, 257w, 271–2, 599w, 668–9w

Pollution control
Aircraft 787w
Carbon dioxide 206w

Pond, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 645
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 478

Pornography
Customs and Excise 444w

Port of London Authority
686w

Portcullis House
401w

Porton Down
Human experiments 86–7w

Post offices
Bank services 589–90w, 695w
Closures 251w, 706w, 777w
Putney (23.10.01) 52–60wh
Rural areas 778w
Scotland 502w
Sussex 251w
Wales 506w

Postal services
Standards 504–5w
Terrorism 405w

Postgraduate education
397–8

Pound, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 546–7, 573, 577, 586
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 155
Questions
Monetary compensatory amounts 739w

Poverty
Africa 266–8
Children 644w
Palestinians 294w

Premier Christian Radio
866w

Premier Oil
Burma 134w

Prentice, Ms Bridget
Questions
Connexions Service 327w
Metropolitan Police, Recruitment 15
Speed limits, Cameras 851w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 297–8
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 31
Questions
Aerospace industry, Terrorism 581w
Botswana, Ethnic groups 133w
Botswana, HIV infection 304w
Burma, EC external relations 258w
Crimes of violence, Emergency services 718–9w
Departmental coordination 692w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 915w
Housing, Lancashire 234w
Kashmir 735–6
Prisons, Manufactured goods 719w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 671w
Railways, Safety 483w
Registration of births deaths and marriages, Islam 528w
Royal prerogative, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 357w
Royal prerogative, Dept for Education and Skills 328w
Royal prerogative, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 172w
Royal prerogative, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 234w
Royal prerogative, Dept for Work and Pensions 243w
Royal prerogative, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 182w
Royal prerogative, Treasury 207w
Special constables 717w
Tax credit, Derelict land 376w, 627w
UN Security Council 256–7w

Pre-school education
453–6w
Leicestershire 453w

Prescott, Rt Hon John, Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 875–6
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 871–2, 875, 877–8
Air routes, Inverness 878
British Irish Council 693w
Burnley 871
Climate Change Convention 693w
Departmental coordination 692w
EC grants and loans, Cornwall 877–8
Emergencies, Planning 870–1
Government, Annual reports 876–7
Hospital beds, Suffolk 875
Institutional care 874–5
Labour Party 873–4
Ministerial policy advisors 865–8
Monetary compensatory amounts 879–80
Northern Ireland government 874
Nurses 880
Schools, Dorset 872–3
Waste disposal 878–9

Prescriptions
Incapacity benefit 349w

Press
Home Office 854w

Press releases
Cabinet Office 293w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 265w
Dept for Education and Skills 255w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 547w
Dept for International Development 869w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 198w, 224–5w, 394w
Dept for Work and Pensions 179w, 522w
Dept of Health 159w
Dept of Trade and Industry 137w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 493–4w
Home Office 727w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 201w
Northern Ireland Office 739w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 182w
Treasury 258–9w

Prestwick
Air traffic control 806w

Price, Adam
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 373–4
Students (25.10.01) 435, 438, 449
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manufacturing industries (24.10.01) 79–81wh, 86wh
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep 547w
Community development 235w
Economic and monetary union 373w
Education, Standards 397
Industrial diseases, Compensation 998–9
Manufacturing industries, Redundancy 630–1w
Public expenditure, Wales 259w
Robbery 84w
Tourism 595–6w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn, Paymaster General
Questions
Administration of estates 887w
Children's tax credit, Northampton 745w
Double taxation 802w
Inheritance tax 887w
National insurance contributions 743–4w
National Insurance Contributions Office 882w
Payroll System Review 520w, 889w
Tax allowances, Offshore industry 889w
Tax allowances, Training 889w
Tax yields, Football 627w
Taxation, Companies 800–1w
Taxation, EC action 745w
Taxation, Fines 746–7w
Taxation, Married people 882w
Taxation, NHS 744w
Taxation, Research 748w
Taxation, Retirement 744–5w
Working families tax credit, Abuse 626–7w
Working families tax credit, Bassetlaw 887–8w

Primary care trusts
152w

Primary education
Admissions 711w
Non-teaching staff 471w
Standards 328–9w, 532w

Prime Minister
Public appointments 313–4w
Royal prerogative 292w

Prime ministers
Ministerial powers 607w

Prisk, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (25.10.01) 426
Questions
Billing, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 493w
Birds, Conservation 26w
Business questions 425
Housing, Hertfordshire 132, 579w
Local government finance 193w, 227w
Manpower, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 27–8w
Sixth form education, Finance 36w
Urban areas 101w
Urban Task Force 101w

Prisoners
854w
Mentally ill 828–9w
Rehabilitation 212–4w, 850–1w
Suicide 330–1w

Prisoners of war
Compensation 2w, 318w, 748–9w

Prisoners' release
Northern Ireland 496–7w

Prisons
17–8, 330–1w
Drugs 730w
Education 213w, 336w
Jobclubs 74w
Manufactured goods 719w

Private finance initiative
625w
Air force 510w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 227w
Education 398–9
Home Office 288–9w
Hospitals 558w
Northern Ireland Office 340–1w
Roads 193–4w
Whittington Hospital 742w

Private Members' bills
Rulings and statements (02.11.01) 1113–4

Private roads
381w

Private sector
NHS 32w, 654–5w, 827–8w

Privatisation
Employee share ownership schemes 802w

Probation officers
Manpower 853–4w

Proceeds of crime
73w, 203w
Nigeria 203w, 205w
Northern Cyprus 314w

Proceeds of Crime Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R, Programme motion, money res* and ways and means res* (30.10.01) 757–851
Questions
73w, 282w

Procurement
Aircraft carriers 765w, 767w
Amphibious vehicles 763–4w
Defence equipment 406w, 513–4w, 659w, 665w, 880–1w
Hawk aircraft 767–8w
Satellite communications 317–8w

Productivity
445w, 642w

Professional organisations
Health visitors 150w

Property
Customs and Excise 625w
Stocks and shares 202w

Proscribed organisations
118w, 616w
Albania 315w
Macedonia 315w

Prosecutions
370–2w
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 286w
Graffiti 280w
Racial violence 491–2w, 606–7w, 853w

Prosser, Mr Gwyn
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 638–9
Questions
RAF Personnel Management Agency, Standards 236–7w
Refugees, Voucher schemes 4

Public appointments
British Waterways Board 921w
Civil Aviation Authority 199–200w
Committee on Standards in Public Life 807w
Health authorities 420w
Judiciary 754w
NHS Appointments Commission 653–4w
Non-departmental public bodies 174w
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission 567w
Prime Minister 313–4w
Regional development agencies 250w
Strategic Rail Authority 200w

Public bodies
Debts written off 743w

Public expenditure
62–3w, 261w, 641w, 643w, 745–6w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 364w
Dept for Work and Pensions 53w, 843–4w
Dept of Trade and Industry 13–4w
North East region 259–60w
Scotland 445w, 520w, 889–90w
Wales 259w

Public finance
374w

Public houses
Licensing 264–5w
Noise 23w

Public libraries
Internet 357w

Public order
Official visits 716w

Public private partnerships
62w
London Underground 186w, 390w, 394w

Public relations
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 594–5w

Public telephones
Hearing impaired 502–3w

Public transport
381–3w
Greater Manchester 144

Publicity
Dept for Work and Pensions 525w
Milk 170w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 904w
Pensions 53w

Pugh, Dr John
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 530
Students (25.10.01) 445, 449, 459–61

Pupil exclusions
323w, 710w

Pupils
Contraceptives 459w

Putney
Post offices (23.10.01) 52–60wh

Pyramid selling
315w

Queen Elizabeth II
Anniversaries 4w, 22–3w, 48–9w, 400w, 759–60w, 879–80w

Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Questions
Regional planning and development, Departmental responsibilities 1000

Quinn, Lawrie
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Regional assistance, Fisheries (24.10.01) 133–4wh, 137–8wh
Questions
Exservicemen 509w
Police, Scarborough 66w
Regional planning and development, Yorkshire and Humberside 680–1w

Race Relations Act 1976
Questions
291w, 403–4w, 853w

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
Questions
291w

Racial discrimination
Armed forces 403–4w
Conferences 811–2w
Crown Prosecution Service 371w

Racial violence
Prosecutions 491–2w, 606–7w, 853w

Racially aggravated offences
852w

Radar
Scotland 104w

Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001
Questions
113w

Radiation exposure
618–9

Radio
250–1w, 407w
Devon 358w

Radioactive wastes
239w
Waste management 24w, 275w, 543w

Radiography
Vacancies 344–7w

Radon gas
389w

RAF Menwith Hill
Treaties 114w

RAF Personnel Management Agency
Standards 236–7w

RAF St Athan
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 660w

RAF Training Group
Standards 237w

Railtrack
396–7w
Finance 9w, 61–2w, 93–4w, 141–2, 195–7w, 222w, 225w, 396–9w, 424–6w, 569–72w, 574w, 627w, 670–4w, 782–4w, 802–3w, 906–7w

Railway signals
380–1w

Railway stations
East Sussex 478w

Railways
Accidents 398w
Bicycles 797w
East Sussex (31.10.01) 295–303wh
EC law 192w, 684w
Finance 221w, 226w, 229w, 475w, 479w, 568w, 570–1w, 784w
Franchises 189w, 669w, 671w, 784w, 908w
Freight 784w
Milton Keynes 482w
North West region 674w, 908w
Repairs and maintenance 671w
Safety 483w, 569–71w, 573w, 671w, 781w, 785w
Standards 398w
Wales 190w, 224w, 383w, 401w
Worcester 233–4w

Railways Act 1993
Questions
671–3w

Randall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 527–33, 566, 569–70, 594

Rapid deployment forces
EC countries 512w

Rapid transit systems
Hampshire 487w

Rationing
Drugs 273

Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick, Minister for Local Government, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 378–82
Questions
Brazil 568–9w
Building regulations 681–4w
Constituencies 430w
Industrial health and safety, EC action 430–1w
Local authorities, Borrowing 429w
Regional government 137–8, 186w

Recreation spaces
23w

Recruitment
Armed forces 659–60w, 662w
Customs and Excise 443–4w
Local government 230w
Mental health services 742w
Metropolitan Police 14–5
Police 71w
Social workers 310w, 892–3w
Teachers 39w, 44w, 323–4w, 453w, 469–70w

Recycling
533–4w
Domestic wastes 167–9w, 364w, 534–5w
Industrial wastes 535w
Plastics 361–2w

Redundancy
Manufacturing industries 630–1w
South West region 637w

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 164, 176, 180, 183–90
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 900–3
Questions
Interest rates 376w
Railtrack, Finance 397–9w, 572w, 673w, 802–3w
Railways, Accidents 398w

Reed, Mr Andy
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 343–7wh
Questions
Crime prevention, Sports 719–20w
Crime prevention, Young people 9
Delivery Unit 863
Developing countries, Debts 297–8w
General practitioners, Leicestershire 152–3w
Hip replacements, Leicestershire 309w
Leicestershire Health Authority, Finance 153w
Police, Standards 720–1w
Pre-school education, Leicestershire 453w
Students, Fees and charges 529w
Textiles 777w

Refugees
1–2, 4–5, (24.10.01) 93–113wh, 279w, 501w
Administrative delays 284w
Afghanistan 452w, 580w, 608–10w
Algeria 73w
Appeals 335w, 399w
Arab states 278–9w
Australia 606w
Cardiff Prison 76w
Children in care 830–1w, 853w
Deportation 76–7w, 500–1w
Detainees 76w, 284w, 333–6w
Employment 7–8, 333w
Finance 334w
Health services 143–4w
HIV infection 611–2w
Immigration rules 85–6w
Legal opinion 76w
Liverpool 611w
Ministerial statements (29.10.01) 627–47
Misrepresentation 617w
Palestinians 74w
Qualifications 216w
Rulings and statements (29.10.01) 647, (30.10.01) 753
Spelthorne 611w
Sudan 434w
Voucher schemes 1–4, 333–5w, 729w

Regency Act 1937
Questions
858w

Regional airports
385w, 428w
Landing rights 476w

Regional assemblies
South East region 140–1, 677w

Regional assistance
Fisheries (24.10.01) 131–8wh

Regional development agencies
137w, 249w, 427–8w, 694w
Manpower 418w
Public appointments 250w

Regional government
127–9, 137–8, 186w
Departmental responsibilities 143w

Regional planning and development
Departmental responsibilities 1000
South West region 226w
Yorkshire and Humberside 680–1w

Registered Designs Regulations 2001
Debates etc.
(30.10.01) 851–2
Questions
780w, 803w

Registration of births deaths and marriages
888w
Islam 528w
Terrorism 400w

Regulation of Health Care Professionals Council
891w

Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Technical Advisory Board) Order 2001
Debates etc.
(30.10.01) 852

Regulatory impact assessments
804–5w

Regulatory Reform Act 2001
Questions
870w

Rehabilitation
Prisoners 212–4w, 850–1w

Reid, Rt Hon Dr John, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland, Ministerial statements (24.10.01) 302–19
Questions
Population, Northern Ireland 496w
Terrorism, Republic of Ireland 5–6w, 16w

Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (24.10.01) 321–7

Religious freedom
Pakistan 810w
Sudan 435w

Religiously aggravated offences
447w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 428–33, 446, 455
Questions
Excise duties, Petrol alternatives 890w
Higher education, Research 42–3w, 530–1w
Police, Vehicles 75w
Road traffic offences, Fixed penalties 729–30w
Students, Finance 324w

Rented housing
Repossession orders 50w

Rents
189w
Arrears 276w

Repossession orders
Rented housing 50w

Republic of Ireland
Terrorism 5–6w, 16w, 135w

Rescue services
Scotland 477–8w
VAT 59w

Resignations
Teachers 44w, 461w, 621w

Retail trade
Fireworks (30.10.01) 228–34wh
Petrol 695w

Retirement
624–5w
Dept for Education and Skills 474w
Dept for Work and Pensions 338w, 847w
Doctors 551–2w
General practitioners 557–8w
Ministry of Defence 241w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 351w
Taxation 744–5w
Teachers 618w

Review of the Payroll System
see Payroll System Review

Reviews
Defence Intelligence and Security Centre 660–1w

Right to buy
430w

River Thames
Boats 224w
Water sports 101–2w

Road traffic
Cheltenham 677–8w

Road traffic control
Greater London 133–6
Southampton 236w

Road traffic offences
Fixed penalties 729–30w

Road works
136–7, 275–6w, 575–9w
East Anglia 795w
Environment protection 576w
North Yorkshire 193w, 369–70w

Roads
Accidents 678w
Chippenham 386–7w
Isle of Wight 487w
Noise 189–90w
Private finance initiative 193–4w
Safety 188–9w
Standard spending assessments 103w, 198–9w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 299
Refugees (29.10.01) 644
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1015, 1030, 1062, 1073–5
Questions
Democratic Republic of Congo, Overseas aid 690w
Ministerial policy advisors 691w
North Korea, International assistance 580–1w
Terrorism 509w

Robbery
84w

Robertson, Angus
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 558
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 283–5wh
Questions
Air force, Private finance initiative 510w
Air routes, Inverness 878
Clyde naval base 878w

Robertson, Angus—continued
Council of Ministers, Scottish Executive 117w
Defence equipment, Procurement 880–1w
Manpower, Ministry of Defence 769–70w
Military bases, Scotland 880w
Radioactive wastes 239w
Scotland, Ministry of Defence 881w
Select committees, Dept for International Development 771w
Select committees, Ministry of Defence 765w
Social Exclusion Unit, Manpower 44–5w
Terrorism 739–40
Trading funds, Ministry of Defence 881w

Robertson, Hugh
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1089–91
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Hospitals, Kent (30.10.01) 237–8wh
Questions
English Tourism Council 265w
Foot and mouth disease, Tourism 262–3w, 266w
Institutional care 159–60w
Smuggling, Alcoholic drinks 59w
Stocks and shares, Property 202w

Robertson, John
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 825–7
Questions
Manufacturing industries 994
Navy 625–6

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 41–2, 59–61
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 318
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 175–6w
Agriculture 360w
Arms trade, Export controls 590w
Coroners 213w
Entry clearances 437w
Flood control, Housing 270w
Health visitors 33w
Housing benefit, Young people 440w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 560w
Invalid care allowances 440w
Nature conservation 173w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 4w, 22–3w
Right to buy 430w
Road works 275–6w

Robinson, Geoffrey
Members' suspension (31.10.01) 885–906

Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Members' interests, Personal statements (31.10.01) 884

Robinson, Mr Peter D
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 916–7, 928–9, 941–3
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 317–8

Roche, Mrs Barbara, Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Questions
Delivery Unit 862–3
Energy Policy Review 868–9
Foot and mouth disease 869
Government Office for London, Standards 45–6w

Roche, Mrs Barbara—continued
Government Office for the East Midlands 693w
Government Office for the East of England 693w
Government Office for the North West 692w
Ministerial policy advisors 691w
Social Exclusion Unit, Manpower 44–5w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse (31.10.01) 311–5wh
Questions
Members, Training 221w

Rogers of Riverside Task Force
see Urban Task Force

Romania
Export controls 6w
Frigates 770w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 479–81, 484
Questions
Civil Aviation Authority, Public appointments 199–200w
Police, Personnel management 67w
Railtrack, Finance 673–4w

Rosindell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 930–1, 950–2
Legalisation of Cannabis Bill, 2R adjourned (26.10.01) 597, 599–600
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1077–9
Questions
Community Fund, Greater London 761w
Constituencies, Scotland 807w
Countryside, Access 592w
Gibraltar, Spain 737–8
Manufacturing industries 776w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 479w
St Christopher and Nevis, Libyan Arab Republic 118–9w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 745

Royal charters
Urban areas 48–9w

Royal family
Marriage 858w
Trade marks 780w, 803w

Royal Liverpool Hospital
Pancreatic cancer 32w

Royal Marriages Act 1772
Questions
858w

Royal prerogative
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 357w
Dept for Education and Skills 328w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 172w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 234w
Dept for Work and Pensions 243w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 182w
Prime Minister 292w
Treasury 207w

Ruane, Chris
Debates etc.
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 475

Ruane, Chris—continued
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 875
Broadband, Wales 778w
Fireworks, Accidents 316w

Ruddock, Joan
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 337, 347–52
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1024, 1035
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Breast cancer (23.10.01) 21–4wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 601w
Afghanistan, Females 601–2w
Afghanistan, Politics and government 868w
Business questions 423
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 176–7w
Police 65w

Rural areas
Departmental coordination 733w
Housing 272w, 426–7w
Jobcentres 523w
Pharmacy 557w
Police 69–70w
Post offices 778w
Voluntary organisations 546w

Russell, Bob
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders 716w
Bus services, Working hours 98–9w
Criminal Records Bureau 449–50w
Criminal Records Bureau, Voluntary organisations 280w
Essex Police, Special constables 718w
Football, Sportsgrounds 21–2w
Landfill tax credit scheme 626w
Military bases, Colchester 616
Prisoners, Suicide 330–1w
Prisons 330–1w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 48–9w
Sportsmatch 357–8w
Wembley Stadium 761–2w

Russell, Ms Christine
Questions
Medical records, Fees and charges 754–5w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 600w

Russia
NATO enlargement 740–2
Overseas aid 304w

Ryan, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Abandoned vehicles (22.10.01) 122
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 332
Students (25.10.01) 437, 442
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Fireworks, Retail trade (30.10.01) 228–31wh
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 875–6
Business questions 414

S4C
Finance 264w

St Christopher and Nevis
Libyan Arab Republic 118–9w

St David's Day
904w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 667w, 750
Climate change levy 59–60w
Electricity 411w

Salmond, Mr Alex—continued
Energy, Conservation 24w, 171w
Foot and mouth disease, Hunting 737w
Livestock, Transport 547–8w
Married personal allowance 259w
Members, Correspondence 213w
Public expenditure, Scotland 889–90w
Radar, Scotland 104w
Select committees, Lord Chancellor's Dept 49w
Select committees, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 27w
Sheep, Ear tagging 545–6w
Tax allowances, Offshore industry 889w
Terrorism 15–6w
Textiles, Climate change levy 137–8w

Salter, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 193, 202, 211–6

Sanctions
Turkey 16–7w

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 48–50, 85–6, 96
Questions
Aircraft, Air conditioning 388–9w
Bye laws 389–90w
Bypasses, Planning permission 389w
Dogs, Bye laws 411–2w, 917w
Local government finance 574w
Members, Correspondence 721w
Radio, Devon 358w
Redundancy, South West region 637w
Rents, Arrears 276w

Sarwar, Mr Mohammad
Questions
Football, Scotland 762w
Security, Regulation 849w
Sierra Leone 813–4w

Satellite communications
Procurement 317–8w

Saudi Arabia
Entry clearances 496w

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 30–1
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1071
Questions
Ballistic missile defence, USA 281–2
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 616
Serbia, Arms trade 911w
Sudan, Armed conflict 268

Sawford, Phil
Questions
Bus services 187–8w
Council of Ministers 808–10w
Northamptonshire Police, Manpower 65w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 638
Questions
Food, Terrorism 273–4w
Foot and mouth disease 540w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 366w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 163–4w, 368–9w, 805–6w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 806w
Foot and mouth disease, Waste disposal 361w
Incinerators 412w
Incinerators, Dioxins 166w, 918w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan—continued
Liquefied petroleum gas 684–5w
Monetary compensatory amounts 919–20w
Nuclear power 593–4w
Nuclear power, Environment protection 544–5w
Oil 588–9w
Packaging, EC law 413–4w
Plant power 410w
Radioactive wastes, Waste management 275w
Recycling 533–4w
Recycling, Domestic wastes 167–9w, 364w
Recycling, Industrial wastes 535w
Tipping of waste 167w, 591w
Tipping of waste, Methane 410–1w
Waste disposal 166w
Waste management 412–3w
Waste management, Construction 414w

Scarborough
Police 66w

Schizophrenia
Medical treatments 308–9w

School leaving
Chelmsford 710–1w

Schools
463–4w, 623w
Admissions 623w
Armed forces 624–5
Counselling 460w
Discipline 329w
Dorset 872–3
Finance 251–2w, 471w, 530w, 623w
Music 34w, 528w, 532w
Northampton 714–5w
Per capita costs 456–8w
Security 896w
Somerset 329w
Sponsorship 709w
Standards 328w, 901–2w
Transport (30.10.01) 243–50wh, 460w
Wales 903w
Worcestershire (24.10.01) 122–30wh

Scotland
Athletics 758w
Community development 476–7w
Constituencies 352–4w, 807w
Defence equipment 880–1w
Football 762w
Local broadcasting 354w
Military bases 880w
Ministry of Defence 881w
Monetary compensatory amounts 548w, 805w
National Lottery 358w
Post offices 502w
Public expenditure 445w, 520w, 889–90w
Radar 104w
Rescue services 477–8w
Sheep meat 172w
Social Exclusion Unit 44–5w
Social security benefits 836–8w
Television 358–9w

Scotland Act 1998
Questions
353w, 415–6

Scotland Office
Assets 691w

Scotland Yard
see Metropolitan Police

Scottish Executive
Council of Ministers 117w

Scottish Transport Group
Pension funds 210w, 442w

Scraple
918–20w

Secondary education
Standards 531w

Secondment
Dept of Trade and Industry 415w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 492–3w
Treasury 888–9w

Secretarial staff
NHS 159w

Security
Airports 194w, 235w
Aviation (23.10.01) 1–20wh, 226w, 290–1w
Government departments 849w
Metropolitan Police 448–9w
Northern Ireland 869w
Nuclear power 6–7w, 501w
Plutonium 315w
Regulation 849w
Schools 896w
Transport 788w

Sedgemore, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1050–2

Select committees
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 182w
Dept for Education and Skills 473–4w
Dept for International Development 771w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 49w
Ministry of Defence 765w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 27w
Rulings and statements (24.10.01) 320

Self-assessment
Income tax 208–9w, 446w

Self-employed
Pensions 752w

Sellafield
Mixed oxide fuel 169w

Selous, Andrew
Debates etc.
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1142–4
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 225–7

Serbia
Arms trade 911w

SERCO
Ministry of Defence 109–12w

Service industries
631–2w
Manpower 635–7w

Sewers
169w, 914w

Sex
Health education 153–4w

Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R and Programme motion (24.10.01) 328–83

Sexual offences
Mentally incapacitated 739–40w

Shares
Partnerships UK 626w

Shaw, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Abandoned vehicles (22.10.01) 120, 124

Shaw, Mr Jonathan—continued
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 655, 707–9
Questions
Northern Ireland government 874
Radiation exposure 618–9
Sixth form education, Curriculum 326w

Sheep
165w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (22.10.01) 19–36, 547w, 591–2w
Ear tagging 545–6w

Sheep meat
550–1w
Infant foods 594w
Scotland 172w

Sheep premiums
536w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Questions
Motor vehicles, EC law 993

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 165

Sheridan, Mr Jim
Questions
Business questions 1009
Terrorism 613

Shetland
Customs and Excise 444w

Shipley, Ms Debra
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 653, 661, 666
Questions
Schools, Counselling 460w

Short, Rt Hon Clare, Secretary of State for International Development
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Ministerial statements (24.10.01) 283–301
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1058, 1064, 1086, 1095–102
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 305w, 686w
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 304–5w
Afghanistan, Politics and government 868w
Africa, Armed conflict 295w
Africa, HIV infection 300–1w
Africa, Overseas aid 295w
Africa, Poverty 266–8
Argentina, Hemp 691w
Assets, Dept for International Development 690w
Bangladesh, Females 493w
Botswana, HIV infection 304w
China, HIV infection 689w
China, Human rights 296w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Overseas aid 690w
Developing countries, Corruption 301–2w
Developing countries, Debts 297–9w, 868–9w
Developing countries, Disease control 296–7w
Developing countries, Drugs 264–6, 771w
Developing countries, Education 300w
Developing countries, Politics and government 301w
Developing countries, Trade agreements 771–2w
Ethical trading initiative 263–4
Gambia, Elections 689w

Short, Rt Hon Clare—continued
General Agreement on Trade in Services 299w
Ilisu dam 301w
India, Earthquakes 296w
India, Overseas aid 295–6w
Kosovo, Children 298w
Microcredit programmes 303–4w
Palestinians, Poverty 294w
Papua New Guinea, International assistance 686–7w
Press releases, Dept for International Development 869w
Russia, Overseas aid 304w
Select committees, Dept for International Development 771w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 297w
Southern Africa, AIDS 300w
Sudan, Armed conflict 268–9, 772w
Sudan, International assistance 772w
Swaziland, Sugar 304w
Tibet, Overseas aid 296w
UN agencies 302w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 303w, 690w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 271–2

Sick leave
Home Office 211–2w

Sierra Leone
813–4w
Helicopters 567w
Overseas aid 297w

Simmonds, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 61–3, 66

Simon, Mr Sion
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 204, 221, 227–9

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1095, 1097–8
Questions
Further education, Non-teaching staff 36w
Further education, Pay 34–5w
Genetically modified organisms, Maize 552–3w

Simpson, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 570–2
Questions
Road works 137

Sixth form education
403–4
Curriculum 326w
Finance 36–7w, 41w, 463w, 773w, 903w
Worcestershire 463w, 711w

Skelmersdale
Motorcycles (24.10.01) 386–92

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (22.10.01) 4
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 895, 898
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 492

Small Business Service
583w, 986–8
Bassetlaw 316w
Chorley 701–2w
Ethnic groups 8–9w
Females 8–9w

Small businesses
777w
Closed circuit television 501w
Cumbria 7w
Finance 7w, 583–4w

Smallpox
Vaccination 895w

SMART awards
501–2w

Smith, Rt Hon Andrew, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Audit 63w
British Waterways Board, Finance 259w
Children, Day care 373w
Corporation tax 261w
Crown Estate Commissioners, Dredging 444–5w
Debts written off, Public bodies 743w
Disabled person's tax credit 206w
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 209w
Government departments, Standards 373–4w, 886w
Income tax, Self-assessment 446w
Inheritance tax 258w
Married personal allowance 259w
National Bus Company, Pension funds 442–3w
NHS, Finance 520w
Partnerships UK, Shares 626w
Pay, Directors 374w
Private finance initiative 625w
Privatisation, Employee share ownership schemes 802w
Public expenditure 62–3w, 261w, 641w, 643w, 745–6w
Public expenditure, North East region 259–60w
Public expenditure, Scotland 445w, 520w, 889–90w
Public expenditure, Wales 259w
Public finance 374w
Public private partnerships 62w
Railtrack, Finance 61–2w, 627w
Regulation 372–3w
Regulation, Costs 372w
Scottish Transport Group, Pension funds 210w, 442w
Standards, Treasury 888w
Tax burden 882w
Tax burden, Pensioners 261w
Tax yields 445w

Smith, Angela, An Assistant Whip
Debates etc.
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1148

Smith, Rt Hon Chris
Questions
Legal profession, Complaints 799–800w

Smith, Jacqui, Minister of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 718–22
Cervical cancer (25.10.01) 522–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 176–82wh
Schools, Worcestershire (24.10.01) 124wh
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 307–8w
Antenatal care, Screening 892w
Biological weapons 664w, 666w
Breast feeding 553–4w
Care Direct, South West region 32w
Cellular phones, Health hazards 154w
Cervical cancer, Death rate 30–1w
Cervical cancer, Screening 30w

Smith, Jacqui—continued
Childbirth 826–7w
Children, Domestic violence 649–50w
Children in care 159w
Children in care, Bed and breakfast accommodation 798w
Children in care, Refugees 830–1w
Community care 148w
Community care services grant 156–7w, 558–9w
Dementia 157–8w
Dementia, Coventry 157–8w
Elderly, Voluntary organisations 158–9w
Genetics, Insurance 162–3w
Guardianship 648w
Haemophilia, Medical treatments 891w
Health education, Sex 153–4w
Health services, Elderly 155–6w
Health services, Neurology 156w
Health services, Standards 155w
Hearing aids 559–60w, 649w
Heart diseases, Jarrow 740–1w
Hemel Hempstead Hospital, Maternity services 648–9w
Home care services, Fees and charges 32w, 155–6w
Hospital beds 155w, 310–1w, 349w, 893w
Hospital beds, Newcastle upon Tyne 655–8w
Hospital beds, Worcestershire 814–5w
Infectious diseases, Disease control 892w
Institutional care 28w, 144w, 159–61w, 819–20w
Institutional care, Closures 160–1w, 181–2w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 33w, 156w, 160–1w, 560w, 893w
Institutional care, South Tyneside 891–2w
Institutional care, Standards 814w
Mental health 647–8w
Mental health, NHS Direct 555–6w
Mental health services 555–6w, 647w, 819w
Mental health services, Advocacy 556–8w
Mental health services, Community care 152w, 828w
Mental health services, Ethnic groups 554–5w
Mental health services, Expenditure 558w
Mental health services, Females 147–8w, 817–9w
Mental health services, Greater London 647w
Mental health services, Recruitment 742w
Mental health services, Standards 144–6w
Mental health services, Vacancies 816–7w
Mental health services, Young people 146–8w
Mental patients 146–7w
Mentally ill, Employment 554w
Mentally ill, Hospital beds 146w, 556w
Mentally ill, Prisoners 828–9w
Mentally ill, Suicide 825–6w
National Institute for Mental Health, Finance 150w
NHSnet, Pharmacy 816w
Pharmacy 306w
Royal Liverpool Hospital, Pancreatic cancer 32w
Schizophrenia, Medical treatments 308–9w
Social services, Personal records 148w
Social workers, Recruitment 310w, 892–3w
Such, Barrie 151w
Sudden adult death syndrome, Screening 307w
Suicide 147w
Sure start programme, Northampton 900–1w
Tourette's syndrome 560w

Smith, Mr John
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 165–6, 232
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1024
Questions
Business questions 1006–7
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, RAF St Athan 660w
Energy Policy Review 868–9
GCE A level 325w

Smith, Llew
Questions
Chemical and biological warfare 1w
Excise duties, Motor vehicles 202w
Mixed oxide fuel 292w
Nuclear fuels, Transport 669w
Plutonium 10w, 318w
Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 113w
S4C, Finance 264w

Smoking
Juries 753w

Smuggling
744w
Alcoholic drinks 59w
Motor vehicles 625–6w
Tobacco 380w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 649–50
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 298
IRA, Points of order (23.10.01) 190
Questions
Gibraltar, Spain 738

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 555
Questions
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 615–6

Social clubs
Gaming machines 763–4w

Social Exclusion Unit
Manpower 44–5w
Scotland 44–5w

Social rented housing
483–4w
Gloucestershire 427w

Social security benefits
57w, 180w
Abuse 54w, 243–8w, 438–9w, 526–7w, 749w, 751w, 847w
Automated credit transfer 441–2w
Blyth Valley 243–4w
Bromley 248w
Cornwall 244w
Cumbria 53w
Disabled 645–6w
East Lothian 246–7w
Haringey 247–8w
Hertfordshire 245–6w
Highlands of Scotland 749w
Kensington and Chelsea 244–5w
Medical examinations 53w
Overpayments 642–3w
Overseas residence 439w
Scotland 836–8w
Take-up 526w

Social Security Benefits Agency
248–9w

Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2000
Questions
178w

Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001
Debates etc.
(25.10.01) 472–95
Questions
338w, 643w

Social services
Personal records 148w

Social workers
Recruitment 310w, 892–3w
Wales 892–3w

Sole traders
775w

Soley, Mr Clive
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 622

Solihull Hospital
Accident and emergency departments 151–2w

Somerset
Environment Agency 738w
Foot and mouth disease 735w
Health authorities 829–30w
Schools 329w

South East region
Police 68–9w
Regional assemblies 140–1, 677w
Transport (30.10.01) 204–27wh

South Tyneside
Institutional care 891–2w

South Wales Police
Manpower 70–1w

South West region
Care Direct 32w
Redundancy 637w
Regional planning and development 226w

South Yorkshire
Fire services 676w

Southampton
Road traffic control 236w

Southern Africa
AIDS 300w

Southworth, Ms Helen
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 149
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1022
Questions
Armed forces, Telecommunications 513w
Competition, North West region 777w

Sovereignty
Petitions (23.10.01) 253

Space for sport and arts programme
22w

Spain
Gibraltar 737–9

Speaker and deputies
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (22.10.01) 39, 70, 81, 93, 105, (23.10.01) 149, (25.10.01) 428, (31.10.01) 907, 934, 959
Conduct of proceedings (22.10.01) 30, 65, 97, (23.10.01) 139, 161, 163, 178, 200, 231, 244–5, (24.10.01) 286, 308–9, 314, 323, 338, 348, 357, 361, 369, (25.10.01) 397, 403, 405, 410, 428, 432–3, 472, 479, 495, (26.10.01) 542, 574, 600, (29.10.01) 609, 629, 642, 692, 694, (30.10.01) 815, 846, (31.10.01) 876, 893, 895, 898–9, 902–4, 930, 948, 971, (01.11.01) 996, 998, 1002, 1013, 1034, 1050, 1056, 1070, 1073, 1096, 1100–1, 1105, (02.11.01) 1113, 1132, 1138, 1155–7, 1161
Points of order (22.10.01) 38, (23.10.01) 145, 157, 176, 178, 190, 233, (24.10.01) 320, (29.10.01) 648, (30.10.01) 753, (01.11.01) 1062, 1105, (02.11.01) 1116, 1149
Private Members' bill orders (02.11.01) 1182
Rulings and statements, Fifteen minutes rule (30.10.01) 767
Rulings and statements, General elections (23.10.01) 145
Rulings and statements, Ministerial statements (22.10.01) 37
Rulings and statements, Political impartiality (30.10.01) 753
Rulings and statements, Private Members' bills (02.11.01) 1113–4
Rulings and statements, Refugees (29.10.01) 647
Rulings and statements, Select committees (24.10.01) 320
Rulings and statements, Ten minutes rule (24.10.01) 328, (01.11.01) 1032
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Conduct of proceedings (23.10.01) 24wh, 40wh, (24.10.01) 80wh, 104–5wh, 113wh, 118–9wh, 121wh, 127wh, (25.10.01) 148wh, 151wh, 161wh, 182wh, (30.10.01) 221–2wh, 227wh, (31.10.01) 263wh, 276wh, 294–5wh, 299wh, 303wh, (01.11.01) 351wh
Rulings and statements, Adjournment debates (31.10.01) 305–7wh
Rulings and statements, Written questions (30.10.01) 250wh

Special constables
12–3, 278w, 717w
Essex Police 718w
Manpower 278w
Sussex Police 717–8w
Wales 278w
West Midlands Police 214–5w, 450w

Special education
37–8w, 468–71w, 712–3w
Nottinghamshire 458w

Specialist schools
326w, 406–7, 622w, 712–3w, 772–3w
Admissions 895w
Languages 896–7w

Speed limits
188w, 193w, 477w, 685w
Cameras 69w, 851w, 862–3w

Spellar, Rt Hon John, Minister for Transport, Department for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 183–4, 195–6, 210, 234, 238–45
Questions
Aer Lingus 386w
Air routes, Northern Ireland 476w
Airports, Parking 906–7w
Arriva 678w
Aviation, Government assistance 225–6w
Aviation, Security 226w
Belfast City Airport 428–9w
Civil Aviation Authority, Public appointments 199–200w
Driving Standards Agency 429w
East Midlands Airport, Night flying 429w
Heathrow Airport, Night flying 385–6w

Spellar, Rt Hon John—continued
London Underground, Public private partnerships 186w
National Air Traffic Services 428w
Paddington Rail Accident Inquiry 478–9w
Public transport, Greater Manchester 144
Railtrack, Finance 397–9w, 569–72w, 670–1w, 782–3w, 802–3w, 906–7w
Railways, Accidents 398w
Railways, Finance 479w, 570–1w
Railways, Franchises 669w, 784w
Railways, Safety 569–71w, 573w, 671w, 781w
Regional airports 385w, 428w
Regional airports, Landing rights 476w
Road traffic control, Greater London 133–6
Strategic Rail Authority 670w
Thameslink railway line 568w
West coast railway line 186–7w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 285–8
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 350, 369, 376–8
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1092–5
Questions
Afghanistan, Females 270
Developing countries, Maternal mortality 269–70

Spelthorne
Refugees 611w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Questions
Standard spending assessments 130

Spinal injuries
305–6w, 341w

Spink, Bob
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 562
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 535, 537, 579–80, 594
Questions
Education 327w
Essex Police, Manpower 9–10
Ilisu dam 10w, 301w

Sponsorship
Schools 709w
Sports 21w

Sport England
see English Sports Council

Sports
761–2w
Crime prevention 719–20w
Drugs 183–4w
Hooliganism 757–8w
Mass media 185w
Sponsorship 21w
Tax allowances 625w
Television (24.10.01) 114–21wh
Voluntary organisations 185w

Sports Aid Foundation
Athletics 185w

Sportsgrounds
Fireworks 450w
Football 21–2w

Sportsmatch
357–8w

Spring, Mr Richard
Questions
Gibraltar, Spain 739
Hospital beds, Suffolk 875
Taxation, EC action 745w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Questions
EC common foreign and security policy, Parliamentary scrutiny 604w
Ministry of Defence, Consultants 878w

Sri Lanka
Arms trade 135–6w
Human rights 17–8w

Stakeholder pensions
179–80w, 750–1w, 847w

Standard spending assessments
129–32
Roads 103w, 198–9w

Standards of Conduct in Public Office Standing Committee
see Committee on Standards in Public Life

Stansted Airport
Hijacking 452w

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Questions
Animal experiments, Crimes of violence 90w
Business, Higher education 775w
Housing, Hertfordshire 132–3
Railways, Milton Keynes 482w

Starter home initiative
143–4, 190–1w, 484–7w, 685w, 797–8w

State earnings related pension scheme
643–4w

State retirement pensions
Age addition 177w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
Parole 732w
Police, Per capita costs 731w
Prisons, Drugs 730w
Theft, Cars 730–1w

Stevenson, Mr George
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 139
China, Human rights 909–10w
National Lottery, Stoke on Trent 597w
West coast railway line 186–7w

Stewart, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 273–6wh

Stewart, Ian
Questions
Urban Bus Challenge 923w

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul
Questions
Entry clearances 119–33w
Housing, Derelict land 794–5w
Housing, Fire prevention 793–4w
Housing, Standards 794w

Stoate, Dr Howard
Questions
Cold weather payments 181w
Maintenance, Children 751w

Stocks and shares
Property 202w

Stoke on Trent
Housing 871w
National Lottery 597w

Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin,
Sittings in Westminster Hall
AIDS (30.10.01) 183–7wh

Strategic Communications Unit
142w

Strategic Rail Authority
670w
Public appointments 200w

Straw, Rt Hon Jack, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 749–52
Kashmir 735–7
Mayors, Greater London 17w
Members, Correspondence 257w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 742–6
Press releases, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 493–4w

Streeter, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 643–4

Stroud
Planning permission 102–3w

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Questions
EC enlargement 747

Student numbers
Agriculture 594w
Chiropody 144w
Further education 715w
Higher education 252–3w, 900w

Student wastage
Higher education 253–4w

Students
Council tax 676–7w
Dentistry 33w
Fees and charges 255w, 529w
Finance 41–2w, 116–7w, 324–5w, 402w, 895–6w, 900w
Opposition days (25.10.01) 428–71
Wales 402w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
Questions
Climate change levy 747w

Subsidence
Mining 871w

Such, Barrie
151w

Sudan
Armed conflict 268–9, 434–6w, 603w, 772w, 810–1w
Human rights 434–6w
International assistance 434–5w, 772w
Refugees 434w
Religious freedom 435w

Sudden adult death syndrome
204–5w
Screening 307w

Suffolk
Hospital beds 875

Sugar
Swaziland 304w

Suicide
147w
Mentally ill 825–6w
Prisoners 330–1w

Supermarkets
Farmers 165–6w

Supported housing
104–5w

Sure start programme
Northampton 900–1w

Surgery
830w

Surgery—continued
European economic area 309w
Leicestershire 149w
Northern Ireland 894w
Waiting lists 29w, 149w, 832–5w, 894w

Sussex
Ambulance services 651–2w
Post offices 251w

Sussex Police
Manpower 68w, 728–9w, 861–2w
Special constables 717–8w

Swayne, Mr Desmond
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 623–4, 664w, 767w, 876w
Ambulance services, Hampshire 652–3w
Anthrax, Drugs 5w, 114w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 4w, 322w, 406w
Armed forces, Cannabis 664w
Armed forces, Deployment 769w
Armed forces, Driving 321–2w, 661w
Armed forces, Nationality 404–5w
Armed forces, Pensions 319w
Armed forces, Recruitment 659–60w, 662w
Armoured fighting vehicles 766w
Army, Northern Ireland 519w
Bombs 1–2w
Challenger tanks 320w
Challenger tanks, Ammunition 878w
Chemical and biological warfare 239–40w
Chemical and biological warfare, Research 770w
Computer software, Ministry of Defence 318–9w
Defence equipment, Procurement 406w
Defence Logistics Organisation 874–5w
Exercise Saif Sareea 2, Food supply 766w
Exservicemen 509–10w, 564w
HMS Ocean 661w
Insurance, Ministry of Defence 113–4w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, Disease control 342–3w
National security, USA 242w, 875w
New Forest 922w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 879–80w
Regional assemblies, South East region 140–1
Tactical reconnaissance armoured combat equipment requirement 321w, 878w
Territorial Army 320w, 663w
Territorial Army, Chemical and biological warfare 660w
Territorial Army, Manpower 240w
Territorial Army, Pensions 240w
Terrorism, EC action 599w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 668–9w

Swaziland
Sugar 304w

Swimming pools
803–4w

Swire, Mr Hugo
Debates etc.
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1064–7
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 580w

Tactical reconnaissance armoured combat equipment requirement
321w, 878w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Questions
Terrorism 740

Tate Modern
596w

Tax allowances
Housing improvement 60w
Offshore industry 889w
Sports 625w
Training 889w

Tax burden
882w
Pensioners 261w

Tax credit
Derelict land 376w, 627w

Tax evasion
380w

Tax yields
375w, 445w
Football 627w

Taxation
374w
Advisory services 207w
Cohabitation 882w
Companies 800–1w
Departmental responsibilities 378w
EC action 745w
EC countries 206w
Environment protection 444w
Fines 746–7w
Judgments 207w, 379w
Local exchange and trading schemes 58–9w
Manufacturing industries 627w
Married people 882w
NHS 744w
Research 748w
Retirement 744–5w
Time banks 58–9w

Taylor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 116
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 227
Questions
Climate Change Convention 732w
Local government services 187w
Specialist schools 406–7

Taylor, Mr Ian
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 139wh, 145–8wh

Taylor, Mr John
Questions
Constituencies 430w
Hearing aids 138w
Inheritance tax 258w
Members, Correspondence 721w
Parental responsibility 201w
Solihull Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 151–2w

Taylor, Matthew
Questions
Chemical and biological warfare, Research 112–3w
Council of Economic Advisers, Ministerial policy advisors 887w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 558w
Income tax, Self-assessment 446w
International Monetary Fund 203–4w
Magistrates' courts, Computers 753w
Ministers, Codes of practice 747w
Private finance initiative 625w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 227w
Proceeds of crime 203w
Public expenditure 261w
Public private partnerships 62w
Roads, Private finance initiative 193–4w

Taylor, Matthew—continued
Secondment, Treasury 888–9w
Tax burden 882w
White papers, Disclosure of information 527w
Working hours 204w

Taylor, Dr Richard
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Schools, Worcestershire (24.10.01) 125–6wh
Questions
NHS Appointments Commission, Public appointments 653–4w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 292
Food, EC action (25.10.01) 502, 504, 510–3
Refugees (29.10.01) 640
Questions
Grammar schools, Ballots 324w
Overseas trade 779–80w
Refugees 1–2

Teachers
Career structure 39w
Disabled 460w
East Riding 622w
Foreign workers 473w
Further education 404–5
Higher education 404–5
Oxfordshire 327w
Pay 463w
Qualifications 617–8w
Recruitment 39w, 44w, 323–4w, 453w, 469–70w
Resignations 44w, 461w, 621w
Retirement 618w
Training 465–8w, 621–2w
Vacancies 44w
Working hours 324w

Technology readiness and risk assessment programme
663w, 766w

Teenage pregnancy
62w

Telecommunications
Armed forces 513w, 619–20
Data protection 727–8w

Telecommunications masts
see Aerials

Telephone services
Customs and Excise 443w

Television
Afghanistan 490w
Broadcasting programmes 357w
Football 263w
Licensing 358–9w, 597w
Scotland 358–9w
Sports (24.10.01) 114–21wh

Temporary employment
EC law 774w

Ten minutes rule
Rulings and statements (24.10.01) 328, (01.11.01) 1032

Tenancy agreements
81w

Termination of employment
Ministry of Defence Police 769w

Territorial Army
320w, 663w
Chemical and biological warfare 660w
Manpower 240w, 403w
Pensions 240w

Terrorism
15–6w, 509w, 511w, 598–9w, 611–5, 739–40, 747–9, 862w, (01.11.01) 1014–105
Aerospace industry 581w
Aviation 81w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 491w
EC action 599w
European Convention on Human Rights 278–9
Extradition 753–4w
Finance 205w, 377w, 521w, 848–9w
Food 273–4w
Nuclear power 665–6w
Pakistan 276
Police interrogation 74w
Postal services 405w
Registration of births deaths and marriages 400w
Republic of Ireland 5–6w, 16w, 135w
Theatre 356–7w
Tourism 262–3w

Terrorism Act 2000
Questions
74w, 118w

Textiles
777w
Climate change levy 137–8w

Thameslink railway line
222–3w, 568w

Theatre
Terrorism 356–7w

Theft
Cars 730–1w

Thomas, Gareth
Questions
Alternative energy 10w

Thomas, Mr Gareth R
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 530, 566–70
Questions
After school clubs 37w
Airports, Security 194w
Alternative energy 11–3w, 776w
Athletics 758–9w, 803–4w
Athletics, Medicine 759w
Bank services, Disadvantaged 204w
Business questions 1010–1
Electric cables 13w
Football 762w
Litter 363w
Local government, Recruitment 230w
Manufacturing industries 986
Metropolitan Police, Recruitment 14–5
Olympic Games 761w
Palestinians, Poverty 294w
River Thames, Water sports 101–2w
Road traffic control, Greater London 135
Special education 37w
Sports 761–2w
Sports, Drugs 183–4w
Tax yields, Football 627w

Thomas, Simon
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 32–3
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Debts, Developing countries (01.11.01) 320–1wh, 349wh, 352–4wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 876w
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 304–5w
Dyfed Powys Police, Disciplinary proceedings 66–7w
Energy Policy Review 774w, 868
Post offices, Wales 506w

Thomas, Simon—continued
Premier Christian Radio 866w
Railtrack, Finance 222w
Railways, Finance 568w
Railways, Wales 190w, 224w

Throckmorton airfield
Foot and mouth disease 272–3w

Thurso, John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Air routes, Greater London (31.10.01) 279–80wh
Questions
Low flying 321w
Meat, Imports 171–2w
Members, Correspondence 275w
Monetary compensatory amounts, Scotland 805w
Wind power 507w

Tibet
Human rights 135w, 910w
Overseas aid 296w

Tidal power
702–3w

Time banks
Taxation 58–9w

Timetabling of bills
(29.10.01) 649–726, (30.10.01) 757–851

Timms, Mr Stephen, Minister of State for Schools, Dept for Education and Skills
Questions
Advanced skills teachers 472–3w
After school clubs 37w
Blenheim High School, Finance 459–60w
Church schools, Disadvantaged 40w
Class sizes 324w, 399–401
Class sizes, East Riding 711–2w
Education 327w
Education, East Sussex 41w
Education, Finance 328w, 456w
Education, Worcestershire 464w, 531w
Extracurricular activities, Allergies 40–1w
Free school meals 38–9w
Grammar schools, Ballots 324w
Holocaust Memorial Day, Dept for Education and Skills 713–4w
Learning and skills councils 900w
Literacy, Standards 472w, 622w
Local education authorities, Assets 468w
Local education authorities, Standards 255–6w
Local Government Association 529w
Non-teaching staff, Manpower 621w
Nursery schools, Finance 40w
Nursery schools, Lancashire 40w
Office for Standards in Education, Manpower 621w
Physical education 458–9w
Pre-school education 453–6w
Pre-school education, Leicestershire 453w
Primary education, Admissions 711w
Primary education, Non-teaching staff 471w
Primary education, Standards 532w
Pupil exclusions 323w, 710w
Pupils, Contraceptives 459w
Schools 463–4w, 623w
Schools, Admissions 623w
Schools, Counselling 460w
Schools, Discipline 329w
Schools, Finance 251–2w, 471w, 530w, 623w
Schools, Music 34w, 528w, 532w
Schools, Northampton 714–5w
Schools, Per capita costs 456–8w
Schools, Sponsorship 709w
Schools, Standards 328w, 901–2w

Timms, Mr Stephen—continued
Schools, Transport 460w
Secondary education, Standards 531w
Sixth form education, Finance 36–7w
Special education 37–8w, 468–71w, 712–3w
Special education, Nottinghamshire 458w
Specialist schools 326w, 406–7, 622w, 712–3w, 772–3w
Specialist schools, Admissions 895w
Specialist schools, Languages 896–7w
Teachers, Career structure 39w
Teachers, Disabled 460w
Teachers, East Riding 622w
Teachers, Foreign workers 473w
Teachers, Oxfordshire 327w
Teachers, Pay 463w
Teachers, Qualifications 617–8w
Teachers, Recruitment 39w, 44w, 323–4w, 453w, 469–70w
Teachers, Resignations 44w, 461w, 621w
Teachers, Retirement 618w
Teachers, Training 465–8w, 621–2w
Teachers, Vacancies 44w
Teachers, Working hours 324w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Questions
Alternative energy, Wastes 586w, 704w
Class sizes 400–1
Climate change levy, Combined heat and power 521w, 533w
Combined heat and power 533w
Electricity generation, Markets 705w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 269w, 369w, 540–1w
Nottingham Health Authority, Finance 828w
Nottinghamshire Constabulary, Finance 719w
Organic farming, Subsidies 360w
Sewers 169w

Tipping of waste
167w, 537w, 591w
Methane 410–1w

Tobacco
Smuggling 380w

Todd, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 169–70
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 989
Aircraft, Noise 194w
NHSnet, Pharmacy 816w
Pharmacy 306w
Pharmacy, Pay 29w

Tonge, Dr Jenny
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 290
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 560
Questions
Air routes, Greater London 235w
Argentina, Hemp 691w
Cannabis, Licensing 853w
China, HIV infection 689w
Coffee, Developing countries 738w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 808w
Developing countries, EC external trade 495w
Developing countries, Trade agreements 771–2w
Diamonds 811w
Heathrow Airport 786–7w
Heathrow Airport, Flood control 199w

Tonge, Dr Jenny—continued
Ilisu dam 251w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 776w
Israel, Army 134w
Multinational companies 779w
Pakistan, Human rights 134–5w
Premier Oil, Burma 134w
Prisons 18
Smallpox, Vaccination 895w
Starter home initiative 797–8w
Sudan, Armed conflict 268–9, 603w, 772w, 810–1w
Sudan, International assistance 772w
Teachers, Pay 463w
Tibet, Human rights 135w
Trade agreements, Drugs 317w
Water supply, Greater London 176w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 303w, 690w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 133–4w

Touhig, Mr Don, Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Schools, Transport (30.10.01) 247–50wh
Questions
Energy, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 757w
Hospitals, Wales 402w
Institutional care, Wales 350–1w
Railways, Wales 401w
Students, Finance 402w

Tourette's syndrome
560w

Tourism
595–6w
Foot and mouth disease 262–3w, 266w
Terrorism 262–3w

Trade
Financial services 417w, 495w, 641w

Trade agreements
Developing countries 771–2w
Drugs 317w

Trade and Industry Select Committee
(29.10.01) 726

Trade competitiveness
642w, 1001–2

Trade marks
Royal family 780w, 803w

Trade unions
Education 330w

Trading funds
Ministry of Defence 881w

Training
Alternative energy 35w
European fighter aircraft 769w
Forensic science 277w
Members 221w
Merchant shipping 680w
Metropolitan Police 15–6
Tax allowances 889w
Teachers 465–8w, 621–2w

Training Group Defence Agency
see RAF Training Group

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981
Questions
1002–4

Transport
189w
Livestock 547–8w
Nuclear fuels 669w
Safety 670w

Transport—continued
Schools (30.10.01) 243–50wh, 460w
Security 788w
South East region (30.10.01) 204–27wh

Travel
Pensioners 578w

Travel information
18–9w

Travel to interview scheme
835–6w

Treasury
Assets 521–2w
Consultation papers 377–8w
Electronic government 641w
Energy 885w
Ministerial policy advisors 743w
Press releases 258–9w
Publications 885–6w
Royal prerogative 207w
Secondment 888–9w
Standards 888w

Treasury Solicitor's Dept
Ethnic groups 799w

Treaties
812w
Forced labour 302–3w
RAF Menwith Hill 114w

Treaty of Nice
604w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 761
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Breast cancer (23.10.01) 24–8wh, 41wh
Questions
Ballistic missile defence, USA 610–1

Trees
Diseases 362–3w

Trend, Mr Michael
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Night flying (23.10.01) 45–7wh

Trials
87w, 217–8w
Magistrates' courts 755w

Tribunals
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 286–7w

Trimble, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 914–6, 921–2, 929–30, 932, 946–7, 964, 972–3
Questions
Weapons, Northern Ireland 280–1

Tungsten
518w

Turkey
Banks 8w
Debts 378w
Sanctions 16–7w

Turner, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 681–2, 694
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 917, 921, 945, 948–9
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 51–4, 58, 62, 64, 68
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 157, 167, 242
Students (25.10.01) 446, 460
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1035

Turner, Mr Andrew—continued
Questions
Aircraft, Pollution control 787w
Bangladesh, Females 493w
Community care 148w
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill 2001/02 497w
Entry clearances 499w
Excise duties, Motor vehicles 60w
Extradition, Northern Ireland 496w
Ferries, Concessions 578w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 167w, 734–5w
GCE A level 402
Graduates, Pay 532w
Health education, Sex 153–4w
Higher education, Student numbers 900w
Hospitals, Wales 402w
Institutional care 874–5
Local education authorities, Standards 255–6w
Maintenance, Children 54–5w
Pay, Graduates 890–1w
Pensions 243w
Police, Manpower 73w
Population, Northern Ireland 496w
Pre-school education 453–6w
Press releases, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 224–5w
Primary education, Admissions 711w
Primary education, Standards 532w
Prisoners' release, Northern Ireland 496–7w
Railtrack 396–7w
Railtrack, Finance 222w, 225w, 396–7w, 572w, 782w
Refugees 279w
Refugees, Deportation 76–7w
Road traffic control, Southampton 236w
Roads, Isle of Wight 487w
Roads, Standard spending assessments 103w
Schools, Music 532w
Secondary education, Standards 531w
Social security benefits, Overpayments 642–3w
Social services, Personal records 148w
Specialist schools, Languages 896–7w
Travel, Pensioners 578w
Wind power 316w
Working families tax credit, Abuse 626–7w

Turner, Dr Desmond
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Genetics, Insurance (25.10.01) 161–5wh
Questions
Electricity generation, Markets 780–1w

Twigg, Derek
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 508–9w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 35
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 888–9
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 340–4, 379
Questions
Armed forces, Meat 518w
Business questions 413–4, 1007
Rural areas, Departmental coordination 733w

Tynan, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 773, 827–9

Tynan, Mr Bill—continued
Questions
Developing countries, Drugs 771w
Drugs, Developing countries 705–6w

Tyres
Waste disposal 23–4w

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 201–6
Terrorism (01.11.01) 1047–50
Questions
Listed buildings 597–8w

UN agencies
302w

UN Development Programme
Indonesia 18w

UN Security Council
256–7w

Unemployment
642w

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust
559w

Upholder class submarines
Canada 659w

Uranium
10w, 519w
Afghanistan 241w, 877w
Georgia 910w
Import controls 588w

Urban areas
101w
Royal charters 48–9w

Urban Bus Challenge
923w

Urban Regeneration Agency
see English Partnerships

Urban Task Force
101w

USA
Ballistic missile defence 272–3, 281–2, 602w, 609–11, 620–1, 766w, 875–6w
National security 242w, 875w

Vacant land
Northampton 791w

Vaccination
Chemical and biological warfare 881w
Smallpox 895w

VAT
64–5w, 209–10w, 625w
Energy 206w
Football 60w
Housing 61w
Rescue services 59w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Questions
Entry clearances, Ministerial powers 910w
Ethnic groups, BBC 762–3w
Ethnic groups, Crown Prosecution Service 798–9w
Ethnic groups, Judiciary 905w
Ethnic groups, Millennium Commission 598w
Ethnic groups, Treasury Solicitor's Dept 799w
Heathrow Airport 786w
India 527w
India, Entry clearances 605w
Indian subcontinent, Entry clearances 669w

Vaz, Mr Keith—continued
Leicester Royal Infirmary, Accident and emergency departments 306–7w
Mayors, Leicester 795w
Muslims 527w
Planning permission 791w
Surgery, Waiting lists 149w

Vehicles
Police 75w

Veterinary medicine
34w, 549w

Veterinary Medicines Directorate
806w

Veterinary services
Livestock 545w

Vetting
Immigrants 277w

Viagra
342w

Victim support schemes
213w

Victims
Crime 408–10

Viggers, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Housing, Fareham (23.10.01) 260
Police, Hampshire (02.11.01) 1186–7
Questions
Armed forces, Drugs 663–4w
Armed forces, Gosport 317w
Armed forces, Health services 5w
Drugs, Misuse 69w
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 11–2
Rapid transit systems, Hampshire 487w
Russia, NATO enlargement 740–1
Terrorism 613
Travel information 18–9w

Voluntary organisations
Criminal Records Bureau 280w
Elderly 158–9w
Rural areas 546w
Sports 185w

Voluntary work
Finance 716w

Voting System Independent Commission
99w

Voucher schemes
Refugees 1–4, 333–5w, 729w

Wales
Agriculture 903–4w
Antisocial behaviour orders 70w
Broadband 778w
Economic situation 492w
Hospitals 402w
Institutional care 350–1w
Iron and steel 903–4w
Post offices 506w
Public expenditure 259w
Railways 190w, 224w, 383w, 401w
Schools 903w
Social workers 892–3w
Special constables 278w
Students 402w

Wales Office
see Office of the Secretary of State for Wales

Walley, Ms Joan
Questions
Consignia, Employment tribunals 507w
Construction, Dept for Education and Skills 461–2w
Construction, Dept for Work and Pensions 340w

Walley, Ms Joan—continued
Construction, Home Office 218–9w
Construction, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 351–2w
Emergencies, Planning 692w, 865
Private roads 381w
Standard spending assessments 131
Waste management 413w

Walter, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 369–72

War pensions
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 406w

Ward, Ms Claire
Debates etc.
Private Members' bills, Points of order (02.11.01) 1114
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Breast cancer (23.10.01) 26wh
Questions
Gambling Review Body 378w
Housing, Hertfordshire 133
Pakistan, Entry clearances 602w
Starter home initiative 191w

Warehouses
Fires 105–6w, 174–5w, 388w

Warships
2–3w, 566w

Waste disposal
166w, 878–9
Electronic equipment 872w
Foot and mouth disease 25w, 361w
Tyres 23–4w

Waste management
412–3w
Construction 414w
Radioactive wastes 24w, 275w, 543w

Wastes
Alternative energy 536–7w, 585–6w, 704w

Water
EC law 917w

Water abstraction
Flood control 913–4w

Water sports
River Thames 101–2w

Water supply
Greater London 176w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Questions
Billing 589w
Billing, Euro 508w
Census 63–4w
Consignia, Lost working days 507w
Consignia, Manpower 507–8w
Consumers, Protection 997
Foreign investment in UK 417w
Govia, Franchises 234w
Members, Correspondence 257w
Post offices, Bank services 589–90w
Post offices, Closures 706w
Sussex Police, Manpower 68w

Watkinson, Angela
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, 2R (29.10.01) 709–10
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1123, 1127, 1144–5
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 235
Questions
Metropolitan Police, Training 15–6

Watson, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, 2R (26.10.01) 587–8
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 815–6
Questions
Magistrates' courts, Trials 755w

Watts, Mr Dave
Questions
Energy, Conservation 916w

Weapons
3w
Northern Ireland 274–5, 280–1, 567–8w

Weather
Death 376–7w

Webb, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 485–9
Questions
Armed forces, Pensions 563w
Disabled, Employment 179w
Disabled person's tax credit 206w
Incapacity benefit 57–8w, 338w, 440–1w
Jobcentre Plus 522w
Jobcentre Plus, Working conditions 523–4w
Members, Correspondence 628w
Mobility allowance 178–9w
Motability Finance 524w
Pension Service, Manpower 526w
Pensions 242w, 337w, 438w
Planning permission 102w
Social rented housing, Gloucestershire 427w
Social security benefits 57w
Social security benefits, Abuse 438w, 751w
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001 643w
Stakeholder pensions 750w
State earnings related pension scheme 643–4w
Taxation, Married people 882w
Winter fuel payments 846w

Weir, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 564
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 806–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
AIDS (30.10.01) 187–8wh
Questions
Aviation, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 27w
Buildings, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 26w
Cellular phones, Health hazards 154w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 365w
Correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 141w
Manpower, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 26–7w
Manpower, Dept of Trade and Industry 140–1w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 352w
Monetary compensatory amounts 921–2w
Monetary compensatory amounts, Scotland 548w, 805w
Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 174w
Pay, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 25w, 364w
Pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 138–40w

Weir, Mr Michael—continued
Public expenditure, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 364w
Public expenditure, Dept of Trade and Industry 13–4w
Taxation, Environment protection 444w

Welsh National Assembly
see National Assembly for Wales

Wembley Stadium
19–21w, 761–2w

West coast railway line
186–7w, 228w, 573w
Repairs and maintenance 100w

West Midlands Police
Special constables 214–5w, 450w

West Yorkshire
Minimum wage 629–30w

White, Brian
Questions
Community Legal Service 858–9w
Interception of Communications Commissioner, Annual reports 666–7w
Modernising government programme 693–4w
Pesticides Safety Directorate 922w
Postgraduate education 397–8
Small Business Service 986–7
Social security benefits, Abuse 243–8w
Social Security Benefits Agency 248–9w

White papers
Disclosure of information 527w

Whitehead, Dr Alan, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 54, 73–80, 105–6, 117–8
Questions
AEA Technology, Contracts 791–3w
Alcoholic drinks, Bye laws 230–2w
Assets, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 680w
Best value 228w
Bye laws 389–90w
Construction, Industrial health and safety 232–3w
Council tax, Students 676–7w
Diesel fuel, Storage 369w
Energy, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 907w
Fire services, South Yorkshire 676w
Fireworks, Import controls 393w
Fireworks, Storage 393w, 874w
Hearing impaired, Greater London 573w
Housing, Fire prevention 793–4w, 796w
Local government, Ombudsman 233w
Local government, Recruitment 230w
Local government finance 187w, 193w, 227w, 574w
Local government finance, Northampton 790w
Local government services 187w
Local government services, Fees and charges 98w, 573w
Local government services, Hearing impaired 572w
Mayors, Elections 97–8w, 393–4w
Mayors, Greater London 192w
Mayors, Leicester 795w
Pay, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 227w
Petrol, Storage 674–6w
Press releases, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 198w, 224–5w

Whitehead, Dr Alan—continued
Regional assemblies, South East region 140–1, 677w
Roads, Standard spending assessments 103w, 198–9w
Royal prerogative, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 234w
Voting System Independent Commission 99w
Warehouses, Fires 105–6w, 388w

Whittingdale, Mr John
Questions
Alternative energy 991
British Sky Broadcasting 316w
Consignia, Hazardous materials 508w
Electricity generation 873w
Fisheries, Compensation 706–7w, 781w
Industrial health and safety, EC action 430–1w
Ineos Chlor 872–3w
Manufacturing industries 994–5
Newspaper press, Distributive trade 779w

Whittington Hospital
Private finance initiative 742w

Wicks, Malcolm, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Work and Pensions
Questions
Children, Poverty 644w
Children, Maintenance 54–5w, 751w
Cold weather payments 181w
Housing benefit, Abuse 752w
Housing benefit, Databases 242w
Housing benefit, Young people 440w
Incapacity benefit 57–8w, 178w, 440–1w
Independent Case Examiner for the Child Support Agency, Standards 180–1w
Jobseeker's allowance 54w
National insurance 644w, 750w
Personal income 641w
Social security benefits 57w, 180w
Social security benefits, Abuse 54w, 243–8w, 438–9w, 527w, 749w, 751w, 847w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 441–2w
Social security benefits, Overpayments 642–3w
Social security benefits, Overseas residence 439w
Social Security Benefits Agency 248–9w

Wicks Committee
see Committee on Standards in Public Life

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Debates etc.
Refugees (29.10.01) 634
Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, 2R (24.10.01) 342, 352–4, 359
Questions
Home detention curfews 82–4w
Police 861w

Wiggin, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep (22.10.01) 28
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1120, 1137–40, 1149, 1162–3
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 231–5
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Research 547w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep 547w
Equitable Life Assurance Society 882w
Exservicemen 664w
Food, Safety 414–5w

Wiggin, Mr Bill—continued
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 164w, 266–7w, 269w, 538–9w
Foot and mouth disease, Herefordshire 362w
Kington Hospital 309–10w
Meat, Imports 271w
Passports 90–1w
Pupil exclusions 323w
Sheep 165w
Surgery, European economic area 309w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 133w, 257w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 301
Exercise Saif Sareea 2 (26.10.01) 556
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 989
Gurkhas 510–1w
Kashmir 737

Willetts, Mr David
Debates etc.
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 472–9, 495
Questions
Death, Weather 376–7w
Pensions, Publicity 53w
Pensions, Self-employed 752w
Publicity, Dept for Work and Pensions 525w
Social security benefits, Abuse 438–9w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 441–2w
Social security benefits, Overseas residence 439w
Working families tax credit, Mortgages 376w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 889–90, 897–8

Williams, Mrs Betty
Debates etc.
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 316

Williams, Hywel
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 101–2
Students (25.10.01) 448
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 257w
Economic situation, Wales 492w
Institutional care, Wales 350–1w
Literacy 38w, 473w
Pakistan, Civil disorder 257–8w
Secondment, Dept of Trade and Industry 415w
Secondment, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 492–3w
Social workers, Recruitment 310w, 892–3w
State retirement pensions, Age addition 177w

Willis, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Students (25.10.01) 433, 436–7, 444, 448, 453, 461–5
Questions
Advanced skills teachers 472–3w
Church schools, Disadvantaged 40w
Class sizes 400
Extracurricular activities, Allergies 40–1w
Free school meals 38–9w, 116w

Willis, Mr Phil—continued
Individual learning accounts 708w, 772w
Individual learning accounts, Fraud 618–9w
Local education authorities, Assets 468w
Schools, Sponsorship 709w
Sixth form education, Finance 41w, 773w
Special education 37–8w, 470–1w
Specialist schools 622w, 712–3w
Students, Finance 896w
Teachers, Career structure 39w
Teachers, Disabled 460w
Teachers, Foreign workers 473w
Teachers, Recruitment 39w, 453w
Teachers, Training 465–8w

Wills, Mr Michael, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Data protection (31.10.01) 307–10wh
Magistrates' courts, Greater London (31.10.01) 268–72wh
Questions
Aviation, Lord Chancellor's Dept 49w
Community Legal Service 858–9w
Computers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 755–6w
Court Service 754w
Criminal proceedings, Administrative delays 50w
Entry clearances, Appeals 337w
Freedom of Information Act 2000 46–8w
Judges, Official cars 528w
Judiciary, Public appointments 754w
Juries, Smoking 753w
Magistrates, Leeds 752–3w
Magistrates' courts, Computers 753w
Magistrates' courts, Dudley 399–400w
Magistrates' courts, Trials 755w
Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate, Annual reports 756w
Maintenance, Children 46w
Medical records, Fees and charges 754–5w
Repossession orders, Rented housing 50w
Select committees, Lord Chancellor's Dept 49w

Wilshire, Mr David
Questions
Refugees, Spelthorne 611w

Wilson, Mr Brian, Minister of State for Industry and Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry
Questions
Aerospace industry, Terrorism 581w
Aggregates levy 587w
Alternative energy 10–3w, 776w, 990–2
Alternative energy, Wastes 585–6w, 704w
Climate change levy 584–5w
Coal 8w
Combined heat and power 704w
Electric cables 13w
Electricity generation, Markets 704–5w, 780–1w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 872w
Embedded Generation Working Group 778–9w
Energy Policy Review 774w
Engineering, Climate change levy 585w
Equal pay, Nottinghamshire 588w
Future large aircraft 696w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 775–6w, 997–1000
Manufacturing industries 994–6
Mining, Subsidence 871w
Motor vehicles, EC law 587w
Natural gas, Imports 586w
Natural gas, Prices 871w
Nuclear power 593–4w

Wilson, Mr Brian—continued
Nuclear power, Security 6–7w, 501w
Oil 588–9w
Petrol, Retail trade 695w
Plutonium 10w
Plutonium, Security 315w
Tidal power 702–3w
Wind power 10–1w, 316w, 703w
Written questions, Administrative delays 874w

Wind power
10–1w, 316w, 507w, 703w

Winnick, David
Debates etc.
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Points of order (22.10.01) 38
Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations (25.10.01) 480, 483
Weapons, Northern Ireland (24.10.01) 315
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 750–1
Business questions 418–9
Members, Correspondence 75w
Mining, Subsidence 871w
Written questions, Administrative delays 874w

Winter fuel payments
846w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Questions
Agriculture, Manpower 275w
Agriculture, Pay 548–9w
Beef, Exports 920–1w
Beef, Imports 551w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 409w
Dairy farming 545w
Foot and mouth disease 735w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 164w
Hill farming 548w
Livestock, Veterinary services 545w
Milk Task Force 737w
Monetary compensatory amounts 919–20w
Organic farming 359w, 592w
Scrapie 918–20w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (31.10.01) 951–2, 955
Questions
Business questions 417
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 758w
Emergencies, Planning 864–5
Midwives, Personation 553w
Satellite communications, Procurement 317–8w
Specialist schools 326w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 271–2, 599w

Winterton, Ms Rosie, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept
Questions
Children, Domestic violence 351w
Children, Kidnapping 50–3w
Defamation 201w
Extradition, Terrorism 753–4w
HMS Thetis 202w
Insurance, Accidents 201–2w
Judiciary, Ethnic groups 905w
Legal profession, Complaints 799–800w
Legal profession, Hearing impaired 424w
Manpower, Lord Chancellor's Dept 50w
Parental responsibility 201w
Personal injury 707–8w
Press releases, Lord Chancellor's Dept 201w

Winterton, Ms Rosie—continued
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 48–9w, 400w
Refugees, Appeals 399w
Registration of births deaths and marriages, Islam 528w
Rents, Arrears 276w
Royal family, Marriage 858w

Wishart, Pete
Debates etc.
Ministerial policy advisors (23.10.01) 210, 229–31, 233
Questions
Afghanistan, Uranium 877w
Armed forces, Health hazards 879w
Aviation, Dept of Trade and Industry 14w
Buildings, Cabinet Office 293–4w
Buildings, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 402–3w
Business questions 418
Chemical and biological warfare, Vaccination 881w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 758w
Manpower, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 356w, 359w
Manpower, Lord Chancellor's Dept 50w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 261–2w
National Lottery, Scotland 358w
Pay, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 227w
Pay, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 351w
Public relations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 594–5w
Public transport 381–3w
Railways, Finance 226w
Select committees, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 182w
Television, Licensing 358–9w

Women
see Females

Wood, Mr Mike
Questions
Institutional care, Closures 181–2w
Tourettes syndrome 560w

Woodward, Mr Shaun
Questions
Children in care, Refugees 830–1w

Worcester
Railways 233–4w

Worcestershire
Advantage West Midlands 9w
Drugs 287–8w

Worcestershire—continued
Education 464w, 531w
Hospital beds 814–5w
Livestock 544w
Manufacturing industries 9w
Schools (24.10.01) 122–30wh
Sixth form education 463w, 711w

Work permits
331–2w
Indian subcontinent 332w
Information technology 332w
Overseas students 849w

Working Age Agency
see Jobcentre Plus

Working conditions
Jobcentre Plus 523–4w

Working families tax credit
Abuse 626–7w
Bassetlaw 887–8w
House of Commons 401w
Mortgages 376w

Working hours
204w
Bus services 98–9w, 229w
Members 488w
Teachers 324w

World Cup
Football 602w, 804w

World Summit on Sustainable Development
303w, 690w

Worthington, Tony
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, International assistance (24.10.01) 289
Proceeds of Crime Bill, 2R (30.10.01) 777–80

Wright, David
Debates etc.
Homelessness Bill, Rep and 3R (22.10.01) 53, 96–7, 111–4

Wright, Tony
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors 866
Nutrition 32–3w

Written questions
Administrative delays 30w, 331w, 339w, 350w, 365w, 407w, 446w, 770–1w, 874w
Rulings and statements (30.10.01) 250wh

Wyatt, Derek
Questions
Africa 600w
International economic relations 276

Wyatt, Derek—continued
Islam, Cultural relations 19w
Prisons 17
Sports Aid Foundation, Athletics 185w
Teachers, Recruitment 323–4w

Yarls Wood Detention Centre
615w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Questions
Athletics 20w
Millennium Exhibition 407w
Millennium Exhibition, Operating costs 431w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 431w
Operating costs, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 488–90w
Terrorism, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 491w
Wembley Stadium 20–1w

Yeovil Hospital
Foreign workers 560–1w

Yorkshire and Humberside
Regional planning and development 680–1w

Young, Sir George
Debates etc.
Robinson, Geoffrey, Members' suspension (31.10.01) 885–906
Questions
Business questions 1008–9

Young offenders
71w
Criminal proceedings 407–8
Custodial treatment 84–5w

Young people
Armed forces 512–3w
Crime prevention 8–9
Disadvantaged 709–10w, 899w
Drugs 336–7w
Housing benefit 440w
Mental health services 146–8w

Younger-Ross, Richard
Debates etc.
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (02.11.01) 1143, 1148–9, 1153–4

Zimbabwe
Land 911w
Overseas residence 910–1w
Politics and government 133–4w, 257w, 271–2, 599w, 668–9w

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LIBRARIES